

# **The Molotschna Mennonites**

by

**Franz Isaac**

Translated and edited by

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Translators' Notes:

- A.) We have set up this translation so that it matches, page for page, the original found at <https://archive.org/details/diemolotschnaerm00isaa> . However, end-of-page sentences split in the original may not be split in this translation.
- B.) Umlauted surnames were converted by adding an "e" after "a", "o" and "u". Umlauted place names are not changed. Umlauted surnames were converted by adding an "e" after "a", "o" and "u". Umlauted place names are not changed.
- C.) The author's footnotes are numbered or marked by an asterisk followed by a closed parenthesis, \*) or Latin numerals, as done in the original Those of the translators are designated by alpha characters.
- D.) In some cases, modern biographies spell names differently than the author did and named people have their names spelled differently in different places. We have tried to keep these original spellings.
- E.) Some of the language is flowery and extraordinarily subservient by today's standards. We have tried to leave some of this in its original form while reminding the reader to keep the historical context in mind.
- F.) The abbreviation "Sr." is translated as "Serene" and is part of a title.
- G.) In some cases, the original German terms are used such as Anwohner, Aeltester, or Kirchenvorstand (these will be defined and/or explained in a glossary).
- H.) Minister (with a capitalized "M") refers to government ministers, while minister refers to a minister of the church.
- I.) The author uses the terms Aelteste and Aeltesten for the singular and plural forms of the term of office of elder or bishop. These have been standardized to Aeltester and Aelteste. Although the later may not be strictly correct, it helps the reader distinguish between the singular and plural.
- J.) The author regularly abbreviates first names (e.g., John. for Johann). An attempt has been made to expand these whenever possible to make identifying reoccurring individuals as easy as possible. The primary outlier being Abr. Because it is usually not clear if this is Abram or Abraham.
- K.) It seems that somewhere during the process of producing this book that some of the scriptural references got a bit muddled.
- L.) The person who is the head of the Guardianship Committee is variously translated as "President" or "Chairman".
- M.) A separate spreadsheet containing the names of the individuals found in this book has been prepared (by Tim Flaming). This spreadsheet has also been posted.
- N.) We have tried to follow the format of the original as closely as possible. This has resulted in a few unusual headings.

# **The Molotschna Mennonites**

A contribution to the history of the same

From documents and more in recent times, by reason of  
of my own knowledge and experiences

by

**Franz Isaac**

Published and Printed by H. J. Braun, Halbstadt, Taurida.

1908

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## Preface

The present work, which presents the history of the Molotschna Colony Mennonites since their settlement in Russia, was written by my father Franz Isaac <sup>a)</sup>, who died in 1899. As can be seen from the contents, he had rich file material at his disposal, so he was able to document important events from the original files. In the last years of his life, when he was already very old, he set out "to arrange the material and to write it into a final draft". However, since he was not able to complete the final copy, the last pages were written by me and added to the material already arranged by my father.

If the reader should find the author's point of view biased, he will find proof for the author's point of view in the original files, the correctness of which is beyond all doubt, and show that the author had justification for his conclusions.

First of all, my father had written this work for his children in order to acquaint them with the experiences of their fathers. At the same time, he also hoped that it could be put into print in his lifetime.

The history of the past should be a teacher for the coming generations. In the truthful presentation of the history of a people, highlighting both the light and the dark sides is unavoidable. Both are instructive. The light sides for emulation, the shadow sides for serious reflection, in one's own life, to avoid the mistakes committed by the fathers.

The personal participation of the author in the historical events as well as his position in society will always influence his view. A certain bias can't be denied in his recollections, so it is left to future historians to produce a more nuanced and impartial history by taking into account other source material.

Be that as it may, I believe that the material carefully collected by my father is of great value with regard to the history of our people, and that it would be a pity if it were to be forgotten or even lost. Encouraged to do so by various persons in our community who recognize the historical value of the work, I hereby present this volume to the public.

November 1906

Franz Isaac

# Forward

This book is a contribution to the history of the Molotschna Mennonites. My father gathered documents, that were then readily available from local authorities and church councils [*Kirchenvorstaende*] up until the late 1840's. His collection of documents was then passed down to me for safekeeping and with the idea that I would further his work.

I have also collected a large amount of additional material, but since I didn't initially intend to publish a book there are some unavoidable omissions. Some of these omissions could not be corrected even though I consulted knowledgeable friends during the editing process. Therefore, the reader may not find everything he hoped to find. Other items may seem superfluous or worse, unpleasant to read; but the facts can't be changed.

The Author

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## **Brief remarks regarding the Causes of Emigration of the Mennonites from Prussia**

Reprint prohibited.

In the sixteenth century the Mennonites residing in the Netherlands were invited to Prussia and given special privileges and exemptions by the Polish King Sigismund for the reclamation of the Vistula lowlands. For two centuries they enjoyed all civil rights, and in 1642 received the following confirmation from Wladislaw IV of the privilege granted earlier:

Because all efforts promoting the common benefit deserve the grace and protection of the princes, and since the ancestors of the inhabitants of the Marienburg Werder were already provided with special privileges and freedoms by my grandfather Sigismund August, and since they moved to swampy and desolate places, cultivated them with much effort and at great expense, eradicated shrubs, built water pumping mills, and thus dried up swamps, and built dams against the waters of the Vistula, Nogat, Lake Druze and the Lagoon. They bequeathed to their descendants an example of excellent diligence and I want to protect them on my own and have given the necessary assurance in an open letter.

However, just as Joseph's merits were soon forgotten, so it also happened to our ancestors, because according to the sovereign document of March 20, 1780, the Mennonites had to pay 5000 Reichsthaler annually to the cadet academy in Kulm from that time on, in return for which they were to be exempt from military service for ever; but by an edict of July 30, 1789, they were restricted in their right to purchase real estate, which had increasingly negative economic consequences for them and forced them to prepare for emigration.

In this distressed condition they received a manifesto from Catherine II, the Empress of Russia, dated July 22, 1763 and the Most High

invitation from this monarch, through the Councillor H. George Trappe, in the year 1786 to move to Russia, as a call from God. The invitation received from H. Trappe read:

Since I have been informed by Her Imperial Majesty, the Russian monarch, by means of a Most High Imperial Cabinet Resolution, which in Russian is called ИМЕННОЙ Указъ [a similar decree], which is the Most Gracious Imperial Confirmation, issued by His Serene Highness the Imperial Prince Potemkin Tavrisheskoi, to the Mennonites of the Danzig region, who has graciously appointed me as the Director and Curator over the colonies to be established by the Russian government. I am quite aware of how much malice, cunning, deceit and envy against Russia has occurred in my absence. Those against emigration will take every opportunity to frighten, threaten and scare my dear and esteemed Mennonites. Before my departure I consider it not only the duty of my heart, but also that of Russia's great and faithful monarch, that I try to reassure honest and innocent people, some of whom have already sold their belongings and are ready to travel, as much as I can, and I will do this conscientiously and honestly.

Above all, from the bottom of my heart I wish all brave Mennonites from the Supreme Giver of all good, grace, salvation and blessing, both in the spiritual and in the earthly realms, that he may bestow happiness and blessing on everyone for his purpose according to His holy will and good pleasure. You, my beloved ones, who have overcome all partiality and malicious lies, and persist in improving your present oppressed and depressed condition by moving to Russia. You, my friends, know how often I have advised you openly and faithfully, to bring the whole matter to God in daily prayer to see if this is His will. If it is man's doing then drive it back and change your minds. Since you are steadfast in your resolve and determined before God to go to Russia, I believe, as you do, that this is God's will, which he will execute it for the glorification of his praiseworthy name and to the shame of all adversaries. I publicly wish you happiness in your resolution, and out of good faith I advise all you who want to become landowners in Russia to come, see and experience what that would mean. How extraordinary it is to live happily, quietly and contentedly under the benevolent government of Catherine, the great and good mother of the country. In addition, you will have ten years of exemption from all taxes, with all possible freedom in regard to every necessary provision and in the peaceful inheritance and proper possession of the four Hufen of land that you have been given.

Then you will have to pay the very small annual tax of 39 Quarter Rubles, that is, not yet the full 10 Rubles.

If two years ago Quakers from America, which had been liberated by France, were able to move to France, without diminishing the role that France played in the liberation of America. This should encourage you to choose Russia as your second fatherland, where foreigners can find freedom of conscience and happiness to a much higher degree than in France. There is no other monarchy in this world that has done more for foreigners than the miracle of our century, Russia's wisest monarch, Catherine the Great.

Malicious and treacherous people, who now live in Danzig, freely and publicly show their ingratitude toward Russia without any restraint. How little they deserve the never-ending but undeserved kindness that Russia's great monarch has shown them. They want to make it a crime that you, dear friends, have sent deputies to the Empress in order to improve your condition, in order to obtain land, which they do not want to give you in the Danzig region even though you are willing to pay for it. How calm, how silent, the same incompetent rabble would have remained, if you good Mennonites would have taken refuge with a different monarch, who would have had less concern than the Empress to give free people a hearing and to grant them privileges.

You are free men, or all concepts of freedom cease altogether. A free man has the right and the ability to improve his condition. So do you. Who can, who may, who will deny you that? The troublemakers in your hitherto free city? Who gave them the right and the power to do so? No one, they should not, they must not make slaves of free people. The well-known, insightful, famous French Count Mirabau gave the present King of Prussia Frederick William, at the beginning of his government, in his printed decree, the advice that His Majesty should release the those who want to emigrate. I think the advice is good and think that if King Frederick William, the much beloved, continues to rule so kindly and lovingly all his subjects as he has begun, there should be nothing to fear from emigration in the Prussian states in the future, to your greatest reassurance. And so that you, dear friends, can all the move safely dismiss the rumors, the people here

are spreading every day because of the war. I am publicly reporting to you that everything is ready in Riga for your reception, according to the contents of the privileges, and that I have made arrangements that you shall be transported from Riga to Dubrovna in White Russia and for the time being no further, all where you will await the order of Sr. Highness, General Field Marshall Tavritscheskoi, Prince Potemkin, appointed by Her Imperial Majesty as Governor General, in order to know when you should move on and arrive at the place of destination. You, my friends, will be quite safe, which you, brave and sensible people, have never doubted. For only the stupid rabble of Danzig could think and say that you, good people, were sent to Russia at such great expense only so that you might become a prey of the enemy. In Dubrovna, a nice little town in White Russia, you will be under the protection of the commander there, the Lieutenant Colonel Baron v. Staal, Adjutant General of Taurida. This excellent man, of good German character and good heart is, as your deputies know quite well, a good Mennonite friend and patron and knows you from the Seven Years' War. I give you my word that he, the noble, knowledgeable man, who knows very well how well the Mennonites will get on in Russia, will tell and write the truth to the General Governor, looking out for your good in the same way that I would.

Now I ask three things of you, dear friends, that you make as much effort as possible to find good preachers, shepherds of souls, who will care for the salvation of your souls and for a pious way of life, so that you may also let your light shine before the people in Russia, so that they may see your good works and praise your Father in Heaven. Secondly, I ask you, my friends, to be as careful as possible that no many sheep come among the flock, that bad people living in obviously gross sins and vices, e.g., those very devoted to sin, do not come into your company and do not defile the good Mennonite name in Russia. Thirdly, I sincerely ask you to keep your love and trust in me in my absence and to believe that I will be a true friend and promoter of all good Mennonites until my last breath of life. I confess that I was moved to tears that so many of you testified your true love for me when saying goodbye. As soon as my most gracious monarch allows it, I hope to be reunited with you in love and peace, and then I wish to meet you happy and healthy and in such a way that it can be said of you with truth that you are walking

before God and are pious and diligent. For this I wish you God's assistance and happiness and blessings for your journey and settlement, and I will die with the deepest love and affection.

Your true friend and patron **Trappe**,  
 Director and Curator of the Mennonite Colonies,  
 confirmed by Her Most High Russian Imperial Majesty

At the request of H. Trappe, the Mennonites sent two deputies, Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch, to Russia in 1786 to select a settlement plan and to work out privileges with Russia's great monarch for all Mennonites who would immigrate to Russia. On a trip to the Crimea in the spring of 1787, Her Majesty deigned to be introduced to the deputies in Kremenchug and listened most kindly to their requests, assured them verbally of all the benefits already promised in the above-mentioned manifesto, and dismissed them in the most gracious mood. The deputies traveled to St. Petersburg and after a stay of almost eight weeks in the Residence, the conditions concerning the privileges were concluded with the government, but a written privilege was not yet handed over to them, which, however, did not stop the immigration, because already on July 20, 1789, the first immigrants in the Ekaterinoslav Governorate on the island of Chortitza arrived at their destination. The Mennonites received a written privilege [*Privilegium*] only in 1798 when the deputies sent the Church Aeltester David Epp and the Church Preacher Gerhard Wilms, who achieved their goal after more than two years of effort. The Privilegium reads:

**We by God's helpful grace**  
**Paul I, \*)**  
**Emperor and autocrat of all Russia etc. etc.**

As a document of Our most gracious approval of the request that came to us from the Mennonites settled in the New Russian Governorate, who, according to the testimony of their supervisors, can serve as a model for the other colonists settled there, because of their exceptional industriousness and their proper way of life, and thus deserve Our special attention which we have, by this letter of grace bestowed upon them. We have not only most graciously affirmed all the rights and privileges contained in the conditions provisionally agreed upon with them, but also wish to encourage even more their diligence and care in agriculture, and graciously grant them other privileges granted in the following points.

\*) Paul ascended the throne of his mother on Nov 8, 1790.

- First, we confirm the religious freedom promised to them and their descendants, by virtue of which they may observe their religious doctrines and clerical customs without hindrance. We also graciously grant that, if the case should require it, their verbally pronounced yes or no shall be accepted by the court in lieu of an oath.
- Second, we confirm to them and to their descendants the 65 Dessiatine of usable land designated to each family for their undisputed and perpetual possession, but forbid that any of them, under any pretext whatsoever, leave, sell, or legally transfer even the smallest part thereof to any stranger without the express permission of the authorities appointed over them.
- Third, we permit all Mennonites already resident in Russia, as well as those who are about to settle under Our jurisdiction, to establish factories or to engage in other useful trades, not only in their own territory, but also in the cities of Our Empire, as well as to join guilds and professional associations, to sell their products without hindrance, whereby they are obliged to obey the national laws emanating therefrom.
- Fourth, in accordance with their right of property, we permit the Mennonites to enjoy all kinds of uses of their land, as well as to fish, brew beer and vinegar, and to distill brandy for their own needs and for small scale sale on the lands belonging to them.
- Fifth, on the lands belonging to the Mennonites, we forbid not only all foreigners to build taverns and liquor bars, but also that no tenants may sell liquor or keep bars without the consent of the Mennonites.
- Sixth, we give them Our most gracious assurance that no one, neither of the Mennonites already settled, nor of those inclined to settle in Our realm in the future, nor their children and their descendants, will be compelled at any time to serve in war or civilian service without their own expressed wish to do so.
- Seventh, we shall exempt all villages and dwellings in their settlements from all kinds of quartering (except when detachments are to march through, in which case they shall proceed in accordance with the ordinances on quartering), as well as from the work of forwarding military supply wagons [*Podwoden*] and crown work. On the other hand, they are obliged to keep the bridges, crossings and roads in good order throughout their territory and to contribute to the maintenance of the posts in accordance with the general regulations.
- Eighth, we graciously allow all Mennonites and their descendants the complete freedom to use their legally acquired property (in which, however, the land given to them by the Crown is not included) according to each one's will as he sees fit.

If, however, any of them, after having paid off all the crown debts owed by him, should desire to leave Our Empire with his property, he shall pay a three-year levy on the capital acquired in Russia, the amount of which shall be declared by him and the head of the village in accordance with his duty and conscience. The same shall be done with the estates of the deceased whose heirs and relatives are in foreign countries and to whom the inheritance shall be sent according to the customary law of succession among them. We also grant the village communities the right to appoint guardians over the estates of the deceased belonging to minors in accordance with their own customary practices.

Ninth, we graciously confirm the ten-year exemption from all taxes owed by them and extend it also to all Mennonites willing to settle in the New Russian Governorate. Since, however, after a recent examination of their condition, it has become evident that they have fallen into an emergency situation due to repeated crop failures and livestock epidemics and are too crowded in the Chortitza area, for which reason it has been decided to transfer a number of families to other land, We graciously grant, in consideration of their poverty and destitution, after the expiration of the first ten free years, five more free years to those who remain in their present places of residence, and ten more free years to those destined for transfer, and order that each family, after the expiration of this time, shall receive from the 65 Dessiantine Land and for each Dessiantine, 15 Kopek per year, but incidentally remain exempt from all crown taxes. The received money advance, however, has to be paid off after the mentioned free years in equal parts in ten years by those who stay at their place of residence, and in twenty years by those who are to be transferred elsewhere.

Tenth, in order to fulfill this letter of grace bestowed on our Imperial, the Mennonites, through which We most graciously assure them of their rights and privileges, we command all our military and civil superiors, as well as our judicial authorities, to refrain from disturbing the said Mennonites and their descendants in the quiet enjoyment of the privileges graciously bestowed upon them by Us, but rather to give them all assistance, support and protection in all cases.

Given in the city of Gatchina on Sept. 6 of the year after  
 Nativity 1800, of Our Government in the Fourth,  
 of the Grand Mastership in the Second  
 Signed in the original by His Sr. Majesty

**Paul, Count of Rostopshin**

# Section 1

## Civil and Economic Affairs of the Molotschna Mennonites

### 1 - Immigration and Settlement

Aware that not only the first (the Chortitzers), but also the subsequent immigrants were entitled to the prerogatives granted by the Most High, 342 Mennonite families from the Marienburg and Elbing regions emigrated to Russia in 1803, 1804 and 1805, their destination being in the Taurida Governorate, on the Molotschna River, where the Mennonites were given about 123,000 Dessiantine land that had been assigned to the Mennonites for settlement. The following letter proves that these immigrants, like the Chortitzers in the past, refused to accept the settlement plan intended for them:

**To the Heads of the Mennonite Colonies Arriving from Prussia.  
Mennonite Colonies.**

From your letter <sup>1)</sup> from Schönhorst <sup>2)</sup> of March 23, which was presented to me by the H. Collegiate Council Kontenius, I see your desire not to be settled in the Molotschna, but at another place, as well as the cause and concerns which have prompted this change of mind. I confess, dear men, that before my arrival in St. Petersburg, when I still had an imperfect knowledge of the lands on the Molotschna, I myself was of the opinion that you would be more prosperous elsewhere than there. But after having attended the deliberations of the Minister in St. Petersburg about your settlement on the Molotschna and having seen from the plan and the topographical description of your lands, the potential of the land for agriculture and cattle breeding, as well as an abundance of hay, I have completely changed from my previous opinion, and only by reasons, which the Ministry has taken into consideration, have I been convinced that you cannot promote your prosperity anywhere better than there. Consider, dear friends, first of all, that

1) This letter has been lost.

2) The first Molotschna had their winter quarters in the Chortitz colonies.

you are to be allotted a district of 120,000 Dessiantine of the most fertile land, where not only you, but also many hundreds of families of your fellow believers can subsequently settle. Secondly, that by virtue of a Supreme Command of His Imperial Majesty, for the more certain promotion of your prosperity, this district has been enlarged by two excellent pieces of land on the Molotschna, which are indicated on the plan No. 60 and 61, from which all the Nogai residing there are to be paid for their dwellings and compensated by the allotment of other lands. Thirdly, that you will have there, in addition to fertile arable land, such an abundance of good hayfields for stud farms, raising horned cattle and sheep breeding, as you, believe me, cannot find and acquire in any other region of the Russian Empire. This single object, which will be a perpetual source of wealth for you, outweighs all the doubts you express in your letter and the difficulties that stand in the way of the beginning of your settlement. But remember, dear friends, that even though the beginning is somewhat difficult, the results will make you and your children's children happy. Fourthly, the lack of good water, which hinders settlements in so many areas of Southern Russia, does not occur at all on the Molotschna and Tokmak, but there are several places where, if human hands help nature a little, even water mills can be built. In view of your concerns that you would be exposed to the robberies of your neighbors, you will not escape this danger anywhere. You must guard your property properly, which a colony of more than a hundred families is quite capable of doing. And since a number of your compatriots will join you in Prussia this year, it will become easier and easier for you to keep an eye on your property as the number of land owners increases. By the way, the government will take all possible measures to secure and protect you against robberies, in addition to your vigilance.

The wood and shrubs necessary for your sledges or houses may be transported from the Dnieper to the Molotschna only 60-70 versts to the landing, which is not considered a great difficulty in our country. Large transports of timber are often brought to the Kremenchuk by land, which amounts to more than 300 versts.

Several letters from you and your trustees to H. Councillor Kontenius, in which you express the wish and the desire to be settled at the Molotschna, have been read and discussed in the Ministry and after deep consideration of all circumstances connected with this matter, the Ministry has considered your settlement at the Molotschna not only feasible, but also advantageous for you, and has submitted its opinion and your wish to His Imperial Majesty.

the most exalted confirmation has already taken place on the 23rd of last February. Since Your Imperial Majesty has graciously entrusted me with the superintendence of all colonial settlements in this southern governorate of the empire, I will dispatch H. Councillor of Accounts to you as soon as possible with detailed instructions, so that he may make the necessary arrangements for your settlement on the Molotschna as soon as possible. I hope that the above reasons will be sufficient to convince the reasonable men among you that the diligence of your hands can expect nowhere more blessing than in the place of your destination, the Molotschna. On the other hand, to those of you who, out of stubbornness or obstinacy, keep changing your wishes, who are not wise enough to see what can be good or harmful for you and your descendants in the future, or who allow themselves to be led astray by the pernicious counsels of evil-minded people, I order you to indicate seriously that you must settle down there, because such a thing, according to your wishes, is now the Supreme Will and Command of His Imperial Majesty.

I expect a report \*) from you on this subject by first mail as a test of your compliance, otherwise I would see myself compelled to take measures that would give you a bad reputation and would have unpleasant consequences for you. By the way, I assure all good and righteous men among you of my willingness to promote everything that could serve your essential benefit and well-being, and (God bless) I will try to remedy your distress, if it should happen to you.

Odessa, April 2, 1804.  
Lieutenant

**Richelieu**, General-

The first immigrants in Grodno received 10 Rubles travel allowance per person from the government and 50 Rubles for horses and wagons per family. Furthermore, after the end of the journey until the first harvest, they received, 8 Kopecks per person per day as a food allowance. Twenty-five Rubles for farming equipment, 100 Rubles for cattle and domestic equipment, 15 Rubles for spring sowing, 5 Rubles for autumn sowing and a quantity of timber, which for the first settlement was 100 Rubles and for the second 159 Rubles 34 Kopek for each family. The settlers received the aforementioned money as an advance, which was to be paid back in ten years after ten free years, but because of cattle plague and crop failure the free years were extended by 5 years. After 1805 the immigrants received the advance according to their needs, and there was no travel and food allowance. From 1828 onwards, those who could not travel on their own were not allowed to immigrate,

\*) This report has not been found.

which resulted in the fact that many poor families were given travel money by the communities in Prussia, because this was still easier than to maintain them there. In the Russian communities, which were still economically weak, a working class was soon created, because very few families were able to repay their debts. In addition to the fact that the emigrants had to have the travel money, they were obliged to lodge a deposit with the Russian consul in Danzig, which was only refunded when the families concerned had arrived at the Molotschna colony, and immigration was soon banned entirely, because the government was careful to leave land available for growing families. About 700 families immigrated after 1805.

(The foregoing data on advance, number of families, etc. are given by the Secretary of the District Office).

The first settlers did not find a tree or a shelter in their places of settlement, so they had to camp in the open until they had created some sort of temporary shelter. They found the lands occupied in several places by Nogai, who moved on but remained adjacent. Their dwellings, in the form of a beehive, covered with felt blankets, were placed on two-wheeled carts and driven to their new places of residence or encampment (Akerman, Burkut, etc.). The bad and worn-out horses of the settlers were bought for slaughter by the Nogai at ridiculous prices, but the best ones were often taken from stables and pastures at night without paying anything for them. The first settlers could buy the most basic foods in the adjacent Russian village of Tokmak, which was founded a few years earlier. Other neighbors of the settlers were the Doukhobors, an apostate sect of the Greek church, who founded the villages Bogdanovka, Troitskaya, Terpenie and others on the right bank of the Molotschna at the same time as the first Mennonites but were expelled to the Caucasus in 1841 because their behavior was contrary to religion and laws, and their settlements were handed over to Russians.

In the former fatherland, the merits of our ancestors were soon forgotten, and their freedoms were gradually restricted. Through self-sacrifice they had overcome hard times and many trials after the discomforts following migration and settlement. They learned to live and live together to establish a self-government, in so far as it was left to them.

Experience teaches that it takes a lot for people who have come together from different places to form a close-knit community.

Established were:

- 1804 the villages of Halbstadt, Muntau, Schönau, Fischau, Lindenau, Lichtenau, Blumstein, Münsterberg and Altona.
- 1805 Schönsee, Ladekopp, Petershagen, Tiegenhagen, Ohrloff, Tiege, Blumenort and Rosenort.
- 1806 Fürstenau, and in 1807 the community sheep farm was established to improve sheep breeding and to open a community source of income.
- 1811 Ruckenau - In this year, Johann Cornies, a resident of Ohrloff, founded the Juschanlee estate. In 1836, because of the excellent construction and magnificent plantings on his estate, he was granted an additional 500 Dessiantine of land via a Most High Cabinet Order. On the night of April 19, 1811 on the Tiege steppe, four people from the village of Rosenort: Jakob Baerg, Jakob Siemens, Dirk Reimer and a young Nogai man were murdered. After some time, a reward of 100 Rubles was offered and a Nogai woman reported a man who had bragged about the murders and had Baerg's pocket watch. After the usual Knout, the murderers were acquitted by a Supreme Manifesto for liberation of Russia from the French, and only sent to Siberia.
- In 1812 the village of Schönsee was resettled. It used to lie between Petershagen and Ladekopp in an area that was too narrow. In this year it was founded by Klaas Wiens from Altona and the Steinbach Estate. In consideration of his economic accomplishments and his progressive leadership style as the first Mayor of the community, he received 362 Dessiantine by a Most High Cabinet Order of March 31, 1819. In 1826 a brickworks, the first in the district, was established here.
- 1817 the Halbstadt cloth factory was founded by Johann Klassen from Rosenort;
- 1818 on May 21, His Majesty Emperor Alexander I deigned to visit the Molotschna Mennonite colonies, which spurred the inhabitants to courageous and enthusiastic business activity.

Now, for the first time, the community saw face to face the one who was the promoter of their happiness and well-being, based on the foundation laid by Empress Catherine II and confirmed by the privilege of Emperor Paul I. Through his gracious patronization and paternal-friendly encouragement in several homes, the community was filled with joyful confidence. Deeply touched by such grace, silent prayers and tears of gratitude followed His Sr. Majesty on his way.

1819 the villages of Margenau, Lichtfelde and Neukirch were founded.

1820 Alexandertal, Schardau, Pordenau, Mariental, Ruduerweide, Grossweide, Franztal and Pastwa. In this year David Reimer from Kronsgarten founded the village of Felsental.

1821 Fürstenwerder, Alexanderwohl and Gnadenheim.

1822 Tiegerweide. In this year the locust came during the harvest, and did not cause much damage, but left their eggs behind.

1823 Liebenau and Elisabettal were settled. The locust eggs laid in the previous year hatched, and before the young locusts swarmed, they devastated field and garden crops.

In 1824, Wernersdorf, Friedensdorf and Prangenau were settled in 1824. Because of the locusts and the lack of crop growth, the harvest was very poor and many cattle were lost due to the lack of fodder. Following this, the winter of 1824/25, was characterized by terrible snowstorms. On February 15, 1825, an unusually heavy snowstorm began, which lasted nine days and piled snow drifts almost as high as a house, not all of which had completely disappeared by the time of the hay harvest because they were heavily mixed with earth. Many thatched roofs were used for fodder, so that many houses, indeed almost entire villages, presented a sad sight. Before spring sowing could begin, the few working cattle which had become completely run down, had to first regain some strength in the pasture.

In July 1825, four Mennonite merchants: Jakob Dueck from Tiegenhagen, Peter Buhr from Lindenau and his son Erdmann, Johann Wilms from Blumstein and Johann Wiens from Altona were murdered by Jews on their way back from Nomen, where they had sold the community wool. The murderers were discovered except for one, but a large sum of money was lost.

In 1825, on October 22, His Sr. Majesty Emperor Alexander I deigned to visit the Molotschna Mennonite colonies for the second time. It was dear to His Majesty's heart to make experiments by planting trees in this wood-poor region,

and in Steinbach, where he dined, he expressed his wish to the church and regional Aelteste gathered there that each landlord [*Wirt*] should plant half a Dessiantine in trees. On the homeward journey, His Majesty died in Taganrog;

In 1825 and 1826 locusts passed through the district in large swarms, but did not cause much damage; but in 1827 they were more frequent again and consumed most of the crops at several villages. The locusts in the former years were small, those in the latter larger, which swarmed in waves so long and so dense that the sun could not shine through.

Just as the visits of His Majesty spurred the colonists to enthusiastic pursuit of all business, so in general the kind and wise authorities promoted the general prosperity. Around 1800, when the Molotschna Mennonites had not yet arrived, the Guardianship Office was founded, which was the nearest and only authority for the foreign settlers and had its initial seat in Ekaterinoslav. Later the headquarters moved to Odessa and was renamed the Guardianship Committee <sup>a)</sup>. For a long time, the office [*Kontor*] was headed by H. Kontenius, and the already mentioned H. Richelieu, who took great care to increase the prosperity of the colonies. His many useful innovations, included the improvement of sheep breeding by the introduction of Spanish rams, at a time when there were still no grain sales, sheep were the only means to maintain the colonies, and to raise them to some prosperity. Further, he encouraged the planting of fruit and other trees, for in that regard this gentleman used to say, "The Emperor's wishes are my strictest commands." The body of this greatest benefactor of the colony's rests in God's Acre near the German village of Josephstal, where, out of a feeling of gratitude, a monument was erected to him by his faithful colonists through voluntary contributions. He died on May 30, 1830 in Ekaterinoslav, in the 81st year of his life. Johann Cornies, a resident of Ohrloff, also helped to improve sheep breeding by making a trip to St. Petersburg in 1825 and buying a number of rams and ewes from the imperial herd there. In 1827 Cornies made a trip to Saxony, where he also bought a significant number of rams and ewes of Spanish stock.

a.) The *Fürsorge-Komitee für die Kolonisten der südlichen Gebiete Russlands* was a very powerful entity that is referenced 110 times. The standard translation is in an abbreviated form "Guardianship Committee" or as its more complete title, "Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers". Sometimes the author even shortens the title to "Committee".

## 2 - Agriculture

In the early years, the only farming tools we knew were the so-called Werder plow, which our fathers had brought from Prussia or made for themselves here, and a long harrow with wooden tines. With this plow the seeds were plowed under, the meadow and the grass were plowed. In short, this was all that was required except for further processing of the grass. The so-called hay-rake [*Landhakens*] was used from time to time, through which the grass was gathered into wide rows. The first wagons brought by our fathers from Prussia had wooden axles, hubs almost two feet wide and very thick rims; a flanged wheel was unknown. In the twenties, skilled wheelwrights and blacksmiths could ply their trade profitably, and so there was an increase in iron-axled wagons with iron rimmed wheels. This was necessary, because the Prussian rim wheels failed quite frequently in the Russian environment.

Not only in the early days, but also until the end of the 1830s, many farmers mowed their own grass and grain. Many a housemother, taking the infant and the other little ones with her to the field, tied the grain into sheaves behind the scythe, which was diligently kept in motion all day long by the father of the household, because nothing was allowed to remain unbound. Unbound grain was, at that time, lost grain. Many a householder had a half-grown boy or girl gather the grain behind his scythe into regular heaps, which he then tied into sheaves himself, laying the scythe away for a time, and putting these into bundles (of 15 sheaves), and then picked up the scythe again. Compared to today, farming was small scale and inefficient.

Threshing was done by treading the grain with horses, but the most important and primary threshing implement was the flail, which now is only recognized by a few young people. The flail was used to thresh not only the rye, but also barley and especially oats, and so throughout the winter they had to swing the flail over the head. Not infrequently, there was not enough time during the winter to finish the threshing. So that what remained in the pile, especially barley, that was unthreshed after the spring sowing, yielded good percentages for the mice. Because there were no threshing machines yet, which only appeared here and there at the end of the forties, although, admittedly still in a very imperfect state. In order to winnow the grain, one often had to wait a week or more for suitable wind after having threshed with horses for a few days.

Agriculture was not only gradually improved by dividing the farm into four fields with black fallow and better cultivation, but it was also expanded after the establishment of the port city of Berdyansk. However, as arable farming was expanded and grain was sold, livestock breeding, especially sheep breeding, declined. At the beginning of the forties, threshing stones came into use and the threshing with horses and threshing with wagons, gradually disappeared, but also the flail was quickly replaced by the much easier and faster way of threshing with stones. Only the slow mowing with the scythe could not yet be replaced by a better equipment, because it was not until the beginning of the seventies that mowing machines became more popular. In addition to the Werder plow, the five-share plow and the three to four-share plow were used at the beginning of the sixties, and were still homemade. The Werder plow is now obsolete. Plows with 1 to 5 shares are now exclusively manufactured in factories and made entirely of iron.

### 3 - The Agricultural Association

It had always been the intention of the High Government, from the very beginning of the founding of the colonies, to promote the planting of fruit and woody trees; but the poor condition of the colonies at the beginning and the complete lack of nurseries in the vicinity of these settlements, as well as some prejudices, left little hope for this important branch of agriculture for quite some time. Even the untiring striving of the greatest benefactor of the colonies, H. Kontenius, had little success in his time, for the mulberry plantations projected as early as 1808, which were to serve for the introduction of silk cultivation, all came to nothing again, and soon disappeared without a trace. But the long-cherished idea of Kontenius, to found an association for this subject, was finally realized in 1830 (in which year H. Kontenius died) was finally realized. The promise of all the leaders, which they had made in 1825 to His Majesty, Emperor Alexander I in Steinbach, namely to help promote the plantations desired by His Majesty, served as a basis, to move forward with greater effort. In the same year, on November 12, 1830,

the " Association for the Effective Promotion of Afforestation, Horticulture, Silk-Industry, and Vine-Culture "a) was opened by a specially prepared instruction under the lifelong Chairman Johann Cornies in Ohrloff with the confirmation by the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, v. Insow. The actual work for the various tree plantations in the Molotschna Mennonite District dates back to this time. Immediately after the opening of the Agricultural Association, the Chairman Cornies set the example to raise the trees from seeds, which was his first endeavor, and he provided the various seeds in sufficient quantities for himself and for everyone who wanted to engage in this activity voluntarily. Most of the first plantations were taken from the Chairman's own plants, until gradually, encouraged by his example, more residents began to raise trees from seed, and thus the demand for seed was met.

The usefulness of this Agricultural Association prompted the higher authorities to extend its scope even further. In 1836, it received the official confirmation: "For the improvement of agriculture and trade" and the District Mayor was to be accepted as the first colleague of the chairman, depending on the state of the Association. Following the order of the Association, by 1831 the beginnings of forest plantations appeared in some colonies. The orchards in all colonies were significantly enlarged and laid out in accordance with the Association's requirements, and many new groves and fruit tree nurseries were established.

Other accomplishments of the Association are:

The establishment of living hedges, the introduction of silk and tobacco cultivation, the improvement of horse, cattle and sheep breeding, the establishment of four-field farming with fallow, the creation of new roads, the improvement of buildings and the exemplary establishment of colonies, as well as the planting of arable fields with trees and hedges, and the systematic construction of school houses <sup>1)</sup>. The regulations regarding servants, supervision of neglected children and idle adults <sup>2)</sup> as well

1) The first schoolhouses built according to the regulations of the Association were in Ohrloff, Rueckenau and Gnadenheim in 1844.

2) Cornies put neglected children in the care of reasonable people, he rented out disobedient servants to reasonable but strict farmers, even idle married men had to submit to his tutelage and commit to work, and in all cases, no matter how difficult they seemed, Cornies used to say: "We are never at a loss for advice". Under his direction everything was clearly defined, and even if one did not like it, it was ordered and one had to comply.

a.) Hereinafter known as the Agricultural Association or Association.

as the general increase of morality and decency among the inhabitants, the painting of buildings and fences with color and the abolition of the customary festivities at the end of the year in the village offices, the abolition of horse stables \*) in the colonies and the designation of blacksmith buildings along the roads, as well as the construction of earthen dams for the irrigation of meadows and the establishment of watering places for cattle. Introduction of ash stalls and surveying of the roads in the whole district. In general, the Association worked to make the farms seem more regulated, and order and cleanliness became more prevalent in them. For example, in the first 30 to 35 years, the chimneys were built of a network of interwoven sticks and twigs covered with mud or clay. This dangerous wattle and daub construction was abolished by order of the Association.

The effectiveness of the Chairman Cornies extended over a period of 18 years (1830-1848). Under his leadership the following colonies were founded;

1832 Konteniusfeld. In this year Fischau was relocated because it was poorly located between swamps;

1835 Gnadenfeld. The residents of this village came from Prussia as a congregation in 1834. Sixty-eight families immigrated from Poland in 1835

1836 the Waldheim colony.

1839 Landskron was settled;

1843 Huttertal and a few years later Johannesruh;

Note The so-called Huttertaler [Hutterites], actually "Huttersche Brüderschaft" - named themselves after the respected Aeltester Jakob Hutter who came from Throl. In 1755 they moved to Wallachia, and in 1772 they came to Chernigov, as a result of the request of the Field Marshal, Count Rumanshov, to his estates in the Chernigov governorate. When after the death of the field marshal his son wanted to make them serfs, they turned to the high authority in St. Petersburg and in 1801 by the Highest Order they received Crown lands on the Desna where they are located.

\*) As far as the horse yards were concerned, the situation was as follows: In the first years, the villages had fenced in a suitable place, preferably in the middle of the village, where the horses were corralled overnight, which brought with it the convenience of being able to pick up the horses needed for the work of the day and bring them back at the end of the day. This arrangement became an attractive nuisance so that in the evening the youth gathered there and the mischief that followed need not be recounted here. Apart from this, it frequently happened that the Village Aelteste gathered the residents there for necessary consultations, and it is understandable that such meetings often became associated with the customary festivities at year-end accounts. Both were abolished as improper.

When the land was no longer sufficient for the growing community and also their Bruderhof had fallen into disrepair, they were settled at their request in the Melitopol District under the leadership of Chairman Cornies and were under one administration with the Molotschna Mennonites. Their current Aeltester was Jakob Walter. After they had lived in the colonies they founded, Huttertal and Johannesruh, and later some of them founded Hutterdorf, not far from Orechow, in the sixties. All the Hutterites emigrated to America at the beginning of the seventies, so they are lost to our further history.

In 1848 the colony Hierschau was founded. It was the last one ordered by Cornies, but was no longer supervised by him, because on March 13, 1848 his talented life ended, while his two children, Johann Cornies and Agnes Wiebe were abroad. In the entourage to his resting place were many Russians and Nogais, who gave him, the promoter of so many useful things and the only one of his kind, the last escort of honor.

## 4 - Crop Failure

In 1833, there was a complete crop failure in Southern Russia. Prevailing storms from the east, which came after the spring sowing season, darkened the air with dust and soil to such an extent that the sun could not shine through. The rain failed to fall for such a long time that there was neither a hay nor a grain harvest and only immature ears were found in entire village plots. When at last the storm ceased, the plowed top soil of the arable fields had been largely blown onto the pasture lands, and the arable fields were a sad sight. When later abundant rains penetrated and refreshed everything and everything awoke to new life, significant quantities of the so-called Kurai grew on the ruined arable fields, on which some cattle were able to survive. Since this fodder was not sufficient, horses were taken to distant pastures (e.g., to the Crimea, where they were supposed to be grazed in winter) but had to be brought back with great loss due to the severe winter cold. Some horned cattle as well as sheep were slaughtered in order to save fodder on the one hand and to provide food for people on the other hand.

By order of the higher authority, a central commission of four members was established for the entire Mennonite district, and a commission made up of two members from each village.

The former, in conjunction with the District Office, had to ensure that the necessary food was procured and famine prevented, and the latter, in conjunction with the Village Office, had to manage the distribution of the bread grain purchased by the District Office and the central commission to the needy. The bread grain had to be purchased in distant parts of Russia, for which a loan of 46,571 Rubles was made from the wealthy of the district. In addition to this sum, those who could help themselves with their own means spent 274,700 Rubles on grain and 85,122 Rubles on hay.

In 1834 in the spring another loan had to be taken to enable the neediest to sow the most vital crops. In some villages there was a medium harvest, in some less, in places nothing. Among the surrounding Russians, but especially among the Nogai, famine arose and many had to feed themselves by begging in the Mennonite villages. In the Nogai villages, on some days there were 25 to 30 people begging for bread. The recovery from these two bad years took several years.

## 5 - High Visits, Letters of Commendation and Earthquake

By letter of December 13, 1835, from the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, General of the Infantry v. Insow, to the regional Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite communities, His Majesty the Emperor Nikolai I <sup>a</sup>) expressed to them His Highest Benevolence for the support given to the needy during the years of crop failure in 1833 and 1834, as follows:

### **To the Regional Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite Community.**

The H. Minister of the Interior informed me on November 23, 1800 (No. 242) that, following a presentation by the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers, the Mennonite congregations of the Molotschna region in the Taurida and Chortitza regions in the Ekaterinoslav Governorate and the Aelteste of these congregations have received a letter of thanks for their praiseworthy actions in assisting their constituents during the crop failure and livestock deaths of 1833. Imperial Majesty's benevolence, His Sr. Excellency presented the matter to the Committee of Ministers.

In accordance with the decision of the Committee, His Majesty the Emperor, on the 19th of the past month of November, graciously ordered that you and the communities of His Imperial Majesty be shown benevolence for such praiseworthy actions.

By letting you know of such imperial benevolence, I instruct you to inform all your communities of this and to instill in them the conviction of the high authorities that they will continue to be guided by the same spirit of brotherhood and by charity towards their neighbors in the event of such misfortunes, to avert the need and the lack by internal means and by mutual aid.

No. 7171, Dec. 13, 1835  
Committee  
Odessa

Chairman of the Guardianship  
General of the Infantry v. Insow

1837 on October 16, His Imperial Highness the Grand Prince and heir to the throne Alexander Nikolaevich traveled through the colonies and also honored the Jushanlee estate with a visit.

In 1838 on January 11, at 9:30 in the evening an earth tremor took place. People were afflicted with dizziness, the movement of wall clocks stopped, the beehive in the stables became restless and the chickens, peeped from their roosts. Except for small cracks on some buildings, no damage occurred. The water in the wells was higher after the shock than before.

On Nov. 9, 1838 His Majesty the Emperor Nikolai I confirmed the letter of grace given by the Most High Emperor Paul I, to the Mennonites, as follows:

Ministry of the Interior  
Guardianship Committee  
for the Foreign Colonists  
1st Department - Odessa.  
December 2, 1838  
No. 5281.

**To the Molotschna Mennonite District Office**

On Nov. 13, 1838 the H. Minister of Crown Lands informed the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee that the Mennonites settled by the Aelteste in the Ekaterinoslav and Taurida Governorates had submitted a petition to the Lord and Emperor on the journey of His Majesty the Emperor's journey on the occasion of the confirmation of the privileges granted to them by the Blessed Emperor Paul I on September 6, 1800, to the Ministry subordinate to him. The Aelteste of the Mennonites declare that, since they had made no submissive request to the blessed memory of Emperor Alexander I for confirmation of their privilege,



to the Mennonite colonists, who have been honored with this high token of the Highest Attention to their efforts, through new progress in the field of agriculture and trade and the establishment of order and purity of morals, will give me a new opportunity to be able to testify to this before His Imperial Majesty.

The original had signed:

Minister of Crown Lands Adjutant General Count **Kisselew**  
Director **v. Bradky**

1841 on October 10, Her Imperial Highness the Grand Duchess Helena Pavlovna with her daughter Maria and,

1845 on August 20, His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Constantine Nikotayevich honored the colonies with their High Visits and all showed themselves to be very patronizing.

In 1848, after it became known through the Supreme Manifesto of His Majesty the Emperor Nicholas I of March 14, 1848, that the devastating tide of rebellion and anarchy had seized the whole of Western Europe, and that this outrage, knowing no bounds in its folly threatened Russia as well, the clerical and secular leaders of the Molotschna Mennonites went to H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee with the following request:

**To His Excellency the H. Chairman of the  
of the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Colonists,  
the State Councillor and Knight, Baron Fr. v. Rosen.**

**The clerical and secular heads of the  
of the Molotschna Mennonite District  
of the Berdyansk District in the Governorate of Taurida.**

In the present unfortunate and serious time, when in all countries, except Russia, the subjects are divided with the legal government, and in which the enemy of the old good and of every order begins to show his strength, we find ourselves urged in our innermost being to reveal our attitude and to make known our adherence and our faithful attachment to the throne and fatherland and to the existing legal order and government.

We know with what great sacrifices His Majesty the Lord and Emperor, Our Most Gracious Father, is endeavoring to prevent the disastrous destruction and the intrusion of the disturbers of the peace from the neighboring countries from us and our distant borders and to give us security and peace. Knowing the heartfelt and sincere desire of many of our constituents in this regard, we have requested from them, from each of them, at their discretion, a completely

voluntary offering in the aforementioned sense, for which in the Molotschna Mennonite District 130 good and usable horses have been voluntarily given.

Although this number is relatively very small, we dare, however, to address this most obedient request to Your Excellency, so that you may wish to submit this through the H. Minister of Crown Lands to Your Imperial Majesty and to humbly request in our name that this small, very small sacrifice be graciously accepted as a sign of our loyal adherence to the existing legal order, to throne and fatherland, as well as a sign of our heartfelt gratitude for the protection we have enjoyed here in Russia up to now and for many other benefits. All right-thinking confreres of our congregation, of which there are quite a few, have gladly added their mite to this offering and consider themselves fortunate to be able to lay their faithful attitude and thanks at the feet of our most gracious father for so many benefits enjoyed.

May the Lord our God grant that we and our descendants may continue to live under such protection within Russia's borders for a long time to come, so that we would have nothing left to wish for. May the merciful and strong God bless our most gracious Emperor and be His great protection and refuge forever.

Finally, we take comfort in the gracious granting of our request and the gracious acceptance by us of our small sacrifice, with which we have the honor to remain most subservient to Your Excellency,

Halbstadt,  
August 16, 1848

The Church Aelteste: **Bernhard Fast, Benjamin Ratzlaff,  
Peter Wedel, Abraham Friesen,  
Heinrich Toews, Dirk Warkentin,**

District Mayor: **Toews,**  
Deputy Mayors: **Braun, Neufeld**

Through the mediation of His Excellency, this offering was accepted, and by the following letter from the H. Minister of Crown Lands, the highest thanks of His Imperial Majesty were made known to the Mennonites.

Translated from the Russian

**All the Mennonites of the Berdiansk district of  
Molotschna district**

The petition of your leaders to the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers of the 10th of the past month of August, in which you expressed your willingness to provide 130 horses free of charge for the military, as a result of the Highest Manifesto of the 14th of March of this year, has been taken into consideration by His Majesty the Emperor, who has received the loyal and subservient feelings expressed therein with special benevolence, and has ordered to send you

the most exalted thanks of His Majesty, and also to make this known to the public.

I make known to you this Most High Will of His Imperial Majesty by means of the present letter of thanks. May this expression of the Supreme Benevolence serve you and your descendants as a testimony of how graciously His Imperial Majesty deigns to accept the proofs of the true zeal of His loyal subjects.

St. Petersburg  
September 30, 1848

His Imperial Majesty, My Most Gracious Lord, General of the Infantry, Adjutant General, Minister of Crown Lands, Lecturer to His Imperial Majesty in Matters of the V Department of the Supreme Chancellery of His Imperial Majesty. Member of the Imperial Council, the Orders of St. Andrew the First Class with Diamonds, St. Vladimir's First Class, St. Alexander-Nevisky with Diamonds, White Eagle, Annen I and V Class, St. George IV Class, Austrian St. Leopold, French St. Louis, Prussian pour le merite and Bavarian Maximilian III Class Knight. Holder of golden sword with diamonds and inscription for bravery, portrait of the Turkish Sultan with diamonds, silver medal for the campaigns of 1812 and 1814 and for the Turkish war of 1828/29 and badge of honor for irreproachable service for XXXV years.

**Count P. Kissileff**

Director of the First Department of the Ministry of Crown Lands:  
**Evenius v. Hahn**

The fact that the Mennonites of Molotschna were worthy of High Visits and such letters of commendation was a consequence of the unceasing effectiveness of the Chairman Cornies, in which, it should be noted, the District Mayors, Johann Regier (1833-1842) and Abraham Toews (1842 -1848) assisted him faithfully.

As the reader will see from the 2nd section of these "Contributions to the History of the Molotschna Mennonites", the period in which Cornies, Regier, and Toews were at the helm was also a period of resistance to the orders of these superiors; but Cornies stood in such high esteem in Odessa and in St. Petersburg so that resistance to his orders made by a part of the congregation was ultimately futile. The community was divided into two camps by the church separation that took place in the twenties. The one party recognized that the whole congregation, through the effectiveness of Cornie's leadership, was increasingly being led to be what the Mennonites were called to be in Russia, namely, to be a model by our work and conduct compared to the neighboring peoples, and that our conduct

had to some extent entered the path that finally led to the achievement of this goal, as the letters of commendation issued to us by the Most High prove.

The other party did not see this, but found nothing more in the work of these colonial superiors than a striving for their own honor and thought that all the regulations that these superiors gave were only their own work and were only approved and confirmed by the higher authorities as a result of a biased presentation to them. There was a kernel of truth in these criticisms, because Cornies was a man who thought for himself, but they completely misjudged his good intention.

However, the congregation stood in respect when Cornies and Toews departed from the scene (they both died in 1848). In place of Cornies, his son-in-law Philipp Wiebe was confirmed by the Guardianship Committee as chairman of the Agricultural Association. The party, which had never appreciated the work of Cornies and had already made every effort to bring a man of their convictions to the helm in the election of a District Mayor after the death of Regier, \*) now succeeded in electing a man as District Mayor who had their full confidence, namely David Friesen of Halbstadt, so that both parties had their representatives. These were of different and, it is not too much to say, quite opposite minds and directions in all their endeavors and activity. Wiebe, the son-in-law of Cornie's and had been his secretary for so many years, made the same effort to continue what Cornies had begun. But Friesen was uncooperative, consistent with the positions of his conservative supporters while the remainder of the congregation made no objections. As long as Wiebe was able to manage his office, things went well, but when he had to resign due to illness in the 1850s, his successor in this office (David Cornies) could not prevent Friesen from becoming the sole authority.

Under Friesen's leadership the following colonies were established:

1851 Nikolaidorf,  
 1852 Paulsheim,  
 1854 Kleefeld,  
 1857 Alexanderkron, Mariawohl, Friedensruh, Steinfeld,  
 1662 Gnadental,  
 1863 Hamberg, Klippenfeld

\*) When H. President learned about the unlawful influence of the Aeltester Warkentin, he prevented the intended election of this party.

## 6 - Final Land Allotment and Resettlement

In the period from the establishment of the first villages until the 1860s, the economic conditions of the Molotschna Mennonites had changed considerably. When the first villages were founded, a family that possessed even the most basic means could settle down and become successful in maintaining their 65 Dessiatine through earnest striving and hard work. Some families couldn't survive because of poverty, or probably for other, sometimes self-inflicted reasons. Later, when young families grew up, beyond the number anticipated when the villages were founded, the owners of 65 Dessiatine carved out smaller farm parcels, which they sold to young still unprovided families to build on. As long as such families were still relatively few, they could feed themselves well, because they could still obtain a piece of arable land from the farmers for a small payment. Also, the unoccupied crown lands of the district, which were available to tenants, were partly leased by these tenants to landless families for cultivation. If for some time the situation of the landless families was quite tolerable in terms of their livelihood, their situation gradually became quite different as the number of landless families increased, so that by the beginning of the 1860s they already accounted for  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the entire population, and their situations became distressed and deplorable. Among the landless in these distressed times, there were men who began to work toward land reform, but their requests were always rejected by the District Mayor, and the petitioners were reprimanded as disturbers of the peace. The District Mayor, as this later became apparent, had his very special plan for the landless. He wanted to make them subservient to the landowners, even though the colonists all enjoy equal rights under the law.

When the corresponding member of the Committee of Scholars of the Ministry of Crown Lands, H. Philipp Wiebe in Ohrloff, began to support this urgent matter in word and deed, and even presented the economic situation of the Molotschna Mennonites orally to the H. Governor General v. Kotzebue and in writing to the H. Minister of Crown Lands, and also among the latter men were found who were determined to take the matter into consideration.

In December 1863, they went to Odessa as deputies with a petition bearing numerous signatures of the landless:

**Guardianship Committee  
for the Foreign Colonists  
in South Russia**

**The Landless Inhabitants of the Molotschna  
Mennonite District  
Our most humble request.**

To effectively counteract the decline in the condition of the majority of the landless inhabitants in our community, which has worsened in recent years due to aggravating circumstances and threatens complete impoverishment, we are encouraged to act together as a united group. Thus, considering that the landless lack the right to vote, which is an aggravating circumstance, we dared to submit a request for the right to vote to the Guardianship Committee in April of this year. When, however, after a long period of waiting and a repeated oral presentation to the H. President, our hope for an answer to this request has vanished. We have tried, but in vain, to win the support of the District Office for this matter, which concerns the largest part of the community, it only referred us to Odessa.

In our distressed situation we now take refuge once again presenting our petition to the Guardianship Committee and to ask in all humility, if the hearing of our request for the right to vote should still encounter legal obstacles, we would like to humbly ask the Guardianship Committee, in fatherly care, not to leave us without assistance, but grant us advice and help, whereby we ask that the misery and condition of the landless inhabitants be solved by competent men, who, irrespective of the personal interest of a landowner, can understand these grievances from their own impartial observations and experience, to see if a permanent remedy can be found, as according to general knowledge, similar things are taking place elsewhere with solutions that have benefited many communities.

However, in order to help us in this hard-pressed situation, until our circumstances are examined, we most humbly ask that the landless Mennonites be settled on unused Crown land in the Molotschna Mennonite District, by which we could acquire the means to gradually resettle, either on pieces of land, either on land which, by the grace of our beloved Emperor, we would like to be given through a suitable presentation, or on land leased from noblemen, as is possible for the betterment of so many poor families.

Without this aid in the district itself, our houses, in which all our assets reside, have no value and thus our resettlement is impossible.

In the hope that the new life and light full of blessing and our ruler's wisdom, which has been brought forth in parts of the household of the great Russian family of nations, will also shine into our bleak situation, we persist in presenting this anguished resolution.

We have entrusted our brothers Franz Isaac, Jakob Doerksen and Johann Fast with the submission of this request and the receipt of the resolution.

November 1863.

(150 signatures.)

By regulation of December 31, 1863, sub No.10897, the committee entrusted this matter to the District Mayor, Friesen, and the chairman of the Agricultural Association, Peter Schmidt, for special care and obligated them to solve it without delay and in a completely satisfactory manner, and the H. Inspector of the colonies was then to make a presentation to the committee, which, in view of the importance of this matter, was not exempt from giving a definitive order.

As a result of this committee regulation, the deputies were summoned to the H. Inspector Andre on January 25, 1864, and after they had read to him, at his request, the request handed over in the Committee, he instructed them, in the presence of the District Mayor and the chairman of the Agricultural Association, to ask the landless for their opinion regarding the use of the communal land, for which purpose two representatives of the landless from each colony were invited to the Ohrloff association school on February 1, 1864. These assembled representatives of the landless made and signed the following act:

### **Community Proclamation.**

After we landless, about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of all inhabitants of this district, had submitted our sad situation to the Guardianship Committee in April of last year, we found ourselves compelled, because of the urgency of this matter, to submit a new petition in November of last year. In all humility, we ask them, firstly, to admit us to the general elections, secondly, to have the unfortunate situation and the entire condition carefully explained to and examined and by competent, impartial men, and thirdly, to allow the crown land in the Molotschna Mennonite District, which is still unsettled, to be given to the landless Mennonites for their use. This petition was presented by the commissioned Mennonites Franz Isaac, Jakob Doerksen and Johann Fast to the President of the H. Guardianship Committee in Odessa on December 7th.

According to this, Franz Isaac and Johann Fast received on the 25th of last January, the H. Inspector of the Molotschna Colonies, in the presence of the District Mayor and the Chairman of the Association, a verbal order to call together the landless inhabitants of this district and to ask them how they would take over the common land. We the undersigned, at each colony delegates of the landless inhabitants, declare as follows:

"We can't consider the establishment of new colonies on the unsettled community land an adequate solution. If the land is divided into such parts, on which certain communities could be sustained, it would help too few out of the large number of the landless to have a mitigating effect on the situation in general. On the contrary, we ask and wish that all the still unsettled land be allowed to be used by the landless families for farming from their homes, where most of them already have cultivated gardens and arranged their affairs to be able to pay the land rent established for the Mennonites in general. If, through the Guardianship Committee, new lands outside the district could then be assigned to us for settlement, then the strengthened families could relocate after selling their homes to those who have not previously owned land."

In addition, we find ourselves compelled to ask most humbly that the request submitted by our deputies concerning the right to vote be taken into account and that the entire condition of the landless residents be carefully examined by competent men who have our trust and who are to be selected for this purpose. These trusted men will also have the obligation to arrange the division of the unsettled land among us in order to avoid all disputes and to have it confirmed by the authorities.

We request that our brothers Franz Isaac and Johann Fast forward this declaration and request of ours to the Sr. Hochwohlgeboren, the H. Inspector of the Molotschna Colonies, for conveyance to the Guardianship Committee and to ask most obediently that this request be a gracious advocate for the hard-pressed landless inhabitants of the Molotschna Mennonite District.

Ohrloff, two February 1, 1864 colony	following the signatures of  representatives of the landless from each  of the Molotschna Mennonite District
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After receiving the above request signed by the representatives of the entire landless population, the Inspector said to the deputies that the request was quite good, but that the District Mayor had told him that it was not at all possible, namely that the desired distribution to

landless could not be admitted to the land because then the laborers would become too expensive for the farmers. The landless were thus very close to being in the same relationship to the landowners as the Gibionites once were to Israel, the Lord's people of property (Joshua 9), only the landless did not like to be condemned to be hewers of wood and water carriers. They were not yet destined by a higher hand to be completely exterminated and put in such a subordinate position as an undeserved grace and instead of dying and to welcome this position with joy, when in reality, we are all equal before the law.

Since it was clear to the deputies what the District Mayor <sup>1)</sup> and the head of the Association <sup>2)</sup> had in mind for the landless, they sent the following request:

### **To the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers**

#### **The most sincere request of the Mennonites Franz Isaac and Johann Fast**

In accordance with the Guardianship Committee's order of December 31, 1863, we were appointed on January 25, 1863 by the H. Inspector of Foreign Colonists of the Molotschna Colonies, we were instructed to call together the landless inhabitants of the Molotschna Mennonite District and to inquire how they intend to use the still unsettled common land most expediently. Thereupon the deputies of the colonies met on the 1st of February and after careful and calm consideration signed a formal letter in which they expressed their unanimous wish that the landless inhabitants be allowed to use the still unsettled land for agriculture from their homes, where their homes and gardens are, for the most part, already developed. To implement this plan sensibly, at the same time requesting that they be allowed to choose trustworthy men, because "only" in this way can the lands have a real benefit for the common good.

While this letter has been presented in the original to the H. Inspector for further consideration, we, the undersigned, deputies of the landless inhabitants, feel obliged to present this matter, which is very urgent for us, to the Guardianship Committee for their consideration, because in the presence of the H. Inspector we have been informed anew of the objections of the landowners.

1) The Vorsteher said: They cannot survive on half a Dessiantine and want to have even more, as if the people would be able to feed the country.

2) He still wanted to pay 2 Kopek and to be paid 3 - 4 Rubles per Dessiantine, a good income, thus to feed on the sweat of the poor.

The committee has asked them to do so, but they do not have the well-being of the majority of the inhabitants of this district in mind. Instead, the District Mayor wants to settle the lands with only a few people and to cut off the last prospect of even a makeshift assistance to the remaining poor people, who already number in the thousands, in order to make them absolutely subservient to the landowners. But the Chairman of the Agricultural Association, rich in his own lands, even appealed to the H. Inspector presenting his ownership documents for the communal land, which was leased for only about 2 Kopeks while a valid reason for this could not possibly exist.

From this the High Guardianship Committee will be sufficiently convinced that the landless families can expect proper insight into their very miserable situation only from the higher authorities, and therefore we dare to humbly ask the same to do justice to the unanimously expressed wishes of the landless inhabitants, for whom the unoccupied land can in reality only be intended and who have no voice at all in the municipality in civil matters.

The Lord our God will guide the hearts of our superiors and thousands of grateful family fathers will silently bless the same.

February 14, 1864  
Mennonites

To the Guardianship Committee of

**Franz Isaac, Isaak Fast**

In January 1865, a commission of landowners and landless people was elected by order of the local government to regulate the land affairs of the entire community, and for the purpose of working out a land distribution project the following information about the available land as well as about the number of families of the Molotschna Mennonites was handed over to the District Office:

According to this information, unused land was available:

at the communal sheep farm	4460
Dessiantine	
given to the cloth factory	3000 "
at Felsental under lease	260 "
at Steinbach "	4600 "
at Juschanlee "	3500 "
 Total unsettled land	 15820
Dessiantine	

Explanatory Note. The unused land in the village plans was not yet in cultivation, which, as it turned out later, amounted to about 8000 Dessiantine

Families were present: landowners 1384, landless 2356, cottagers [*Anwohner*] 1063.

In addition to the families mentioned above, 490 families lived on their own on leased land, as well as in towns, crown and nobleman's villages. Thus, the farmers did not make up a full third.

It was not possible to initiate a joint action of the Commission, because the landowner members of the Commission were obliged to protect what the District Mayor wanted. The Landless Commission, therefore, sent the following dispatch to the H. Minister of Crown Lands:

**To the Minister of Crown Lands <sup>a)</sup>**

As a result of extreme necessity, the new landless Molotschna Mennonites, with the approval of the local authorities, ask the Ministry's permission to allow them to use the uninhabited public land before the whole matter is resolved and to allow the election of new tenant farmers to the Land Board at the beginning of the year.

**Isaac, Fast, Fast, Doerksen**

Wiebe, as a corresponding member of the Committee of Scholars of the Ministry of Crown Lands, also wrote in this matter to the H. Minister of Crown Lands, as well as to H. Senator v. Hahn, enclosing the deputies' files:

**The Honorable Minister of Crown Lands**

In the Molotschna colonies there are about 3000 Mennonite families without land but with their own houses, who pay all the same taxes in money and in kind as landowners, but without having a vote in the community. They are obliged by law to obey the local village authorities and the District Office, but in elections for Aelteste and other common matters, none has been given the privilege to vote so far. The only landless Mennonites who are allowed to participate in the election of Aelteste are those enrolled in the revision in the same colony where their home is located, which is approximately the eighth part of all such inhabitants. The fortunate landowners with an allotment of 65 Dessiantine to each family, total about 1500 landlords, who not only have all these advantages, but can also be elected to any and all municipal offices, even if they are not in the revision there. Under such circumstances, the majority of the inhabitants of this district, in which they have no representation at all, increasingly suffer, of which the correspondence with the Guardianship Committee serves as proof, which I have the honor to submit for Your Excellency's favorable review with the most humble request: not to refrain, in order to preserve

a.) Translated from Russian, in the original, into English

the Molotschna Mennonite Colony, in order to protect our common welfare and to ask you to put yourself in the sad position of these many landless families.

In true conviction of the fairness of such striving of my confreres, I address myself to the high person of Your Excellency. Excellency, I dare to hope that after the cause of the landless Mennonites has been transferred from the Guardianship Committee to the Ministry of Crown Lands, our wise government will not disregard the fate of the great mass of poor people who, as they have asked the Committee in their community petition, will, with the acquisition of the right to vote in the community and the possibility to feed themselves by means of the allocation of the land, which is still free in our country, to their houses, by not settling it with new villages, will therefore make every effort to earn the patronizing care of the higher authorities.

Your Excellency's most devoted servant

**Philipp Wiebe**

**To Your Excellency H. Senator Evenius v. Hahn**

In the Molotschna villages the families without land have already increased to more than 3000, twice the number of landowners. Due to the emigration of the Nogai and increasing settlement on the lands previously occupied by the Nogai and other Crown lands in this area, the Anwohner can occasionally find a few Dessiatine of land to lease but this opportunity may soon disappear. The landless Mennonites are rightly concerned for their future and have asked that the remaining Crown land in the Mennonite district not be settled with new villages, but to give them the use of this land as a stop-gap measure to allow them to transition from the homes where they are already established, into new homes, so that if later, by the grace of our fatherly government, a resettlement were made possible, the houses could be better utilized, and they would thereby always have eager buyers from the among the young adults in the community.

Initially, the District Office has been repeatedly asked to take care of this matter, and when it not only did nothing, but by force of incarceration also wanted to prevent any appeal to the Guardianship Committee, the landless Mennonites finally sent three men from their midst to Odessa, where this very urgent matter was recognized as such by the Guardianship Committee, was taken for further consideration, and has now been presented to the High Ministry for a decision.

Below I take the liberty to submit to Your Excellency the correspondence concerning this matter, with the most obedient request to be our gracious intercessor. At the same time, I have also addressed a letter to His Excellency the Minister, a copy of which is also enclosed, and I am convinced that

the sad condition of more than 3000 poor family fathers will arouse the deserved pity of the High Government and will be remedied.

The landless Mennonites can expect nothing good from the local board [*Ortsvorstande*], which acts only in the interest of the landowners, by whom it is elected, and has no sense of responsibility to the rest of the community. All of us are completely convinced of this seeing what has already happened, and therefore we place our greatest trust in Your Excellency's benevolent hands, because few in our community understand our situation and also few are so noble as to defend the right with vigor.

Your Excellency will graciously forgive us that we, mindful of the many benefits we have already received, come back with a request once again. May the Lord God graciously preserve your high person for the general good for a long time to come. With this faithful wish we respectfully remain,

Your Excellency's most humble servant

**Philipp Wiebe**

Although the District Office announced in April 1865 that the free land was to be settled with villages in that year, the Landless Commission had not allowed itself to be distracted by the efforts of the local authority, but had worked out the following land distribution project:

### **Project or Proposal**

#### **The Landless Commission for the Settlement of the Unsettled Lands still located in the Molotschna Mennonite District.**

As a result of the received regulation of the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers of December 18, vol. I. No. 10245 and the subsequent memorandum of the Ministry of Crown Lands concerning the inheritance rights of foreign settlers, the Mennonite District Office of Molotschna had all landowners and all landless persons of the entire district, of each category, to elect a commission consisting of four persons. Both commissions were to meet on January 27 of this year, to regulate the inheritance rights of foreign settlers with regard to the unsettled lands still located in this district. The above-mentioned regulation of the Guardianship Committee and the memorandum of the High Ministry were handed over to them by the District Office in conjunction with the Agricultural Association as a guideline for their task.

From all this, the Landless Commission sees that the high state government not only upholds the principle of considering the land allotted to the Mennonites for their use as community property in the newly formulated regulations, but also wants to make it even more effective through the abolition of the right of the youngest and the indivisibility of the host land, as well ensuring that the community is not weakened in the process. On the other hand, we do not want to do violence to our economic conditions, which of course would have the worst consequences and therefore we do not want to distribute the land based solely on

number of souls. However, the Commission believes that it can base the regulation and the needs of the landless on the principles of communal property and the common well-being. According to this, the communal needs must be satisfied by the communal property, and consequently the right of the landless must be satisfied to the greatest extent possible. Even if everyone does not have an equal share in the personal use of the common land according to the law, the community is responsible for everyone. The regulation of the relations among us Mennonites rests on two foundations: first, on the brotherhood, i.e., our own confession of faith, and second, on the obligation to our high national government.

Our own confession demands charity and does not tolerate any exaltation, much less favoritism, and the government demands the same if it wants to secure all the inhabitants of the country and give them equal opportunity as much as is possible. With us, however, despite the fact that according to your laws we should all enjoy equal rights, at present only  $\frac{1}{2}$  of all inhabitants are placed in such a way that they can really do justice to their citizenship obligation, while  $\frac{2}{3}$  not only cannot fulfill their mandate, but must always, be a burden to their fellow citizens and also to their obligation. When this, by far largest part of the population of the Molotschna Mennonite District, comes to stand on a solid foundation, not only will they, but also through them, the whole community will be lifted morally and the state will gain a large number of families who will meet the demands of the same with joyful confidence.

We must therefore subordinate all personal considerations and petty momentary advantages of the individual to the good of the whole community and the interest of the government protecting us, and use all available land, without, as the government says, harming the previous owners of properties of 65 Dessiantine, to do justice to the landless confreres and to the intentions of the high obligation. We have all the more reason to act wisely because the government has benevolently placed this regulation in our own hands, because it is the principle of every government to work through persuasion and conviction, especially with us, who as a congregation of brothers where this should be presupposed first.

The manner of regulation is proposed by the Landless Commission in the following points:

#### I

The existing available land, which has not yet been divided into parcels of 65 Dessiantine for individual families may therefore be used according to the memorandum for the most advantageous distribution in parcels as small as possible, but within limits of a useful minimum, is as follows:

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| a) the land at the Juschanlee plant owned by the: Owner of this plant until now in leasehold of approx.          | 3500<br>Dessiantine |
| b) the parcel of land at the Steinbach plant leased from the owner of this plant until now, amounting to approx. | 4600 “              |
| c) the unoccupied parcel of land adjacent to the shepherd's land of about  | 1460 “              |
| d) the communal shepherd's land of about   | 3000 “              |

Explanatory Note. Although in the past it was suitable to use much of this land for the establishment of a model sheep farm, it should no longer be withheld from the large mass of the people for whom it was originally intended. Half of the sheep farm has already been rented to some of the landless for farming at unaffordable rates and this probably is the main source of income for the sheep farm.

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| e) the parcel of land near the Felsental estate, which has been leased from the owner of this estate up to now, of approximately | 260 “ |
|--|-------|

Explanatory Note. If the owner of the estate has any claims to keep it under lease with regard to its large plantations, this should be taken into account.

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| f) the parcel of land used for the support of the Halbstadt cloth factory of about | 3000 “ |
|--|--------|

Explanatory Note. This piece of land was given to the founder of the factory for sheep breeding, in order to facilitate the growth of the factory for the benefit of the community and to independence through its own fine wool, but for many years it has been leased to the landless people in the surrounding villages for farming in exchange for as large a rent as possible. Whether the municipality is now entitled to reclaim the land, since it has been proven that the factory owners, even with such significant support, were not able to raise the factory to self-sufficiency and only let it operate for a few years for the sake of the land, and the colony's cloth needs must be largely purchased from outside, cannot be judged by the Commission, since it does not know what documents the factory owners hold. However, since this piece of land is absolutely necessary for the security of the landless because of its location, it would be appropriate that the factory owners, if they still have full or perhaps partial claims to the income from this land, be satisfied by the entire community and that this land be released to those who use it for the general land rent.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| g) there is surplus land in many colonies, beyond the 65 Dessiantine parcels which have already been allocated, of which the number of dessiatine cannot be stated without proper surveying. |  |
|--|--|

Explanatory Note. Since 65 Dessiantine is the legal maximum what may be in one hand, this surplus land cannot belong to the farmers, who up to now have used it exclusively for themselves, besides their 65 Dessiantine, under the label of "useless", but still largely usable, so that in some villages instead of 65 they have even 70-75 Dessiantine and even more in use. The Commission finds it particularly necessary in this matter, concerning the regulation of unsettled lands, to mention also the Chumak Roads <sup>a)</sup>, which pass through the Molotschna Mennonite District and, as far as the Commission knows, were later subtracted from the land parcel originally intended for the community. These large Chumak Roads, at that time narrowed down to about 750 fathoms <sup>b)</sup> in width, would be of great importance to an expedient allotment of lots as building sites for landless families, according to their location, and therefore a suitable presentation of them to the High Government would seem very desirable. In fact, these wide Chumak Roads are of less use to the transports than to the adjoining villages, in that before the oxen transports begin to go, the grass is for the most part already always grazed, so that the same, made narrower and duly bordered, would suit their purpose very well.

## II

From their 65 Dessiantine the farmers have been selling building sites, which according to the decree of the Agricultural Association should be  $\frac{1}{2}$  Dessiantine, to the landless for an average price of about 100 Rubles, and the majority of them are occupied. If, after proper surveying, the still available land mentioned in the first point, were allocated to the closest villages, a portion of land could come out for each such building site, which, used for agriculture, and under the condition that the owners of such building sites remain in their previous village relationships, would still be sufficient to give a family the necessary sustenance. However, it would be unlikely that an owner of 65 Dessiantine would own such sites in addition to his farm. The basic rent, which the purchasers of such sites have to pay annually to the landlords in addition to the purchase sum, should be completely eliminated, because the interest from the capital received for such sites gives the landlords an income of 5-7 Rubles annually, and only the land rent to be paid to the crown should be retained by the farmer.

Explanatory Note. As for the village relationships, based on the community privileges, it is understood that there is the freedom to graze of about 8 heads of cattle for a certain price. The price to be based on the number of children attending school and used for the upkeep of the school, etc. Such ratios would have to be regulated equally in all villages.

## III

Since at present there are already a significant number of families who have neither settled on such building sites nor can count on a chance

a.) The Chumak Roads were salt transportation routes used by salt traders traveling from outside the colonies toward their market destinations. The width of these roads was to prevent the trader's livestock from passing diseases to the colonists' livestock. Hereinafter noted as "Chumak Roads".

b.) a Fathom or Sazhen is 7 feet or 2.134 meters making the Chumak Roads 1.6 km or 1 mi. wide.

inheritance of a part of the farm, but only rent here and there. The land portion of the building sites still unoccupied and to be sold by the farmers could be used exclusively for the landless, which would be helpful to them in acquiring such sites. If such families want to acquire from those sites still available, the previous average price could be fixed for them and, in case of settlement, the respective land parcel could be sold to them. If some landowners, instead of selling the building sites still in their hands to landless families for the aforementioned average price, might prefer to keep them for themselves in order to use them for later distribution as their assets to their heirs, they would be free to do so, however, in such case the land to be distributed to the landless could never be allocated to this farmstead.

#### IV

All landless persons who have been using their land so far would be obliged not only to pay the land rent for the land in use, but those who have acquired a building site and are using their land as a fixed site, would also be obliged to render community services in proportion to their land. As far as the internal division of the crown dues is concerned, since it is left to the villages, it would have to be changed, and since the land is the responsibility of all, it would also have to be distributed mainly based on parcel size, whereupon the families mentioned in the third point, as long as they are not in possession of a fixed parcel of land, would be exempt either completely or to a large extent.

#### V

If, in the future, the land parcels were to be divided into three special farms, as would be desirable and advantageous for the development of agriculture, this would counteract the further increase of landless families, but would not prevent it. The vacant building sites will be settled very quickly and thus all land in the district will be in use, and the land parcels allotted to the present landless families could no longer be subdivided. Therefore, the establishment of a community fund, which has already been proposed by the local authorities, is necessary to provide for the future landless, either to purchase land, or, if after the settlement of the last land proposed above, new lands outside the district are to be assigned to us by the generosity of the High Government, to support the resettling families as needed. For the establishment and maintenance of this fund, each landowner would be obliged in proportion to

his land area in use, to the extent that the sustenance of these families requires it, because it must be an on-going principle that land acquires more land. Although the community has not had an account of its common income for many years, it can be assumed that initially, even without this fund, it would have a significant capital at its disposal for this purpose. From this fund, those who have already acquired external lands for temporary or permanent use and who have settled in villages, should also have to pay a proportionate share, in order to fund this account equally.

By admitting them to the municipal assemblies and giving them the right to vote, and by these proposed steps to use the land still available and to provide for still growing families, all would be placed on a firm foundation. The established families could resettle after significant improvements to their farmsteads, and beginners could take their place. The economic conditions of the hitherto landless, however, would thus be remedied, whereas with the present arrangement most would inevitably fail, because their houses, which is the whole of their assets, would lose their value completely in the case of a settlement of the last remaining undeveloped land by only a few. The last hope for the landless would be cut off, since the capital possessed by them could not be made liquid in case of a possible resettlement. Under this proposal, our colonies would quickly flourish through their own efforts and God's blessing, the all-consuming caste system would disappear, and a generally sincere desire would prepare a better future for even the youngest in the community than is possible under the present circumstances.

Finally, the Landless Commission, with the delivery of this proposal to the Molotschna Mennonite District Office and the Agricultural Association, is fully convinced that it has fulfilled its task as much as it was aware of, keeping in mind the interest of the landlords as well as the landless, which in any case can never be separated. It asks that the original of this proposal be sent to the Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers for presentation to the Ministry of Crown Lands.

March 18, 1865

The Landless Commission  
**Franz Isaac, Johann Fast,  
Johann Doerksen, Joseph  
Fast**

The reader can see the present state of the whole matter from the following presentation and request made to the Committee:

**To the Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers  
From the Mennonites Franz Isaac, Isaak Fast, Johann Doerksen and Johann  
Fast**

**Presentation and Request**

At the end of December of the previous year, the local authorities received a directive from the Guardianship Committee dated the 18th of that month under No. 10245 and subsequently a memorandum from the Ministry of Crown Lands concerning the inheritance rights of the colonists. In January of this year, the local authorities held a meeting of the mayors and had them decide by vote how best to use the unsettled land still in the district to provide for the many landless families, whether by distribution to all landless families without founding new villages, or by settlement at 32½ Dessiantine per family, namely by founding new villages. Since the mayors realized that the latter way of using the land from the large mass of landless families would help only a few, they decided by majority vote in favor of distribution. At the same time, the mayors were instructed to elect 4 Commission members from all farmers, and 2 electors from each colony from among the landless, and to send the electoral lists to the first, and to send the latter to the District Office on January 27 of this year. These electors were presented by the local authorities with both the proposals to distribute and settlement of the lands, and were then called upon to vote. When they had decided with a large majority in favor of the distribution without founding new villages, they then elected 4 Commission members from among the landless under the direction of the District Office.

Upon written confirmation of the regulation of the unsettled lands in the district, all commission members were invited at the same time, and the above-mentioned regulation of the Guardianship Committee and the memorandum of the Ministry were handed over to them by the local authority for their compliance. However, at the second general meeting of the Commission, the Landless Commission was told in all seriousness that, after a closer examination of the aforementioned documents, they were convinced that the landless had no old claims to land, that the possession of land was harmful to them, and that they were economically secure by diligently working for the farmers, although it was expressly stated in the documents that, according to the law, every colonist must enjoy completely equal rights, also with regard to the use of the land. Three Commission members of the farmers would not agree on any distribution, but only on formation of new villages.

However, since this was contrary to the task assigned to the commission, the Landless Commission was instructed to give its opinion independently, and was again requested by the District Office to send a declaration to the District Office with the particulars of the proposals to be made, on February 13, No. 1453.

After the commissions of both sides had worked out the required proposals in several special conferences and had sent them to the District Office, they were invited by the District Office on April 9, and they were informed orally, and later also in writing to the Landless Commission, that according to the regulations of the Guardianship Committee the unsettled land issue had been settled. The Landless Commission was disbanded, because its purpose had become superfluous.

Although in the last-mentioned regulation of the Guardianship Committee it is stated that according to the decision of the High Ministry that the selection of the method of land ownership should not be delayed, the local authority has, against the will of the community (which is proved by the above-mentioned vote of the mayors, the electors, as well as the community resolution signed on February 1, 1864 by about 2500 landless people), ordered an immediate formation of new villages of 32½ Dessiantine per family, which is to be accomplished yet this year.

Now the landless are being told by the mayors, which despite their above-mentioned decision for land distribution, in a meeting on April 30th of this year for the formation of new villages, are told that the High Ministry has decided in favor of the formation of new villages, and that this decision means that the distribution of the remaining lands as desired by them is to be regarded as null and void. The reason for this is not that they want this settlement, but only fear that they will be excluded from any land use, whereby many do not believe that this settlement will be possible for them, because the houses, in which their entire property consists, could not be liquidated. For which reason, and also because only a few of the great mass can be accepted, the majority of the landless will not accept such settlement.

Since this settlement, which is the published opinion of the Deputy District Mayor Dueck and of one member of the Landowners Commission submitted to the District Office clearly and openly show, will inevitably bring about the ruin of most of the landless, the undersigned, after considering the situation of the great mass of their landless brethren, who were granted only for a short time the opportunity to look with confidence toward a better, and not into an even worse future.

They now have asked the Minister of Crown Lands to investigate this matter, and to ask the Guardianship Committee in the name of this great mass, respectfully and most humbly ask that all land still available be distributed according to the following proposal made by the Landless Commission without founding new villages.

May 4, 1865

**Franz Isaac, Johann Doerksen,  
Johann Fast, Isaak Fast**

Taking advantage of the pause that occurred after the above request was handed over, it should be mentioned here that it was quite all right to hand over the unsettled lands on lease and to help out the cloth factory at a time when there were still few landless families, but that they did not want to hand them over now, when the landless already made up  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the entire population, was unjust, but they wanted to enrich themselves even further through them. The land given to the Halbstadt cloth factory was to be used for sheep breeding, so that the factory owner would be able to maintain the whole factory with his own wool, and also to raise it for his own and the community's benefit. However, the land was no longer used for its intended purpose and the factory is no longer in operation. The owner of the factory rented the land to the landless, to whom it legally belonged, at the highest possible prices, truly a rich source of income, considering that the factory was inactive. For the owner of the Steinbach estate, at that time Peter Schmidt, it was also advantageous to lease a part of the land at the highest possible prices to the landless, to whom it belonged for use for the respective crown fees, for a few kopeks rent. The same was the case with the shepherd's land, the income of which was not subject to any control, as was revealed by the revision of the municipal accounts by the member of the Council of Ministers His Excellency v. Islawin. An exception to this rule was made by the owner of the Juschanlee estate, because it was he who initiated this type of land allotment and also brought it to its final execution.

Of course, nothing was known about the reception the above-mentioned documents of the proposals and requests sent by H. Wiebe to St. Petersburg, but the settlement of the last available land intended by the District Mayor did not go further than the request for the same, and no further action was taken.

Nothing more was heard about the settlement and nothing was made public, which prevented the establishment of new villages.

In August 1865, the member of the Council of Ministers, the State Councillor v. Islawin, came to Molotschna to investigate the situation of the landless and the management of the municipal accounts on behalf of the H. Minister. To this noble-minded gentleman, who publicly announced that he was ready to accept any complaint, the Landless Commission, which had been dissolved, submitted the following declaration of the actual facts about the administration and regarding the situation of the landless population of the Molotschna Mennonite District:

**His Excellency  
Member of the Council of the Ministry of Crown Lands  
Real State Councillor, H. v. Islawin.**

After the landless Mennonites on the Molotschna had been striving for three years in every possible way to prevent their complete impoverishment by a suitable means, which can only be achieved if these families, who have for the most part established themselves in the villages, could receive the unsettled crown lands still located in the district. The Commission elected by the landless Mennonites, at the behest of the local authorities, prepared a proposal in this regard and presented it to the Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers.

In the past spring, the Commission was informed of a ministerial decision according to which the landless should not be impeded by the method by which they become land owners. Based on this decision, the landless have now petitioned the Guardianship Committee to allow the land in question to be subdivided in accordance with the commission's proposal. In spite of all this, the District Office has decided to settle said lands at 32½ Dessiantine per family with the establishment of new villages, which would favor about 400 families and completely ruin more than 3000 others, which can be easily proven with figures and would have the worst consequences for the whole community. To settle 400 families requires, only roughly calculated, about 500 Rubles (formerly 1000 - 3000) which totals 200,000 Rubles. On the other hand, the 1600 Anwohner houses in the colonies will lose 400 Rubles in value, totaling 600,000 Rubles. The grand total is would then be, over 800,000 Rubles, which sum the municipality will lose as well as the

more than 2000 families, whose existence is based on nothing. On the other hand, if the rest of the land is distributed among the residents, the municipality will be twice as rich and all the families will be secure for the future.

The basic problem in the district, which all of us can see, consists of the fact that only  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the inhabitants are admitted to the elections and  $\frac{2}{3}$  have absolutely no voice, which is why the interest of this large mass of families finds no support, which has become particularly evident in recent years. The landless have repeatedly appealed to the local authorities to consider their plight, but all representations to the higher authority have been calculated to thwart our last hope, and if the landless, seeking help themselves by continuing to protest and appeal, they are arrested and punished as violators of the law. Even a meeting of the landless, personally ordered by the H. Inspector himself, was later declared to be an illegal meeting and the leaders were maliciously disgraced. Therefore, there is no other way to prevent such encroachments than that the residents are also admitted to the communal elections and thus elect leaders who will serve the interests of all.

The Anwohner, without exception, don't have the slightest voice in village governance, but they still have to pay high taxes, and even less voice in the District Office, which they also help to pay for. Everything is carried out without their input but supported by their taxes. The renters simply have to comply with every decision. Life is very difficult as they look at all the bills. For many years, the landless have been paying immense sums of rent for the shepherd's land in order to earn bread for sustenance, and they are not wrong in thinking that such significant sums should be put to good use for the landless. It is said that these funds are partly squandered and much of the rest is loaned without proper security. The District Office is running its own banking operation by borrowing and lending, the money of individuals, from the community's account, which completely undermines the credit in the community, because the private citizen has to fear for his money, if the District Office, as it is said, has the advantage in every banking transaction with its capital, while nobody knows who the debtors of the District Office are.

We, the undersigned members of the Commission, therefore feel compelled to ask Your Excellency most obediently to convene the mayors and the electors of the landless from the villages in order to ascertain the real facts and to consider the deplorable condition of the landless as soon as possible,

in order to give a proper outcome to the matter that is so important for all of us. Thousands of poor families will seek to earn the longed for goodwill of Your Excellency and the High Government with sincere gratitude, with which we humbly take the liberty of requesting

Your Excellency's most devoted Mennonites  
**Franz Isaac, Isaac Fast, Johann  
 Fast**

In addition to the foregoing declaration, the Commission presented this gentleman with a copy of the land distribution project already submitted to the Guardianship Committee, which His Excellency willingly accepted and instructed the Commission, because it was fully recognized by His Excellency, to appear before him again the following day. When several questions had been answered on the following day, His Excellency demanded detailed and thorough proof from the Commission that the landless inhabitants were really secured in their existence by such a kind of land allotment as was proposed in the project, and this was to be proven with figures. The Commission gave the following evidence:

**Proof  
 of the appropriateness of the proposed land allocation.**

The Landless Commission of the Molotschna Mennonite District proposed to distribute the available land still in the district equally among the renter's parcels [*Anwohnerstellen*] and, according to an approximate calculation, a parcel of 10-12 Dessiantine would be allocated to each such site. To justify this, it must first be explained what such a parcel is and what obligations are attached to it. A renter's parcel, according to the regulations of the Agricultural Association, should contain  $\frac{1}{2}$  Dessiantine of land, on it stands a house, the mean size of which is assumed to be 50 feet long and 30 feet wide. This is usually a dwelling house and cattle barn. In addition, on many places are still outbuildings, such as a Treadmill, an Oil Mill, or a Grot Mill (these trades are operated with very few exceptions only by *Anwohner*) or workshops of the craftsmen. Then, every such place without exception had to build an ash shed per regulations. Each place is enclosed on both sides with a mulberry hedge, at the rear end with an olive tree hedge and at the street with a fence. Furthermore, it is planted with trees, mostly with fruit trees. There are special rules for the construction of such houses and the planting of the sites, which the owner is obliged to follow, just like the landowners. It can be said that such a *Anwohnerhof* is a model farm

albeit on a small scale. These places are purchased in an undeveloped state from the landlords at an average price of 100 Rubles. The owner, however, is obliged to pay an annual rent of up to 1 Ruble, and in some cases 3 Rubles, either to the village treasury or to the landlord from whom he bought the place. On average, the Anwohner are allowed to drive 3 head of cattle to the common pasture, for a grazing fee of 1 Ruble. per head. He pays the same shepherd as the landlords per head. Because all taxes, both crown taxes and community taxes, are mostly calculated on the head of the household, a poor landless person often pays 2 to 3 times as much as an owner of 65 Dessiantine. In addition, their trades, e.g., mills, oil and grain mills, etc., are taxed in the same way as farms. If we now assume a renter's family [*Anwohnerfamilie*] of 3 able-bodied souls and 2 school children, their annual tax is as follows:

Crown levies (committee salaries)	4 Rubles	50 Kopek
Mayor's salary, school fees, District Office salary, doctor's salary, for maintenance of incurable sick, for the treatment of rabid patients	4 "	35 "
Pasture money and shepherd's fee for 3 hired men	3 "	45 "
In Total:	12 Rubles	30 Kopek
If he now still owns a trade, e.g., a mill, he still pays for it:		
District salary	- "	45 "
Physician's tax	- "	40 "
For the maintenance of the sick	- "	45 "
Grand Total:	13 Rubles	60 Kopek

One must admit that this expenditure, without owning a Dessiantine land, is too large. The commission therefore also proposed to base the tax burden primarily on the land, that is, to collect the taxes *dessiatinen* by *dessiatinen*, because this is equitable. The establishment of these farms, if they remain without land, is a failed enterprise. Thinking men have realized this long ago, that handicraft and trade can flourish in the villages without land, which the founding of the craftsmen's village clearly proves. But since now a large number of Anwohner, really just peasants, so such farm can't exist without land. The trade goods, which are produced in the villages, are exported, their price therefore depends on the money market and also the sales. As a result, even with the best harvests, the price of grain is often very high, but this is only to the benefit of those who own land, and

the land does not actually feed the village residents, but feeds the landowners, the others depend on earning a living through a trade. Here, however, the economics of import and export step in the way and show that the village residents who have mechanized make some workers superfluous and also because factory products are available at prices so low that the tradesmen cannot compete. Due to these two relationships: the exportation of raw products and the importation of manufactured goods, it is an unavoidable necessity for every poor village inhabitant to obtain the most vital foodstuffs himself from the land. He has too little money to be able to pay for the necessities of life at the market prices, while his earnings are limited by the importation of goods that are cheaper than he those that he can produce. Goods, if he can provide them, are constantly threatened by market uncertainty. If, finally, a village inhabitant wants to support himself as a day laborer, it should be noted that in the economies of the landowners, the work which is available to him is limited to only a very short time of the year, and that primarily in winter. When most expenses are incurred, often no work is to be found, and if any work is found, it pays so little that the daily wage is barely sufficient to feed the day laborer, let alone to be sufficient to feed, clothe and warm the family. For both artisans and day laborers in the villages, it is equally necessary to engage in some agriculture, and there are hardly any individual artisans and day laborers in all our villages, to our knowledge, who confine or can confine themselves exclusively to this branch of agriculture because the landless have to pay expensive rent for the lands they use. This is due to the following, every artisan and day laborer needs some livestock, that is, at least some horses and cows, to provide for his needs. It is not possible to hire an inexpensive wagon in order to procure, for example, fuel, grain and materials (wood, leather, etc.) for the trade. Indeed, at times it is not even possible to hire a single horse for great expense for a short period of time, and then the trade of a craftsman or the job of a day laborer in winter must cease. But if one has to keep horses, the feeding of these animals is possible only by farming, at least on a small scale. If, however, one cultivates on a small scale, about 10-12 Dessiantine one can produce the most necessary food for oneself as well as maintain the required domestic animals, provided that one can use the common pasture in summer as before. Thus, a stable situation is created for the trade and a stable existence for the poorer village residents, whereby a family receives an adequate living through diligence and thrift.

The best proof of the thoroughness of this assumption is provided by experience. Indeed, many craftsmen work

their craft and by cultivating 10-12 Dessiantine often at a distance of 20-25 versts and at a rent of 3-6 Rubles per Dessiantine, for years they had a good livelihood, and some of them even prospered significantly. An allotment of 10-12 Dessiantine of land for the landless, combined with the value of their houses, stabilizes their existence far better than a resettlement to 32½, Dessiantine, in which then the capital in their houses is lost, because, in reality, of these 32½, Dessiantine no more than 15 Dessiantine can be cultivated, and the remaining land must remain for communal grazing. But at the same time the expenses for the new settler are disproportionately increased, because in a newly founded village a new school building, shepherd's house etc. must be built, a preacher and a shepherd must be employed, and many other things must be added. Both landowners and settlers lose greatly in the case of a resettlement to 32½, Dessiantine while leaving behind the capital in their houses, but both parties gain if the Anwohner remain with their villages. The landowner keeps nearby the artisan, who can produce his goods and sell them, and the laborer has enough land to produce the necessary food for his family. The benefit of the distribution of land according to the proposal of the Landless Commission can also be proven by calculation. According to approximate calculation, for every renter's parcel of 10-12 Dess, there is one family. If we assume a family size of 3 able-bodied souls and 2 children, each year they need 5 Tschwt. Wheat, 5 Tschwt. Rye, 30 Tschwt. fodder grain, for a total 40 Tschwt. of grain. Also, his family needs 2 horses and 2 cows and for feeding these livestock 8 loads of long fodder. If these needs are bought for cash, the approximate result would be as follows:

5 Tschwt.	Wheat	@ 7 Rubles equals	35 Rubles
5 Tschwt.	Rye	@ 4 " "	20 "
30 Tschwt.	Fodder grains	@ 3 " "	90 "
8 carloads	Fodder	@ 5 " "	40 "
		Total	185 Rubles

Now we want to sow 4 of the 10 Dessiantine with wheat, 1 with rye, 3 with fodder grain and leave 2 to fallow, so we can harvest with a medium harvest from it, 16 Tschwt. Wheat, 5 Tschwt. Rye, 24 Tschwt. fodder grain, 8 loads of long fodder. These would amount to 244 Rubles in money according to the above prices. If we now subtract the sowing for the future year, which amounts to 25 Rubles according to these prices, we still get a small surplus of 34 Rubles.

The objection is made that these lands are not useful when allotted to the landless because they are too remote in some places. This distance which is at most 15-16 versts is, however, an inconvenience, but this land is currently tilled at an average rent of 4 Rubles per Dessiantine which amounts to 40 Rubles per 10 Dessiantine. These 40 Rubles fall away with the distribution of the land and completely outweigh the inconvenience of the distance. If it is still advantageous for those living nearby to cultivate this land at 4 Rubles rent, it is even more so for those living far away when this rent falls away. \*) The distance is indeed, as already mentioned, an inconvenience, but by no means a reason to discount this proposal.

Furthermore, it is argued that then more taxes and wages will be demanded from the Anwohner, which is true, but only in proportion to their land. We also want to assume that the taxes would remain only those listed above with an allotment of 10 Dessiantine, thus, an land owner with 65 Dessiantine should pay 6 ½ times as much, i.e., 79 Rubles 95 Kopek that the allocation of land to the Anwohner is not harmful to craftsmen and tradesmen, but useful and even necessary, has just been shown. When this objection is made by our landowning brethren, one is really amazed and one sees how harmful partisan hatred is to the common good. So, there could be no reason to suspend the distributions of about 10-12 Dessiantine. The only inconvenience of distance would be most easily removed by reducing the large Chumak Roads or routes of 750 fathoms width, passing through the middle of the colony, to 70 fathoms <sup>a)</sup> width, as at present, and taking the land thus gained for distribution. In this way, the individual parcels of land could also be enlarged somewhat after being surveyed. When the aforementioned distribution of the land has been completed, there will still be families in need of land. But since there is none left in the district, it is absolutely necessary to find a means to meet these needs. Here, at the request of the local authority, the Landless Commission has made the proposal to form a capital fund to purchase land, in the following manner. Each Dessiantine of usable land would pay an annual sum to this fund, about 10 Kopeks per Dessiantine of usable land. This would yield annually, out of about 124,000 Dessiantine in the district, a capital of 12,400 Rubles. This is not a high rate and could, according to the result of the harvests, adjusted higher or lower each year.

\*) It should still be noted that after the land is allotted, it can be made more productive by better cultivation. At present, the land is usually leased only on a yearly basis, and most of it in winter or spring. This makes good cultivation of this land completely impossible. There is no possibility of the leased land falling into disuse.

a.) This reduction would take the Chumak Roads from 1.6 km or 1 mi. to 150 meters or 490 feet wide.

This would still not be sufficient to provide the growing population of young families with land and therefore ways will still have to be sought to provide for these people. This circumstance would be even more serious, however, if the available land were used to provide only 400 families instead of over a thousand.

An even more burning question than the distribution of the land is the participation in the right of suffrage, to which all householders are legally entitled. By the fact alone that a large part of our colonial population is denied appropriate legal protection. We could get into such a situation where; everything is granted to one class and nothing to the other. All internal colonial institutions are made by majority vote of the landowners, who constitute only  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the population. It goes without saying that the landowners first protect and consider their own interests in any arrangements and institutions, and that the interests of the landless are given low priority, because they have no representation, as proven by the above table of levies for a landless family. If, however, the interests of the majority of the population are completely neglected and suppressed, it is easy to understand that this will cause constant hatred and envy. The landless have no means of the help themselves in this sad situation. In the community assemblies they have no voice in the protecting their interests and no recourse is open to them. If the landless finally take recourse by writing petitions to present their plight to the high paternalistic government, they are reprimanded by the District Office under the pretext that they have violated Article 392 of the XIIth Amendment. Part II of the Code of Laws. But if, according to this article, they wanted to order a meeting under the leadership of the local authority, only to express their needs and wishes. These authorities are elected by the landowners alone, and, as experience proves, do not consider the needs of the landless. Among the landowners, the obvious advantage that the implementation of the proposal of the Landless Commission would bring to our colony is gaining more ground, no matter how many difficulties and reservations are made opposing this project. Many landowners, among them also a Deputy District Mayor, have already expressed their support, many more would do so if asked, and the mood of the 20 farmers selected under the influence of the present District Office would not be reflective of the attitude of all farmers.

**Franz Isaac, Isaak Fast, Johann Fast**

When the Commission with the aforementioned file entered Prishib in the long hall of the Honorable Daudrich, where His Excellency was staying, the District Mayor, the Chairman of the Agricultural Association and the selected representatives of the landowners were standing in a semicircle in front of this High Lord. His Excellency, noticing the Commission at the opposite end of the hall as soon as it entered, stepped out of the aforementioned circle and came to meet it in a friendly and patronizing manner in the middle of the hall, received the files, walked through the semicircle of representatives again and came to his table. When the Commission had also entered the row of representatives, His Excellency immediately turned to it and told it that a complaint had just been made about it by the representatives, that it was dealing with changing all the boundaries in the district. The Commission answered with the words: "Your Excellency! We will not let this be foisted on us." Now, His Excellency handed the Commission the land distribution proposal that it itself had prepared saying, "Read what is written here." When the Commission read the second point of the proposal: "If now the still available land named in the first point would be allotted to the colonies in the closest possible proximity after correct surveying" His Excellency did not continue any further but took the proposal in his hand, turned to the Chairman of the Association, steely-eyed but silently waiting for the meaning of the words to sink in. The Chairman stammered, "Something like this has been said". His Excellency said seriously and emphatically, placing his right hand on the proposal: "One does not adhere to what has been said, but to what is written here. Turning to the Commission, His Excellency instructed it to appear again in the evening of the same day, and at this last appearance, His Excellency gave it his full approval with regard to the proposal presented, not saying a word about the aforementioned complaint. The Commission did not appear before this gentleman again, but when it learned that the colonial surveyor had given His Excellency an incorrect indication concerning the superfluous land in the village plans, it therefore addressed itself once more in writing to His Excellency as follows:

**His Excellency,  
Member of the Council of the Ministry of Crown Lands,  
Real State Councillor the Honorable v. Islawin**

We, the undersigned, feel obliged to hand over to Your Excellency the notes, which were written out by the Regional Clerk and handed over to us at the time of taking over our Commission, in order that

Your Excellency may see from them that the best source for securing the landless is far more productive than Your Excellency was told by the land surveyor in our presence, namely that in the existing colonies, instead of 1500 Dessiantine there are close to 8000 Dessiantine of so-called unusable, actually superfluous land, of which only a very small part of it is really unusable.

In the joyful confidence that through Your Excellency's benevolent efforts a blessed future for our entire community is in prospect, we feel compelled, in the name of our landless brethren, to express our deepest gratitude to Your Excellency, with the most heartfelt request that he will graciously forgive us for troubling you once again. With the Lord's help, all our efforts should always be directed towards showing ourselves worthy of the grace of the High Government.

With this faithful assurance we take the liberty to  
once again to call ourselves  
Your Excellency's most obedient Mennonites

**Isaac, Fast, Fast**

The Kirchenvorstand of the congregations in Ohrloff, Halbstadt and Neukirch presented His Excellency with the following request:

**His Excellency,  
Member of the Council of the Ministry of Crown Lands,  
Real Councillor of State the Honorable v. Islawin**

Since thousands of our brethren are without land and without a source of food, and since we as spiritual leaders cannot remain indifferent about the gloomy prospects for the future for those in these circumstances, but must harbor serious concerns about the moral condition of our congregations. But a remedy is still possible by using the land that is still available. We feel compelled to support the wish of our poor landless by asking Your Excellency to grant us the right to use the land that is still available to put an end to this misery and distress by means of suitable decrees, which would provide us and the aforementioned brothers as well as our descendants an incalculable benefit.

August 20, 1865

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**

Preachers: **Kornelius Penner, Jakob Martens,  
Franz Klaassen, Abraham Regier,  
Bernhard Harder, Franz Isaac,  
Kornelius Isaac, Franz Balzer, Jakob Isaac,  
Johann Regier, Aron Rempel**

Encouraged by the petitions of the Ohrloff, Halbstadt and Neukirch Kirchenvorstaende, the landless also asked the church boards of the other congregations with the following request to consider their sad situation and to intercede on their behalf with His Excellency:

**To the Kirchenkonvent of the Molotschna Mennonite District.**

**From the Landless Inhabitants of the Colonies**

**A most humble request**

In recent years, under the pressure of aggravating circumstances, our situation has become much worse, accelerating the decline in our net worth and threatening our complete impoverishment. We therefore have sought to find an effective means to alleviate this situation. We, seeking advice and help, turned first to our local authorities and they were not inclined to help us. We then turned to the higher authority and asked that in our desperate situation, until our circumstances can be properly evaluated, that the unsettled crown land located in this district be given to us for use and that we be given a vote in the general elections. The higher authority and the sympathetic ministry, sent a memorandum, which expressly demands the safeguarding of us and our descendants', and consequently, in January of this year, each village sent two landless representatives and the Mayor's Office [*Schulzenamt*] was summoned to the District Office. By a large majority of the votes the proposal of the District Office to establish new villages with 32½ Dessiantine parcels was rejected, in favor of the proposal to distribute the unsettled land among all the landless. Because of the great importance of this, the Kirchenkonvent cannot have remained ignorant and will, we hope, have supported our work with its prayers. The High Ministry has left the choice of how to distribute land to the landless but the District Office, in contradiction, nevertheless is striding toward a settlement that favors 1/6 while 5/6 are robbed of their last hope and are abandoned to ruin and the bitterest misery. The Kirchenkonvent, cannot violate the duties placed on them by God and certainly can no longer remain inactive and quietly watch the downfall of their brothers. Additionally, our sad fate is an avoidable evil, and comes from some of our landowning brethren and the board elected by them.

We therefore ask the honorable members of the Kirchenkonvent as stewards to take care of us, as members of one body (1 Cor. 12:26) and members of God's household (1 Tim. 5:8), and as true believers, who according to James 2:15, not only say: "warm yourselves and be satisfied", but in fact help us and as spiritual fathers tell our board and the other landowning brethren, whose existence our grandfathers so insightfully provided for, that according to Gal. 6:10, we should do good to everyone, but especially to our fellow believers. It is a sin if one knows how to do good and does not do it, how much more so if one tries to prevent the good that could be done out of envy or other dishonest motives and tries to bring thousands of poor brothers and their families, who could be easily helped without harming others, to the beggars' bar and into the most bitter misery. Truly, there will be a merciless judgment on those who have not shown mercy when the Lord must judge between the fat and skinny sheep (Ezek. 34:20-22). Dear fathers and brothers in the Lord, whom the Lord has appointed as shepherds over His flock, we also belong to this flock, therefore let our distress and our future distress touch your hearts. Take care of us and help to ensure that no one suffers distress in the future, just as the apostles did.

Despairing of success because of so many unsuccessful attempts, we are looking forward with fear to the resolution of this request of ours, since in case of failure we would be forced to take the last resort and to present our misery to His Imperial Majesty, the beloved father of our country. This would, however, without our wanting it, be an accusation against our brethren, into whose hands the Lord and our benevolent government has partly placed our further fate, and they would stand there, not as disciples of our Savior Jesus Christ, who have love for one another, but as followers of Cain, who was wicked and strangled his brother (1 John 3:12) and also we would have to withdraw from such disorderly brothers who hate and seek to corrupt their own flesh and blood, which the Lord will prevent.

1865

The Undersigned

The foregoing request to the Kirchenkonvent failed, as one might assume in the present state of affairs. Eventually we heard that an Aeltester said: "We have no land to distribute here, only the distribution of the spiritual bread that we have and rely on.

The majority of the Aelteste, as it is proved in the second part of this article, were still under the influence of the District Mayor from the Barley and Church Disputes, which had ended shortly before. A large part of the merchants supported the interest of the landless with the following letter to H. v. Islawin:

### **Excellency!**

The undersigned merchants and landowners of the Molotschna Mennonite District dare to once again bring before Your Excellency the cause of the landless inhabitants of our villages. Until now we have been observing this matter, because we believed that the Agricultural Association, in accordance with its obligations, would consider the welfare of our colony, as well as the improvement of agriculture, trade, etc., and thus would be acting with prudence and expertise, as befits its position. Unfortunately, we have come to the conclusion that the present Agricultural Association neither knows our needs and has an unrealistic overview of the situation. It is unable to follow the original purposes of our settlements and the intentions of the High Government.

As a result, we allow ourselves the liberty to speak out on such a highly important matter where we would not otherwise intervene.

First, we must describe in what way the different estates in our colony correspond to their destiny of being model landlords, and how we see ourselves in the future. The landowning Mennonites are model farmers, because they have provided the evidence that it is possible to extract significantly more from the soil than is usually extracted from it in other steppe regions of Russia. In addition, they have improved their farms into a beautiful state, so that their buildings and facilities are not only equal to those of all other farmers in ornamentation and beauty, but significantly surpass them. The landless Anwohner are also model farmers, but in a completely different way. Since they are dependent on handicrafts and trades, they excel in useful inventions, especially of farming implements and tools for agriculture. With these they have not only provided for the colony and improved the method of agriculture, but also the surrounding area, as far as there has been a willingness to improve. The Mennonite wagons have already spread as far as Moscow and are proving to be very practical, as well as their farming implements, machines and mills are in great demand. Thus, the landless colonist is as useful a pattern in his part as the farmer. It can therefore only be a question of how these two estates

can be improved to promote mutual harmony. If we now look at their mutual rights, the sad conclusion is that the landless man has been completely wronged and that all his achievements, which are certainly just as great as those of the farmers, do not receive appropriate recognition and attention.

Because a farm of 65 Dessiantine land is to be a model farm, the buildings on it must be constructed according to prescribed requirements. Those who follow these requirements receive as a reward, free of charge, 65 Dessiantine. If the 65 Dessiantine are taken away from these buildings, they have completely lost their value, because the equity accrues to the landowner, rather than the renter. The landowner and the landless person are in completely different situations. If he wants to have shelter for himself and his family, he must first buy a half Dessiantine parcel for which he often has to pay over 100 Rubles. Then he must also build a house according to the prescribed requirements. If he is unable to do this, no matter how useful his work may be, no matter how meritorious he may be to the colony and the Russian fatherland, he remains unnoticed, unconsidered and unrewarded. But if a craftsman has finally built a house according to the requirements, he has to enclose his homestead with hedges and fences just like the farmer, he has to pay taxes like the farmer and share all the other obligations, moreover, he must annually pay the farmer significant rent for his half Dessiantine. He has to function as a farmer even though he has no land and is otherwise a model citizen. In earlier years, when the number of landless families was much lower and there was still more unsettled land at their disposal, the colony had risen to such a level of efficiency that at the time of the Crimean War it could render a recognized service to our Russian fatherland by provisioning it. Here, too, the Anwohner, like the farmer, had to join the ranks and, while not owning a square foot of land apart from his building site, had to send horses and wagons on distant journeys and maintain them there, while the fodder grain, usually 2 Rubles per Tschetwert, because of the war, the price had risen to 10 Ruble per Tschetwert. For the farmer who grows his own feed grain, or, who can buy it from the Hanseatic League, and who is able to maintain an abundance of draft cattle, these journeys were not a great effort. The situation was quite different for the Anwohner, who often had to harness his only horse and leave his family without a provider. The landless, therefore, found themselves doubly defenseless, first, because they had no voice, they had to put up with all the duties imposed on them by the village authorities, but also that their compensation bore no relation to that paid to the farmer. No landless person has ever dared to talk about it.

But how painful it must be for the landless to realize that even the District Mayors and the Agricultural Association regard and treat as seditious an effort to escape this state of lawlessness, which is only made as a result of the bitterest necessity.

The Landless Commission, as it has come to our knowledge, has given Your Excellency in a written treatise the reasons why it is impossible for poor colonial inhabitants to live without small scale farming in order to produce the vital food stuffs for themselves and their livestock. Because the landless do not own land, they have been forced to farm on leased land. Usually, such a poor landless person has to travel a distance until he finally locates a piece of land to cultivate. Sometimes, when the farmers had already sown as much land as they could, the landless man could rent as much unused land as he needed. But because everything depends on the timely sowing, i.e., on the use of the winter moisture, the farmer, who sometimes pays as much rent for one Dessiantine as the farmer for his 65 Dessiantine, falls far behind the farmer with his harvest in quantity and quality, which led the Agricultural Association to the assumption that nothing comes from the renter's agricultural efforts. In addition to this, the leased land can never be plowed or tilled in advance in the fall, which would also make the land more productive. In general, the land is not cultivated by tenants, because this would increase the next year's rent and the land might be in someone else's hands. By carefully cultivating their own small piece of land, those who are still landless would very soon convince the Agricultural Association that a renter's farm [*Anwohnerwirtschaft*] can also be a model farm in terms of yield. The allocation of a small land parcel of 10-15 Dessiantine to the Anwohner, significantly raises the craftsmen's status and makes him more efficient and is also the only means to lift him out of his present difficulties and hardships. It is in the interest of the landowners as well as of the landless themselves, but it is also in the interest of the merchant class. The principles of brotherhood among the Mennonites presuppose a general mutual responsibility. The landless get into increasingly more desperate situations every year, so that they were short of the most important material for their crafts and also the necessary necessities of life. They had no other means by which to procure them, so the merchants of the Molotschna Mennonite District gave them goods on account in the hope that they would be able to square accounts

if better times would come or their conditions would be mitigated so that they would receive their due. In this way, the Molotschna Mennonite merchants have an estimated claim of 200,000 Rubles against the landless. Some of the merchants, who out of philanthropy could not ignore the need of their brothers, have almost completely exhausted their resources, so that they will fail if the matter of the landless is decided in a disadvantageous way. It would be disadvantageous if all the available land in the district were to be sold without at least a small parcel of land being allocated to the homes of the landless. The credit of a destitute landless person has so far been based on the value of his buildings, for which there have been buyers up to now. If now the prospect of allotment of land to these buildings is removed, then these homes are completely worthless and would be worth less than the raw building material. It is self-evident that the guarantee of the merchant class will be taken away and that the merchant class will lose the most important part of its outstanding money. If one assumes that all landless people could be allowed to settle on 32½ Dessiatine immediately, a new loan would be necessary for the destitute people. But where could the landless find such a buyer, since if their houses are worthless and they would owe much more than they have? And if the landless received advances from any source, the merchants would not be able to let go of their claims, so as soon as an indebted settler owns a farm that finds buyers, they would go and collect his assets, and then he would be landless again. This is how things would turn out if all landless people were immediately allowed to settle. It is clear what the result would be if the land in the district were distributed among 400 families and the other thousands were left to live in devalued houses without means of subsistence. These 400 families have been designated by the villages to which they belong as being the neediest of the settlement. Of course, the neediest are already the most indebted. It is therefore to be expected that, if settlement takes place, many of the settlers will lose their land after a period of one or two years, during which they will work themselves deeper into debt, and then the program will not even be a help to the settlers, while the landless will be ruined and the merchants will lose large sums.

As we have heard, the Agricultural Association, the District Office and that part of the landowners who are opposed to the division of the village land, base their views on the conditions abroad, where there is a working class that has no prospect of ever getting out of its state of dependence and servitude. For this reason, it makes a suitable tool for the wealthy and is actually to be regarded as an unwilling resource in the hands of the rich.

The intention to produce such a condition here is diametrically opposed to the principles of brotherhood, since it offends the personal dignity of the human being. It is also overlooked that this very circumstance creates constant unrest abroad, and gives rise to thousands of families shaking the dust of their fatherland from their feet, withdrawing from it with their property and blood, and very soon being filled with contempt for their homeland. Abroad, these conditions are unavoidable, simply because there is insufficient room to accommodate the enormous overpopulation. Everywhere, efficient agriculture extracts as much as possible from the soil, but there is too little arable land to support the entire population, and so a part of it is abandoned to a hopeless existence. The situation is quite different in Russia, however, where the yield and the productive capacity of the soil have by no means reached their maximum and there can be no question of overpopulation on the whole. Therefore, if the deficiencies of foreign countries are adopted and introduced here, it is not only a violation of the overall interests of our people, but it is a violation of the interests of the Russian fatherland as a whole. Russia has enough land for the good living for its population and it has enough land for the enrichment of the same.

The disadvantage of treating the landless from this immoral point of view has already begun to make itself felt. As abroad, so here, too, many have begun to leave their homes and to scatter here and there. They have established taverns and other enterprises, in some cases very far from the colonies. As a result, they have not only been lost to our communities, because they no longer work to promote the common good, but they have also been lost to the state, because they have abandoned the purpose and goal of the government. They are no longer model citizens, but to some extent sinking into the cultural condition of the rest of the population because they are now left to their own devices and are completely without supervision, oversight and care. This, however, is a loss for the state, because it gives us our rights and liberties, so that we, on the other hand, are supposed to perform and benefit, while those who are left out cannot perform and benefit.

It can therefore only be in the interest of the colony, as well as of the High Government, to save the trade and craftsmen from a complete impoverishment by appropriate measures.

If an expansion by settlement, as we have shown above, is for the moment impractical, nevertheless the matter of the landless can be properly regulated for the future by allotting a land parcel of 10-15 Dessiantine to each Anwohner. This allotment would be impossible to implement if the width of the Chumack roads leading through the middle of the colonies from 750 fathoms to 70 or 110 fathoms in width cannot be included. It would therefore be desirable that this land, which in any case can find no better use, could also be used for this purpose. Through such an allocation of land, the buildings of the Anwohner would retain their value, thus the outstanding capital of the merchants would be secured and the landless would be enabled to rise and for later also to resettle, if the High Government would like to come to the aid of our descendants by graciously allocating a new piece of land for their further development.

The Undersigned

Among the landowners there were many who foresaw the ruin of a large part of the community with such an administration as it was carried out by Friesen and the Chairman Schmidt, and for this very reason several of them could not remain silent, but felt obliged speak out, in order to put an end to such a harmful administration, if possible, and submitted the following request to H. v. Islawin:

**Excellency!**

As pleasant as it was for us to read that Your Excellency wants to take care of all our public and private affairs with great patronization, so saddening it is for us that we have to approach Your Excellency about such a matter. For years we have felt with deep pain the wounds from which our body suffers and which have their root in the local colonial administration and from there on has had the most pernicious effect. A great deal has already been said to Your Excellency about the state of the treasury, the administration of justice and so many other administrative branches of this office, and refraining from bothering Your Excellency with new descriptions of this kind, our most humble request is only that the Honorable District Mayor David Friesen, as a man whose deeds have been so thoroughly substantiated and have had such serious consequences, should be punished.

We are afraid that the compromised situation in which the current District Mayor finds himself could drive him to desperate actions.

We find ourselves all the more compelled to make this request because we have just learned that H. Deputy District Mayor Dueck, on whom the public trust is based and from whom we hoped to supervise the actions of the District Office, has today taken his dismissal from the H. Inspector of the Colonies, Councillor Andre, and has already left for Rostov.

We, the undersigned, who are both members of the community living in the craft town and those present from various villages, have dared to present our request to Your Excellency because no other community lives in such close proximity and would be able to make known its fears and wishes in such a short time. If Your Excellency would not consider it too great a presumption, then only we would like to dare to propose men who, as we believe, possess the confidence of the trustworthy in remote villages and from whom Your Excellency, in consideration of the reasons stated in our request, would have the goodness to appoint a Deputy District Mayor until such time as the introduction of universal suffrage in remote villages, that man can be selected who, because he is called by all to this important office, will also represent the interest of all. The men to be proposed by us would be: N. N. N. N. <sup>a)</sup>

Following are the signatures.

Finally, two invectives were written about the landless in general, but especially about their representatives. As much as could be done in a hurry, they were signed by landowners and sent to His Excellency after his departure from Prischib to the village of Reichenfeld. Whether one could not complete these documents in time or whether one preferred that His Excellency was a little further away from Halbstadt when receiving them, cannot be known. They give the reader an understanding of the present attitude of the majority of the landowners and reads as follows:

a.) Apparently, naming the individuals would have been very sensitive when the book was published because many of those involved in this struggle would still have been alive.

First diatribe.

**Your Excellency,  
Member of the H. Council of the Ministry of Crown Lands,  
H. State Councillor and Knight, v. Islawin.**

**To the undersigned Mennonites most humbly**

**Presentation and request.**

As unpleasant as it is to appear as a witness against one's own brethren, it would be unconscionable to remain silent where malice, envy, and disregard for all order and legality play their game so brazenly, as has been the case for some time and especially in recent days among a certain part of the population of this area.

Apart from the legality and expediency of the distribution of the crown land still to be settled within this area, whether for the settlement of half farms, in accordance with the original legal provision, or whether for the distribution among the house owning Anwohner with unlawful rejection of all the Einwohner in the village without exception, on which question the authorized landowners from 9 villages of the local district have asked Your Excellency to decide. Excellency on the 20th of this month, we, the undersigned Mennonites, feel compelled by our conscience to draw your attention to the following facts:

- 1) that by far not all landless families of the Molotschna Mennonite area would agree with the declarations, claims and demands of their representatives, if they could all be asked for their opinion, and that basically there are only a few restless heads. In spite of the provisions of Section 38 of our Village Charter, they held meetings in private houses, suspected and denigrated our superiors, drafted letters of complaint and petition from the main instigators of this seditious movement, and consequently submitted them for signature, and thus proved most irrefutably that they are driven by the same spirit of licentiousness, disregard for all lawful order and the filthiest self-interest under the umbrella of charity, which elsewhere also calls into question peace, order and security;
- 2) that we must, with the most complete approval of our hearts and consciences, give our District Mayor David Friesen the well-deserved testimony that, always having in mind in the most impartial and unselfish manner has only had the best interests of all the inhabitants of the area. He has conducted his office in an exemplary manner for a number of years, and that this testimony of ours, if it were necessary and time permitted, would be quite reliably accepted by all order-loving, right-thinking and reputable inhabitants of this area as well as theirs.

- 3) that it would be highly desirable and appropriate to the importance of the matter if Your Excellency would demand impartial testimonies from the village communities concerned about the conduct and reputation of those persons in our region who have filed complaints and suspicions in general or against our District Mayor. Such testimonies would undoubtedly shed the necessary light on the value of the complaining persons as well as on their statements;
- 4) the leaders of the unruly party, after their return from Halbstadt and Prischib, having there to their heart's content showered Your Excellency with baseless letters of complaint and exercised all their wantonness, spread the almost unbelievable rumor that some persons had even submitted a petition to Your Excellency a petition in which they have asked for the dismissal of the District Mayor and for the confirmation of a certain Philipp Wiebe or Warkentin in his position, and from the jubilation with which they spread this nonsense, indeed from their own words, one can convince oneself that in their extravagance and disorderliness, they have really already come so far as to believe that Your Excellency himself will satisfy this request. Truly, if such a spirit of licentiousness and disorder were not or could not be countered by serious legal measures, it would certainly be impossible to determine where such unrestrained attitudes would finally lead.

Out of love for our brethren, and love even for the erring and harassing, we therefore feel compelled to most humbly ask Your Excellency to recommend to our Guardianship Committee the most appropriate and legal measures by which alone restless minds can be quieted, and lawful order, obedience, and good discipline be restored.

Following are the signatures.

Second diatribe.

**To Your Excellency, member of the Council of the Ministry of Crown Lands,  
State Councillor and Knight, v. Islawin,**

**The undersigned Mennonites of the Molotschna Mennonite District**

**most humble request**

Your Excellency will not deny us, the undersigned Mennonites of the Molotschna Mennonite District, a sympathetic hearing, in view of the movements and unrest, which have been caused by some.

We must admit with shame and deep displeasure that they belong to our Mennonite community. We feel compelled to express our feelings humbly before Your Excellency. It is generally known that the discontented, driven by the revolutionary spirit of our time, have assailed Your Excellency during his presence in our colony with petitions, accusations, complaints and slander, which are directed first of all against the district superiors elected from among us and confirmed by high authorities, but especially against H. District Mayor David Friesen.

Without being more familiar with the literal content of these complaints and accusations, we feel it urgently necessary and in the interest of justice, to confront this disturbing and malicious activity and, in order not to be misjudged because of our prolonged silence, to inform Your Excellency, that we and many of our brethren, who because of the shortness of time cannot sign, are not only completely alien to all these disgraceful activities, which threaten to bring our people into disrepute with the Colonial Board [*Kolonialvorstande* \*]), but rather believe that there are many reasons to express our deep thanks to our District Office in general for its faithful and poorly rewarded administration of our community affairs, as well as especially to H. District Mayor David Friesen for his long 17 years of service to the colony. We only wish and most humbly ask Your Excellency to be the interpreter of these wishes and feelings of ours and under the protection of our high and highest authorities, to live in peace and quiet our Christian and governmental profession for the sake of the rights and privileges bestowed upon us by the Most High [*Emperor*], and to see our Colonial Board use the full power bestowed upon it, so that, if necessary, even the restless and disorderly may be severely reprimanded to restore peace and order.

August 1865

The Undersigned

Notwithstanding that His Excellency supports the project of the Landless Commission as well as the later proof that the landless are secured in their existence by the proposed land allotment, as well as the endorsement of this matter by the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent and the merchants,

\*) Not the work of the landless, but the desperate struggle of the landowners against a secure existence of the large mass of landless families, brought us into disrepute and from these vituperative writings it will have become quite clear to His Excellency how necessary it was to remove Friesen from office.

and regardless of the fact that His Excellency's found the municipal accounts were in the great disarray, he still did not seem to see clearly, and only in this confusion was it possible to draft the requested documents and hand them over to His Excellency.

How this whole matter was perceived by H. v. Islawin can best be seen from the consequences of the investigation. Not only was the District Mayor Friesen completely removed from his office, but also the H. Inspector of the Colonies and the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee were replaced by others.

Since, however, a smaller land allotment than 65 Dessiantine to the family was not permitted by law, the project of the Landless Commission, after it had been arranged in the Ministry, was submitted by the H. Minister of His Majesty to the Lord and Emperor for decision and confirmation, and as a result the Molotschna Mennonite District Office received the following regulation:

### **By the Most High Order**

As a result of the correspondence concerning the settlement of the lands in stock in the Molotschna Mennonite District of the Taurida Governorate, His Excellency the Minister of Crown Lands informed the Guardianship Committee on March 4, sub No. 23, as follows:

To the Mennonites settled in New Russia, the land is allotted to each family with observance of the inheritance law issued in 1764 especially for the foreigners, by virtue of which the settled lands pass from the father to the youngest son and must remain indivisibly and permanently under one landlord.

In said colonies, on the basis of §§ 20 and 28 of Volume XII, Part II, the community councils are made up by the landowners of each farm and only those colonists who have their own independent farms can be elected to community service.

These rules led to the formation of two classes in each colonist community in South Russia, landlords, in whose hands is the exclusive administration of the land and the community self-government, and landless, under the names of Anwohner and Einwohner, whose number exceeds the number of landlords and, not having a sufficient quantity of land, have to earn their living by crafts, trades and labor.

Realizing the necessity of taking measures to organize the largest possible number of landless people, and having previously reviewed these issues, I proceeded from the approach adopted

in the Ministry with a very brief presentation to the Lord and Emperor, in which I state my opinion:

- 1) to hand over the lands located in the Molotschna Mennonite District, about 16,000 Dessiantine \*) to the landless families for equal distribution;
- 2) to give preference to such distribution to the Anwohner and that the owners of half and more fragmented farm properties generally presently in the colonies shall be admitted to all community affairs according to timely and legal principles;
- 3) to determine to whom the Anwohner land shall be apportioned, a temporary commission shall be established, consisting of the local board [*Vorstande*] and of representatives of landowners and landless persons; and
- 4) to leave the determination of the rules concerning the manner of use of the land to those families to whom the land has been allocated.

Upon this most humble presentation, the Lord and Emperor, on the 14th day of the month of February of this year, has been pleased to order that the said rules be handed over to the Colony Board [*Kolonialvorstande*] for execution.

In execution of this Most High Order, I instruct the Guardianship Committee, by sending the relevant execution of a copy of the journal of the aforementioned Commission of the 3rd of February past, to take the indications made in the journal as the guideline in the execution of this Most High Order and settlement in general of the land still located in the colonies. In the journal of February 3 of the commission specially established at the Ministry, careful evaluation of the arguments presented by the landless and the landlords with respect to the rules for the use of the free lands found:

- 1) That if unused the lands in the district of villages were divided into 32½ Dessiantine parcels, 320 of the Anwohner would be provided for, from a total of 1068, while the other 748 Anwohner would suffer a visible and complete ruin;
- 2) that an Anwohner in possession of 12 Dessiantine land with the help of a craft or trade would form a self-sufficient farm and his household would be completely secured, and
- 3) that it is more just and beneficial to the whole colonist community to have a larger number of families, even if with a smaller piece of land,

\*) Here not all the land was yet in account.

than to satisfy a smaller number with larger pieces to the detriment and ruin of the others, and therefore recognized the necessity to amend the decision contained in the regulations issued to the Guardianship Committee under June 10, 1864, sub No.13651, concerning the settlement of the free lands in the Molotschna Mennonite and other districts (the Molotschna Mennonite District Office was informed of the Ministry's decision on this matter on February 27, 1865, sub. 1211) and to transfer these lands for the general use of the landless of this district according to the following rules:

- 1) From the lands located at the Molotschna Mennonite District shall be:
  - a) the unsettled crown land and communal shepherd's land, as well as the land of 3000 Dessiantine divided in 1824 according to the established conditions of the Halbstadt cloth factory, shall be taken for equal distribution among the landless in case it is proved after the present investigation that the factory has ceased its activity and has not kept the conditions set with regard to the land, and
  - b) the lands found to be unusable, which are to be divided among the old villages, shall remain with each colony for common cattle grazing;
- 2) the preference to this division is generally given to the Anwohner, but this right cannot be enjoyed by the following residents:
  - a) those who have previously sold their farms, live on pensions and live in houses bought or built by themselves, and
  - b) those who had a farm, but had to give it up because of laziness, negligence and weariness;
- 3) to determine to whom of the Anwohner land shall be allotted according to the main rule stated in the foregoing points, a temporary commission shall be established under the guidance of the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, the local inspector of the colonies, or the chief magistrate, to which commission from both classes, the landlords and the landless, shall be elect two representatives;
- 4) this commission, after a very precise examination of the lands to be subdivided, shall determine the number of families that can use the subdivided land in each village of the district, according to a proportional calculation, and accordingly it shall determine the subdivision in each village among the qualifying families;

- 5) the commission named in the 3rd and 4th points decides the matters presented to it as a body according to the common majority of votes, and complaints about its decisions must be presented to the chairman of this commission within 14 days after the announcement of the decision to the municipality, who is obliged to present the original complaints to the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee within 7 days, who finally decides the same;
- 6) the Anwohner who have a permanent residence, as well as all owners of half and more divided farms with the consent or approval of the municipalities, as independent and fully entitled landlords, must immediately be admitted to participate in all municipal assemblies according to §§ 20 and 28 of the existing laws, Colonial Constitution Vol. XII. Part II. 1857 edition.
- 7) The determination of the rules concerning the use of the land shall be left to the inspection and consent of the families to whom the land has been allocated.

Notifying the Molotschna Mennonite District Office of this determination of the special commission established at the Ministry and the Supreme Order issued thereupon, the Guardianship Committee prescribes, after the publication of the determination of the special commission and the Most High Order to all the communities subordinate to it of both landlords and landless, are to elect two representatives from each category to form a temporary commission under the chairmanship of the District Mayor. Inspector Hoffmann will personally supervise the regular business and proceed to immediately execute the Supreme Command on the basis of the rules laid down by the commission specially established at the Ministry, but the deadline for the completion of this matter shall be no longer than July 15 of this year. The Committee finds it necessary to indicate to the District Office that it is necessary first discuss the question of who among the Anwohner qualifies to receive land, how many pieces of land belong to each village, counting the numbers of Anwohner with less than 12 Dessiantine and then a plan to distribute the land among them.

If the number of Anwohner, which according to the determination of the commission are eligible to receive land, is more in any village than there are 12 Dessiantine parcels to be distributed to the Anwohner, then in such case, in the opinion of the committee, the right to land allotment must be decided by lot. The District Office is obliged to submit a report

of this whole matter to the Guardianship Committee.

April 7, 1866  
No. 2779

Member of the committee: **Karaisha**  
Secretary: **Shadanov**.  
Deputy Table Chairman: **Williamsen**  
Right Secretary: **Martens**

According to this regulation of the Guardianship Committee, a commission was elected by farmers and landless persons, and this commission, under the direction of H. Inspector Hoffmann, the available land was distributed to the landless families owning houses. This distribution, however, was only a provisional one, the final allocation could only take place in 1869, after, with the permission of the Ministry, a reconfiguration of the Chumak transport routes could be included.

According to the data of the District Office, before the land allotment there were 1063 improved Anwohnerstellen, but when it was realized who was entitled to land in the allotment, by 1869 many more small parcels had been improved, so that in the final allotment with inclusion of the craftsmen's sites, there were 1563 house owning families, each with 12 Dessiantine arable land and access to the cattle pasture counted. See the following act:

#### **To the Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers**

The Commission for the Distribution of Lands in the District, in conjunction with the Board of Administration, in sub No.127, presents the map prepared, with the exception of the land to be distributed in special subdivisions. Since this joint report only deals briefly with the business side of the land allotment, i.e., the distribution of the lands in defined parcels for the benefit of the mass of the Anwohner and small farms [*Kleinwirten*], without taking into consideration the various questions that arose after the provisional distribution of the land in 1866 about the relation of privileges and duties between the two usufructuary landlords, the full and half farms of the original allocation of 65 Dessantine in the Village Plan and the small landlords with the subsequent allocation outside the Village Plan distribution of 1866, and the small farms in the subsequent allocation outside the Village Plan. A special commission was set up in 1868 to mediate between both types of beneficiary owners which didn't result in agreement because of unlawful political activity and economic separation dividing the villages into two camps, a community within a community.

Now that a settlement of the landless issue can be brought to a definite conclusion, we feel compelled, to express our opinion regarding the supplement to the sub No.127 Report, as to what should be included in the final settlement of the grievances within the district, not only for the small farmers, but in general for the welfare of the whole area.

With the allocation of land to the small farmers outside the Village Plan and not in their village communities, and would live among the full and half farmers and where the latter have common communal property in their Village Plan, two contradictory principles of usufruct and entitlement to the common property are established. There is personal and the communal, common usufruct, which separates the usufructuary small farmers into a different and disadvantaged group compared to the usufructuary full and half farms. Both of them are members of a village community and even though they are entitled to the common property according to different but specific regulations, they still are separated because of their unequal enjoyment of the common property, even though both parts of the village community have equal rights under the law, both politically and economically, and equal duties towards the community, the district and the state. With this relationship to each other, both equal in number, the small farmers and the full and half farmers cannot constitute a unified village community with its common rights and duties, but a unified village community in name only. A means of connecting and merging both communities into one must be implemented, which would make the full farm and half farm interests common and their duties and benefits equal, so that both stand on equal footing.





In the affairs of the village, it is not permissible that, in the case of equal rights and duties, as is provided for in § 159 of the Colonial Constitution, that colonial land should come into personal possession of anyone in the community, but remain as community property, and so the allotment made for the small farmers cannot constitute an exclusive land parcel independent of the rest of the communal property, but must, in order to keep the village community together with its implied communal duties and rights, also be added to the rest of the communal common property. Both allotments, the former original and the present one, come in parcel-wise and common usufruct for all three categories, the full, half and quarter farms. If both communities, the small farms and the full farms, remain in their present politically and economically separate position, there is no telling into what contentious entanglements the whole society may fall, with harmful consequences, apart from the present turmoil and disagreements, which until then still only bear the character of partisan discord and have their origin and support in the conservative views of the hitherto exclusively entitled and privileged full-scale farmers.

The owners of full and half farms oppose the real merging of mutual interests with the small farms, saying that their rights will be violated and that they will have to accept a proportionate share in all the subsequent allotments and grant them again a share corresponding to the allotment norm for the small farms in the original village rights, if the quantitative norm, both for the full and half farms, as well as for the small farms, is not to be reduced for the former and not to be increased for the latter. Of course, they are speaking against their own conviction and experience, and they know very well that any isolated part of the community, be it a part of the small and full farms full of the remaining part of the small and full farms, who assume a separate economic position to the whole, will not reach a normal state as long as the mutual village community interests are separated. Even the full farms of some villages have made the experience that even with one and the same allotment, as in the case of the full farms, as with the farms settled on 65 Dessiantine, could attain the economic and communal position to each other only by making their interests to the common property of the country, to common among themselves,

The well-known hostile attitude of the farmers toward resolving the landless situation in the district, as well as supply additional land for growing young families, is not based on any principle or conviction, but the result of antipathy and aversion to the many landless people. It is gratifying that gradually some landlords are becoming convinced of the necessity and the nature of the settlement of this state of affairs through the merging of interests, but such landlords are very rare.

Firmly convinced that the High Government will consider the separate position of the two categories and cannot admit that the existing division in the village communities will be decided for the future and that the subsequent land allotment will not be made to the small farmers, but to the village communities in the sense of article 159 of the Colonial Constitution and will be on this fixed basis for community life and according to it all now disputed questions about cattle grazing, burdens, payments, benefits etc. can be settled. We, the undersigned, the members of the Molotschna Mennonite District Office and the Commission for the Distribution of Lands, hereby submit the following information for their deliberate consideration and further disposal:

- 1) In determining those families who, apart from those already recognized as entitled to land in 1866, are still entitled to share in the use of the land available in the district, it has been taken into consideration that the land entitlement for the families has been determined exactly according to the regulation of the Guardianship Committee of April 7, 1866 sub No. 2779. There are 297 such families in the district, including the craftsmen's village of Neuhalbstadt, which are recognized as entitled to land and, together with the 1266 small farms already present, make up a total of 1563 small farm families;
- 2) in order to increase the quantity of land, which was granted to each colony for use by earlier allotment, as far as an expedient distribution of the lands allotted to the district by the Chumak Roads was not possible on its own, all lands in the district allotted to the small landlords for provisional use in 1866, consisting of 15,068 Dess. 517 Faden, as well as the land quantity of 5455 Dessiantine 1914 Faden made available to the district after the Chumak Roads was narrowed, and as a result of this enlargement

of the quantity of land given to each colony for use, each of the 1563 small farmers mentioned in the first point, where he has cultivated, will receive a share of this enlarged common property, namely 16 Dessiantine calculated for each small farmer, after which 1357 Dessiantine, 515 fathoms of the quantity of land used for this purpose in a place unsuitable for distribution will provisionally remain for lease;

3) of the lands mentioned in the previous point, as shown in the following projected plan, is allocated to each village in the closest possible proximity, to the extent required by the increase of each village by the small landlords incorporated in it, whereby it was taken into account that no village was allocated the land still lacking in terms of the closest possible proximity, at the expense or to the detriment of other villages. The following overview, which corresponds to the projected plan (see pages 72 and 73), provides proof:

- a) How many full, half and small farmers are in each village.
- b) How much land each village covers after the incorporation of the small farms involved.
- c) How much land each village had in use after previous allotment.
- d) How much land each village after incorporation of the small farms to be allocated, and
- e) at what distance from each sub No.2779 village is the newly allocated land.

Halbstadt, Deputy District Mayors: **Isaak Fast, Heinrich Wiebe**  
 December 4, 1869 Commissioners: **Franz Isaac, Jakob Wiebe**

The plat made by the land surveyor was presented to the government and confirmed by the ministry and the following regulation was given about the way of using this allocated land:

**The Ministry of Crown Lands**  
**To the President of The Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers**  
**Department**  
**The General Affairs Colonial Department, 1st Table**

February 13, 1870  
 No. 1349

After submitting the presentation of February 1 to the Minister concerning the distribution of land among the landless population of the Molotschna Mennonite District, about 6000 Dessiantine which have been released from the Chumak Roads leading through the district,

Your Excellency has decided to take as a starting point the reasons stated in your presentation, which result from the exact assessment of the local conditions, when preparing the proposals to be expected from the Guardianship Committee concerning the use to be given to the designated lands, and namely:

- 1) first of all, the land from the Chumak Roads, of about 6000 Dessiantine must be allocated, whenever possible, to the landless living near these parcels. This land must be incorporated into the community plans of the respective villages, on the same basis of those 12 Dessiantine allotments, made in 1866 to 1301 families of Anwohner and landless;
- 2) after such transactions have been made, the twelve-Dessiantine allotments must be considered as final and as properly incorporated into the land records of those villages in which the families have taken up permanent residence and used such an allotment. These families retain their buildings and living places as before. They are able to participate in the common cattle pasture, the order of use of the allotment and also the measure of the participation in the cattle pasture are determined according to the community decision of the village assembly on the existing basis. In this way, the farms with a 12 Dessiantine land allotment in each individual village must be included in the common economic system, and the inconveniences in the economic processing of the Anwohner allotment, in some cases due to the distance between them and the villages, or separated by intermediate land parcels, fall on the whole village community and not only on the individual Anwohner. Consequently, the result is: full, half and quarter farms (12 Dessiantine of farm land, the building site and the cattle pasture) which are completely equal among themselves in terms of the benefits of agricultural processing of their farm plots, i.e., the difference in the allocation among the individual farms remains only quantitative, while it is now also qualitative, thus making the uniformity in the imposition of taxes, etc. more difficult. And so, at the same time, gradually, the present hostilities and unilateral aspirations of the landed class will disappear by themselves;
- 3) all the land of the Chumak Roads, about 6000 Dessiantine, after the aforesaid exchange, will be converted into permanent income producing properties within the limits that it will then have, with the obligation on the part of the district municipality; a) to pay to the government the required land tax for it, and b) to pay the surplus revenue together with the municipal tax already established by the municipalities of Molotschna.

50 Kop, per Dessiantine and to 50 Kopek from the able-bodied soul to the purchase of lands abroad, to use for the settlement on the same of the landless population, with the right to sell these lands as legal property.

The decision of the H. Minister the Department of General Affairs, in response to the presentation of February 1, is given for implementation.

Director: **Baron v. Medem**

Section Head: **Klaus**

**Guardianship Committee**

No. 3136.

Section 1

**Office**

Table 1

Dated, March 20, 1870

**To the residents of Halbstadt,  
the Molotschna Mennonite District**

**and the Agricultural Association**

Enclosed is a copy of a regulation of the Department of General Affairs of the Imperial Domain Ministry of February 13, sub No. 1349, concerning the distribution of land among the landless population of the Molotschna Mennonite Region, which has been vacated from the Chumak Roads, the Guardianship Committee writes to the Halbstadt District Office in association with the Agricultural Association in this District and the Commission for the Distribution of Land in the Molotschna Mennonite District (the latter having been sent the relevant regulations on this matter at the same time). This details the Ministry's instructions concerning the distribution of the approximately 6,000 Dessiantine of land among the landless population of the Molotschna Mennonite District vacated by the Chumak Roads which pass through the district. The next step is to draw up proposals concerning the alignment of this vacated land and the possible complete incorporation, within each village's boundaries, with the common land owned by the villages concerned of those twelve-Dessiantine allotments which were given in 1866 to 1301 families of Anwohner and the landless. Beyond that, to proceed to draw up proposals within those boundaries, after the transfers in question, to form permanent leaseholds. This task must be completed in the shortest possible time and no later than the end of April of this year, at which time the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee intends to appear in person at the Molotschna Mennonite villages for the purpose of reviewing the same. The colonial surveyor Feodorovich will be detached to take part in the tasks related to this matter.

In the meantime, so that the land does not remain without income from the Chumak Roads until the final confirmation of the proposals of the Ministry of Crown Lands in regard to the distribution and exchange of the same, the Guardianship Committee prescribes to the Halbstadt District Office, together with both the Agricultural Association, the Commission for the Distribution of Land and the Gnadenfeld District Office, to decree that this land be leased out for the current year by means of an auction, after a preliminary list of conditions and a general publication about it, either to one person or in suitable pieces, and then to report to the Committee about what has been done.

The fees received from the Chumak Roads land for cattle grazing, shall be incorporated into the fund intended for the purchase of land for landless people of the Molotschna Mennonite area. The District Offices and commissions are to be immediately notified, and they are to report weekly to the committee on the progress of this matter, i.e., the purchase of the land.

**Karajcha,  
Shadanov,  
Chainavsty**

The above-mentioned order of the H. Minister, namely that this land allotment should not belong exclusively to the Anwohner, but to the whole village community, and that full and quarter farmers should all take a proportionate share of it, has not yet been carried out, and this failure to observe the Minister's order is the cause of differences that still occur between full and quarter farmers, e.g. because of cattle grazing; because the interests of both classes are not merged, but more or less separated. As disadvantageous as this disregard may be in some villages, the very important point has been reached that the equity which the former landless Anwohner built up in their houses can now be made liquid at any time, because the quarter farms have their value, whereas these buildings would have become worthless if the land had not been allotted, and what the District Mayor Friesen was striving for would have been fulfilled to a great extent, namely to make the landless subservient to the landowners, so that they would have continued access to a pool of inexpensive laborers.

This land allocation to the landless families had already helped many but there were still many landless families who were not eligible for land allocation

and these families are increasing every year. While this allocation was still in progress, the Landless Commission had already drafted a preliminary project on how and in what way to take care of the growing families by purchasing land. In the beginning, many people stood by this matter just as they had stood by the distribution of the last available land, but more and more people came to understand that they were legally obligated to provide for the landless, and this matter was more seriously considered and finally tackled, for which purpose the leasehold article of about 6,000 Dessiantine that remained in the land allotment with the approval of the High Government yielded very significant sums.

Lands which were purchased:

In 1871 Sagradovka (Kherson governorate) was purchased, containing 21,276  $\frac{2}{3}$  Dessiantine @ 23 Rubles 50 Kopek per Dessiantine, which makes 500,003 Rubles in total. On this land 17 villages were established.

In 1884 Memrik (Ekaterinoslav governorate) was purchased, containing 12,000 Dessiantine @ 52 Rubles 50 Kopek per Dessiantine which makes 630,000 Rubles in total. On this land 10 villages were established, 63 full farms at 60 Dessiantine and 240 half farms at 30 Dessiantine.

In 1891 in Samara governorate, Busuluk district, a parcel of 16,388 Dessiantine @ 32 Rubles per Dessiantine and a parcel of 4,000 Dessiantine @ 30 Rubles per Dessiantine (totaling 20,388 Dessiantine) was purchased for 664,416 Rubles. On it 12 villages were established.

In 1895 in Orenburg governorate a 12,000 Dessiantine parcel of land @ 32 Rubles 50 Kopek per Dessiantine was purchased for a total of 390,000 Rubles.

In total the Molotschna Mennonites have so far (1899) purchased 65,664  $\frac{3}{4}$  Dessiantine of land for 2,184,419 Rubles. In addition, many families are settled in the Crimea and in the Ekaterinoslav Governorate.

Those who are not able to look far back and see the present supply of the landless can hardly understand how this matter, which is so self-evident, could once (in the sixties) evoke such a great struggle, but if we continue our efforts to get to know the cause of this struggle, it consisted, on the one hand, in complete ignorance of the laws, and on the other hand, in well-planned

and well-calculated dishonest intentions. Whoever in earlier years, before this land matter was even brought into being, had taken over a share of land for settlement and use, believed that the 65 Dessiantine assigned by the government were his property. This opinion, even if there were individual exceptions, was generally perpetuated, so that no thought was given to that buying a farm could also be connected with some kind of obligation to later provide for such families who did not own any land. This, of course, was a mistake, because according to the law the land was not someone's personal property, but common property, i.e., everyone without exception had an equal right to it. That this was the law was generally known too little or not at all, and the colonial authorities had perhaps not sufficiently educated the colonists to the obligation they assumed relative to the landless, when they bought land, if it became necessary to provide for them. As long as the need for further provisioning did not exist, this error did not, on the whole, have any harmful effect until the need for further family provisioning arose. This error had a more pernicious effect, because since the beginning of the sixties, when one began to work for the provisioning of the landless, it was not recognized as an error by the local authorities, but was strengthened and brought up as a full right.

The landless, of course, were caught in the same error, they wanted to be helped, but they were unaware that they had a legal right to such help, just as the landowners did not know their obligation. But it is not difficult to understand that they were the first to break free of this error, because they soon learned to understand that their very existence was endangered by it. When these circumstances became clear to the landless, they began to act seriously, namely by legal means, and if the landowners had only resisted the purchase of the land, which could have impacted with their wallets, they could still be excused to a certain extent, because they believed to be completely in the right with their opinion that the 65 Dessiantine in use were really their property; but that they opposed the landless, when they demanded the land lying outside of the 65 Dessiantine, which was not justified.

The fact that the people, who sided with the landowners and got involved in such a serious struggle can hardly be excused, for they thought that no one would dare to rebel against it. But it must be taken into account that they were taught and guided in this way, and instead of instructing them about their erroneous conception of the facts, they were encouraged in it, because even the District Mayor was leading the fight on this side. In addition, the self-interest is still quite strong, one allows oneself to use, in addition to his 65 Dessiantine, the land that was surplus in the village plans \*) and one allows oneself to use the income from the still unsettled lands only for the benefit of the landowners, even if a part of it was already beyond any control. And how advantageous it must have seemed if  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the population were designated as a working class and the preferred third could have received a steady supply of workers as a result. This was what the District Mayor wanted, what he tried to enforce with all the means at his disposal, and this was approved of by so many, and some believed that they were completely in the right in their participation, because they did not understand that a landless person had any rights. The caste system was almost completed.

The former chairman of the Agricultural Association, Philipp Wiebe, lived quietly in his seclusion, but just as he had kept the welfare of the community in mind during his service in office, so it was also close to his heart now to do everything possible for it. Nothing escaped his notice. He kept his watchful eye on everything that was going on, and he had long since realized that something had to be done for the safe survival of the whole. He saw that if a large part of our people were not to be totally ruined and the whole weakened by such ruin, serious, thorough help would be necessary. For if, as the District Mayor wanted,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the whole had been abandoned to ruin, the government would have demanded that the landowners restore this part, and that would then have been a difficult task, whereas now, when there was still land available, the solution was much easier, because more than 1500 families could be satisfied and secured in their existence at one stroke, without cost, and the equity processed in the houses could still be secured for them.

\*) Alexanderwohl, for example, was able to satisfy 26 small farmers with the surplus land in the Village Plan.

The land allotment to the already incorporated families was therefore as much in the interest of the landowners as to the landless.

The whole effort around this land allotment was Wiebe's work, as he was an instrument in the hand of Him who directs the hearts of the people like the water streams, so the Landless Commission was an instrument in his hand. He paved the way for the Commission, which found no support from the local authorities, and gave the greatest possible resistance. The commissioner sent by the Minister to investigate the situation of the landless was H. State Councillor v. Islawin. The Commission appeared before him with its request and its land distribution proposal, and all the counter-work of the District Mayor bounced off Wiebe's proposals and clarifications like the storm-beaten waves of the sea off an immovable rock.

This fight of the landowners against the landless, or as one can also rightly say, of the District Mayor against Wiebe, became a desperate one, when Friesen already knew that His Excellency had taken the submissions of the Landless Commission so benevolently and still dared to take this desperate step, namely to have the two diatribes drawn up and signed by as many landowners as possible and sent to State Councillor. In these diatribes, the requests of the landless and their representatives are called revolutionary activities, but the State Councillor accepted the proposal of the commissioners and yet demanded thorough proofs that according to this proposal the existence of the landless would be secured. It is also said in the diatribes that the leaders of the unruly party have inundated State Councillor with baseless letters of complaint, while the Commission has only submitted a petition explaining the facts, the land distribution project and the proof or justification of the expediency of the proposal was submitted to the State Councillor. The landless individuals have submitted nothing but relied on their representatives. This cause was supported only by the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Kirchenkonvent and by several merchants. In the vituperative writings, one requests that power be given to the District Office and the Guardianship Committee to punish these rebels by law. His Excellency understands the landless situation completely, and instead of the requested power, the District Mayor is cashiered. One finds it unpleasant to have to appear as a witness against one's brothers, but silence is unconscionable

and further it says, it must be admitted with shame and deep displeasure that these rebels still belong to the Mennonite Association, but Your Excellency decrees that the petitions of these troublemakers, whose membership in the Mennonite Association one must be ashamed of, be submitted by the latter to Your High Excellency, the H. Minister, for the most gracious consideration and attention.

What lies in the words of these taunters but that His Excellency in His blindness did not recognize what was right, that he was not able to distinguish the distressed, those whose existence was endangered from troublemakers. As if only they, the taunters, were still capable of recognizing what was right, and that the government had sent a man to investigate the conditions of the Molotschna Mennonites, who was not up to his mission, but blindly lent his ear to troublemakers? The man whom one knew so well in the Ministry, who was himself a corresponding member of the Committee of Scholars of the Ministry of Crown Lands, who possessed the confidence of the Government that, since he was in favor of the distribution of land, the latter could not doubt the expediency of this distribution. This man was called in the vituperative writings "a certain Philipp Wiebe", as if hardly anyone at Molotschna knew of his existence. How it must have been sufficiently clear to His Excellency, from this one expression, how childlike the minds these petitioners were. Here it is quite clear that a bad will is always mixed with a good portion of ignorance, so that one presents oneself as what one is.

The Molotschna Mennonites believed themselves to be the first among the foreign colonists, and perhaps in the time of Cornies they were in some respects, e.g., in good buildings, in regular installations of colonies, plantings, elevation of education; but if we look back at the treatment of the landless at that time or at the position of the landowners and the present District Mayor and the Chairman of the Agricultural Association, which they took for the care of this class, the Molotschna Mennonites stood last in line, because there was never such a fight anywhere among other colonists with regard to the care of the landless, as just among the Molotschna Mennonites. But it could hardly be otherwise under a 17-year administration of the colonies, as it was carried on by Friesen, for one is more easily misled than led on the right paths.

If we once again refer to the effectiveness of the former chairman, Wiebe.

The public work of this man and the work of his father-in-law Cornies were not different. Though both had their weaknesses, they had one and the same goal in mind, the good of the whole. However, it was Wiebe's task, in his seclusion, to give the whole work, the eventual reallocation of the land once assigned to the Molotschna Mennonites, an achievement of lasting significance. For never has a work been carried out among the Mennonites at Molotschna, which has been of such general beneficial consequences for the civil and economic existence of the whole brotherhood, as this land allotment and the so closely connected provision of the distant family growth by land purchase. Wiebe clearly recognized that through the distribution of the still available land, help could only be provided for the present and that something had to be initiated for the future, and in this he also supported the commission with his fatherly advice, because it was important to him that in the expansion of a project, that in the purchase of land and the transfer of it to landless families, both the mother community would remain unharmed in its existence and the recipients of such land would be secured in their existence as far as possible.

Even if the project, which had been worked out by the Commission for the purpose of the land purchase, was still subject to additions or changes in some respects, the matter had been initiated and found increase acceptance, and this all the more easily, since the local authorities were now being taught better and the supply of land to the landless was also being seriously supported by the Guardianship Committee. More and more people came to the conclusion that this was the proper path and that the purchase of new land had to be taken seriously.

In this fight against a secure existence of the largest part of the Molotschna Mennonites, which had a shameful outcome for those fighting against this proposal, the already strongly rooted caste spirit was cut off at the ankles, but the government had to intervene, and because it was a matter of the greatest importance for our people, of their secure existence, even the High and Highest Government. By the Supreme Decision, all resistance was broken, the old prejudices and errors made way for a correct! One would have had every reason to erect a monument to the victory, the greatest victory ever achieved among the Molotschna Mennonites in the civil and economic spheres,

an Eben-Ezer, and even if this did not happen publicly, it will have found a lasting place in many hearts and many a person probably joined in Samuel's words:

**Up to this point the Lord has helped!**

If we now look around us decades later, we no longer see such urging, for the cause has been lifted. The mother community, even if it cannot correct all the troubles connected with a resettlement, knows its obligation, buys land for the children, for the growing families, it has become better in this area and even if it was a difficult course of development, the fruit of it is the general welfare. Few recognized the source from which the effectiveness for the general welfare flowed, but it flowed all the more abundantly and poured into a brook that has made the whole so fertilized and fruitful that it now bears the most gratifying fruits, the supply of land to the landless.

When you, beloved reader, visit the grave of the unforgettable man in the forest near the Jaschanlee suburb, the man who was so instrumental in the momentous development of the Molotschna Mennonites, then dedicate a moment of silent remembrance to the deceased. Remember him, for his merit is great. But no sooner had his effectiveness ended than his earthly shell sank into the grave. Peace to his ashes!

The District Mayors were elected:

1804: Klaas Wiens, Altona, founder of Steinbach,  
 1806: Johann Klassen, Rosenort, founder of the cloth factory in Halbstadt,  
 July 1, 1809: Gerhard Reimer, Ohrloff,  
 July 1, 1812: Johann Klassen, Rosenort,  
 July 1, 1815: Peter Toews, Ladekopp,  
 Jan. 1, 1821: Gerhard Enns, Altona,  
 Jan. 1, 1824: Johann Klassen, Ohrloff,  
 Jan. 1, 1827: Johann Klassen, Tiegerweide,  
 Sep 19, 1833: Johann Regier, Schönsee,  
 Sep. 2, 1842: Abraham Toews, Tiege,  
 Sep. 1848: David Friesen, Halbstadt,  
 Sep. 1865: Franz Dueck, Blumenort,  
 Mar. 1867: Abraham Driedger, Halbstadt,  
 Nov. 1868: Kornelius Toews, Tiege,  
 Nov. 1873: Abraham Wiebe, Lichtenau,  
 Mar 1879: Peter Dueck, Halbstadt,  
 Feb. 1889: Klaas Enns, Fabrikerwiese,  
 March 1885: Johann Enns, Ohrloff,  
 July 1889: Klaas Enns, Fabrikerwiese,  
 Oct. 1889: Peter Neufeld, Liebenau,  
 1899: Franz Nickel, Münsterberg.

In the spring of 1870, a second Volost was established by the Guardianship Committee in Gnadenfeld.

The District Mayors of this Volost:

May 15, 1870 - May 1, 1871: Wilhelm Ewert, Grossweide,  
 May 1, 1871 - Sept. 1, 1871: Franz Penner, Prangenu (Deputy),  
 Sep. 1, 1871 - Feb. 1, 1876: Peter Ewert, Rudnerweide,  
 Feb. 1, 1876 - Mar. 1, 1877: Gerhard Fast, Rudnerweide (Deputy),  
 Mar. 1, 1877 - Jul. 1, 1878: Peter Ewert, Rudnerweide,  
 July 1, 1878<sup>a)</sup> - July 1, 1887: David Unruh, Gnadenfeld,  
 July 1, 1887 Gerhard Doerksen, Alexandertal.

a) 1878

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## **Section 2**

# **Ecclesiastical Matters**

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## Section 2

# Ecclesiastical Matters

### I. Church Establishment, Church Separation and Expulsion of some Church Aelteste

The Molotschna Mennonites, who had settled in 17 colonies in the first two years (1804 and 1805), united in 1805 to form a church congregation, and, in that same year, the first Church Aeltester, Jakob Enns in Tiegenhagen, was confirmed by the Chortitza Aeltester Johann Wiebe. His Majesty, Emperor Alexander I, who was so interested in the prosperity of the colonies, donated 6,000 Rubles to the congregation for the construction of churches, and in 1809 the community built a church in Ohrloff and in 1810 another in Petershagen. The colony had now matured and had churches available for worship services, but it soon became apparent that some members were not eager to live according to the Gospel. In the course of time, it followed that one challenged the arm of the authorities and the District Office came into being to hold disobedient people to account or even to punish them. However, some found this to be contrary to the Scriptures. Mainly it was two Church Preachers, Klaas Reimer and Kornelius Janzen, both living in Petershagen, who protested against it. However, they did not rebel against the District Office or against the punishments dictated by the same, but rather they demanded such a way of life from Mennonites that such punishments would never be necessary. Since they did not prevail with this view, although it was in accordance with the Scriptures, and in general with the creation of such congregation, but could not abandon their view, they separated from the congregation with some members in 1812 and formed their own congregation. In vain they asked for the customary confirmation of an Aeltester and so the Church Preacher Klaas Reimer presented this request.

Although no serious obstacle was placed in the way of this congregation when they left the mother church, they were exposed to ridicule for a long time, and their teachers were not allowed to enjoy the exemption from the civil services [*Reihediensten*] as other church teachers were allowed to do, but they endured everything with great patience and rendered the most faithful obedience to the local as well as to the higher authorities. Their whole endeavor was to live up to the teachings of Jesus in Matt. 5:39-41. Initially, this congregation refused to participate in elections, but later served in village offices themselves. In 1843, through the mediation of Chairman Cornies and by order of the H. Minister, this congregation was put on an equal footing with all other congregations in every respect, i.e., recognized as a congregation by the authorities. The order of the authorities reads:

By order of the  
Guardianship Committee  
January 28, 1843.  
sub No. 4501.

**To the Mayor's Offices**

Upon the presentation to His Excellency the Deputy General, Chairman of the Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers, His Highness of the H. Minister of Crown Lands has ordered that the Molotschna Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde not be disturbed in the performance of its religious services and to permit it to continue to hold its meetings in private houses until a church building can be constructed. At the same time, the H. Minister has instructed the Deputy of the Guardianship Committee to consider by what means the construction of a church for the aforementioned congregation can be brought about. As a result of this high decision, the Kleine Gemeinde from now on enters completely into the general church rights like the other congregations, and therefore the Mayor's Offices are informed of this, in order to give the Kleine Gemeinde, like the other congregations, all privileges and also that its church preachers, as the existing order determines, are exempted from the civil service, as well as to consider and regard them as ordinary church preachers in appropriate cases, about which the Mayor's Offices have to make known to all village inhabitants. This regulation originated from the Agricultural Association.

It was not very praiseworthy for the other churches that the H. Minister had to order this. The spirit of intolerance, which is so peculiar to the Mennonites, as they have proven in later and more recent times, raised its head even then. After this congregation had lived quietly and calmly for half a century in the midst of the other congregations

and had proved that in all this time no member of their community was subjected to punishment on the part of the secular authorities, the whole Kleine Gemeinde community moved to the Ekaterinoslav Governorate in the sixties and went to America with the first emigrants in the seventies and so is lost from our further history.

We pick the story up again at the top. The first Aeltester Jakob Enns had to have a deputy soon because of his poor health, and the congregation chose the Church Preacher Jakob Fast in Halbstadt, who was confirmed to the office of Aeltester by the Aeltester Enns in 1817. The Aeltester Enns died on April 23, 1818. In 1819 the Rudnerweide church with its Aeltester Franz Goerz came from Prussia, which was a so-called Frisian congregation, but the Ohrloff-Petershagen church, already established in Molotschna, called itself Flemish \*) Mennonite congregation. Since the difference existed only in outward customs, these congregations united in 1820 under the leadership of their Aelteste Jakob Fast and Franz Goerz in such a way that the above-mentioned designations should no longer be relevant. In this year (1820) the Alexanderwohl congregation with its Aeltester Peter Wedel came from Prussia. The Aeltester of the Ohrloff-Petershagen congregation Jakob Fast died after a short period of service on November 9, 1820 and in 1821 on January 14 the Church Preacher Bernhard Fast from Halbstadt was elected Aeltester and confirmed in office on June 30 by the Aeltester Franz Goerz.

After reading the news about the distribution of Bibles through dedicated societies, several members of the board of the three now existing congregations, as well as other members of these congregations, came to the conclusion that it was their duty to support this Bible distribution. They expressed the wish to participate in this work by making voluntary financial contributions, in order to help the impoverished, as well as the heathen peoples, to receive the expensive Word of God through their support, for which purpose a branch of this society was to be established in the Molotschna after a suitable presentation to the main Bible Society in St. Petersburg. The Aelteste Fast, Goerz and Wedel gave their full recognition to this work and on December 24, 1821 a Molotschna branch of the Bible Society was confirmed from St. Petersburg.

This work was opposed by many in the Fast community, because in it the supposed military names: President, Secretary, etc. appeared. It was thought that if other denominations

\*) Are Frisian and Flemish names after their earlier place of residence in the Netherlands?

were to take part in one and the same work, they would soon be ready to take up the sword. Many slanders and obvious lies were spread and believed about the Aelteste, even assaults against the Aeltester Fast, i.e., a vicious assault was made in one of the church services. In the case of hostility to this work, as well as in the case of opposition to the government's wish that the Mennonites celebrate the main feasts: Easter, Pentecost, Christmas with other inhabitants of Russia at the same time, i.e., according to the calendar adopted by the Christian church in the fourth century. Four Church Preachers of the Ohrloff-Petershagen community took the lead, namely Jakob Warkentin, Altona, David Hiebert, Lindenau, Franz Wiens, Petershagen and Johann Friesen, Rosenort. They separated from the church community intending to form their own community in order to save as many as possible from the impending doom. Now that they were not served by the Molotschna Aelteste, they turned to the Chortitza Aeltester Jakob Dueck, as well as to the Aelteste in Prussia, insisting on independence and demanding the election and confirmation of their own Aelteste. The Aelteste who were asked initially feared that if they promoted these separated ones to independence by confirming an Aeltester, the rift could become even worse, but after a long complaint of those who had left, they finally gave in and the Aeltester from Chortitza, Jakob Dueck, was asked by the Aelteste from Prussia, to take care of the abandoned herds, as they were called in Prussia letters, and to confirm an Aeltester for them. Jakob Warkentin from Altona, under the direction of the Aeltester from Chortitza, was selected and appointed and confirmed to the office of Aeltester on August 3, 1824.

After the desired independence was established, the Aeltester Warkentin and his congregation demanded from the Aeltester Fast and his congregation the transfer of the Petershagen church as exclusive property for themselves and the congregation under the condition that no church preacher and no song leader of the Fast congregation should appear in it, because they had become common with other denominations during the spreading of the Bible, had admitted the missionary Moritz to the Lord's Supper and thus denied the confession of the Mennonites and would now also soon take up the sword. But Aeltester Fast could not agree to such a transfer of the church, because the churches are a common property and the visit of the same cannot be forbidden to any inhabitant.

Because of participation in the spreading of the Bible, erroneous stories were sent to the Prussian congregations and the Church Preacher David Epp in Heubuden was asked by a recipient of a letter sent to Molotschna there to answer the letter in his stead, and because from his answer it can be seen how the Molotschna participation in all the work of the spreading of the Bible as well as the celebration of the festivals according to the old calendar was understood, so let us read:

**A Letter from Church Preacher David Epp in Heubuden,  
to the School Teacher Peter Regehr,  
in Petershagen, Prussia,  
Concerning the Bible Society Matter**

According to the wish of your brother Jakob Regehr, I have taken on the task of answering your letter of April. You write something about the sad thing in which we are involved. It is also really sad that there is so much strife among Christians, who should all rightly seek nothing but Him crucified and His glory, according to the example of our Savior, for by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. As I have learned, the dispute about the Bible Society founded among us is truly an incomprehensible matter, where every Christian should compete to help according to the ability the Lord gives, and not to protest against it. If we knew the value of the Bible and were enlivened by the spirit by which the Bible is written, then it would be a joy for us to bring the Word of God to the ignorant peoples, who still sit in darkness and the shadow of death, the good news full of Christ that they too are redeemed by the blood of the Son of God. If we were to consider how many hundreds of millions of people are wandering in blindness, how many people sacrifice to dumb idols, how the illiterate left-behind widows are thrown into the fire by of their own sons, how pitifully many of them are sacrificing themselves in many ways to placate their enraged idols, how children in their innocence are thrown alive into the flames, and other such cruelties. I say, when we consider this, should not a compassion come upon us to save these erring ones? If, for example, an animal wanted to run into the fire, would we not do our best to keep it away? How much more can we save a human being, not only from the fire that consumes this body, but also of the eternal fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels. In order to save the poor erring peoples, many societies have been formed over the last few years to make the Gospel known to all peoples according to the clear pronouncement of our Savior, and to that end there is a Bible Society in St. Petersburg,

where the Bible is translated into many languages, and with much pleasure I have learned that you, too, no longer want to remain mere spectators of what's happening in Molotschna, but are also contributing to the spread the Word of God, the Bible, among your ignorant neighbors. Oh! a Christian ministry, if through your efforts even one soul, which is worth more than the whole visible world, is saved, what a joy it will be on that great day of judgment to have contributed something to it. It is sad that so many among us are against it, they accuse the preachers of wanting to have big titles for themselves, such as President, Director and Secretary. Of course, this accusation can be said about every official. It can also be said about you that you are seeking a big name for yourself. He wants to be a supervisor over the children and still seeks to be honored inappropriately by the clergy. He who is faithful, as it must be with a Bible Society, seeks his Savior's and not his own honor. The title President is not a military title, but their titles of their leaders are chairman, director, supervisor and secretary. But it is not true that they call themselves General or Captain, as some say, because I know the Bible societies too well for that. If the accusers knew how great their ignorance is, they would be ashamed and would not be a hindrance to anyone who wants to spread the Bible. Since 1817, we have contributed annually to the Bible Society, and since the New Year, I have been a correspondent for the Bible Society myself, and it is a pleasure when we see progress. Some give nothing even to us, who could give much, but there is much misinformation here that would have people believe that the Society is harmful. Your Aelteste and preachers are accused of not informing you beforehand or of not having sought your input. In parachurch organizations, where the Word of God does not clearly speak to matters, such as the election of a preacher, the Bible does not say that this person by name should be a preacher, but the majority of the brothers must decide. But what God's Word commands, one does not ask man, because one must obey God more, Acts 5:29. If Noah had asked his brothers in his time, he would not have built an ark, but would have perished to please them, and Lot would not have left Sodom, but would have perished to please his contemporaries. Oh, my dear friend, we are living in a time when everyone, to whom his salvation is dear, is bound to contribute something to the spreading of the Kingdom of Grace of Christ. I hear you answer, but who is poor? Peter says: "I have neither money nor silver, but what I have I give". There are a few who cannot contribute but you have so many opportunities to grow with your wealth. If make your entrusted children aware of the signs of the times,

if now the words of the Savior come true according to Matthew 24 :1-51. If you yourself contribute a few kopecks, encourage others and especially teach your children to love their Lord not only in their childhood but also in their adult years, because the love is the fulfillment of the law, that no one should be afraid that too much would be done for the glory of God. According to the approximate calculations, there are still 656 million pagans, 160 million Muhamedans, 9 million Jews and 175 million Christians, among the latter most of whom are partly weary of the Word of Life and partly ignorant of it. So, it is not a time to put our hands in our laps, but to work because it is day. I also believe that your preachers will not listen to the ignorance of their brethren, but to the command of God, and so will counsel the souls of those who want to hinder the spread of the Gospel. Oh, that they would consider what Heb. 13:17 says, Obey your preachers and follow them, for they watch over your souls, as those who are to give an account of them, that they may do so with friends and not with sighing, for that is not good for you. If your brethren should see the tears that flow not only among you but also among us because of them, they would know that it is not good for them, as the apostle says. And our Savior says, "Woe to the man through whom sorrow comes, it would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck and to be thrown into the sea where it is deepest. That your leaders do not seek their own honor, but that of their Savior, is also clear from the fact that they reap contempt rather than glory.

One fears that we will unite too much with other religious groups in spreading the Bible. An unheard of blindness; drinking, playing, joking and fooling around in the taverns with other people of the same religion, singing funny songs together, etc., no one fears these harmful associations, but the spreading of the Bible is harmful? In what way did our forefathers, who were in paganism, receive the Gospel? Please investigate this, because I do not have the time to write about it. You can read about it in the Baseler Magazine. Now my friends, if it is the duty of Christians and according to the will of God to spread the Bible and those who want to prevent it are obviously acting against the will of God. Tell me, with which spirit could and would you go to meet the judge of the world? How would you be able to answer for the calamity, the misery of so many, that comes to your account, the thousandfold curse that rests on your immortal soul, because so many souls remain astray through your reluctance and did not recognize their true destiny, you, to whom all sources of correct knowledge have been opened, who cannot excuse themselves with any ignorance. I break off, if only you knew what serves for peace at this time of yours.

A second cause of the quarrel is that we celebrate the old or Russian holidays, so that the restless brothers would like to read what our Savior said to the Samaritan woman in John 4:24 says, God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, about which more could be said, but everyone will be able to read about the worship of the first Christians in the Shepherd's Voice No. 2, 1822, which, God willing and we are alive, will come to you this summer. The first Christians, when the holidays began, celebrated the holiday which we call the old or Russian one. Pope Gregory introduced the new calendar, which the Occidental Christians adopted, but the Oriental or Greek Christians did not, but remained with the old one. In my opinion, it is not necessary to ponder on which day we celebrate the birth of our Savior, but to see that it happens daily in spirit and in truth, and he wants to be born in us spiritually. So, it is with the resurrection of Christ, as long as we do not rise spiritually with Christ from dead works and serve him in holiness and righteousness, as long as the power of his death does not come to life in distant hearts, our Easter celebration does not help us at all, and our remembrance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, when we pray for the same, helps us so little, because Peter says: To you and your children is this promise, and to all the distant find, whom God will call. Acts 2:39 and Paul: Whoever does not have Christ's Spirit is not his Rom. 8:9. and those are God's children whom the Spirit of God calls v. 14.

If anyone should be embarrassed on reading this and think, I know nothing of all this, so I am lost and the like, take comfort in the fact that the uncovering of our misery is the first effect of the Spirit of God and who wants to guide us into all truth, if we ask Him. So, then I will close my letter in the hope that many of you will recognize what is the good and pleasing will of God and may recognize, as Saul did, whom they ignorantly persecute.

David Epp  
June 30, 1822

When the demand of the Aeltester Warkentin for the transfer of the church did not succeed, the District Office also wrote:

To the Church Aeltester Bernhard Fast and his like-minded preachers and brothers:

We members of the District Office have been asked by some like-minded brothers from Aeltester Jakob Warkentin's congregation, to discuss with Ohm Bernhard Fast about whether

the same would like to withdraw from the church in Petershagen with its preachers and choir singers and leave it solely to the congregation of Ohm Warkentin for the reason that the congregation has separated for known reasons and through which (according to the opinion of the District Office) the hatred could be alleviated by much because of this separation and finally through God's help the congregation could again reach unity and true peace, if also a church built by the High Crown for the whole community without exception would be left to the like-minded community of Ohm Warkentin, whereupon Ohm Bernhard Fast explained his opinion to the District Office that his community would probably not decide to do so, because in his opinion such peace can probably not be established.

Because the mutual congregation of Ohm Warkentin does not calm down herewith, but believes to have a rightful claim to this house of prayer, the District Office cannot help but call upon the entire preaching staff and brothers herewith and ask them to accept this request of the District Office, and ask them to consider this request of the District Office carefully and to consider whether this request of the District Office is unreasonable or could be considered biased, if it can say with conviction that only peace and harmony in the community can be aimed at by this. Furthermore, the District Office has complete confidence in the honorable preaching service, that it is bound by duty and conscience and will not refrain from applying for what it can do to help calm the community.

If the honorable preaching service considers the presence of the members of the District Office at a brotherhood assembly to be scheduled to be necessary, then the same are ready to be present after being requested to do so, until which time we expect a favorable written answer after a warm welcome.

No. 80 The original is signed:  
February 9, 1827

District Mayor **Klaassen**  
Deputy District Mayor **Toews**  
Deputy District Mayor **Regier**

The following letter shows that Aeltester Fast could not share the overruling of the District Office:

To the District Office in Halbstadt.

From the esteemed letter of the District Office dated February 9 of this year, No. 80, addressed to me, my fellow preachers and brothers, I see that the District Office has been informed by some brothers from Ohm Jakob Warkentin's community to talk to me about

whether I, together with my preachers and song leaders, want to withdraw from the Petershagen church and leave it to the congregation of Ohm Warkentin alone, for the reason that the congregation has separated itself for known reasons (as they say), whereby, in the opinion of the District Office, the hatred of this separation could be reduced by a great deal and finally, with God's help, the congregation could achieve unity and true peace. This request of the above-mentioned members is supported by the District Office in that it believes that it can say with conviction that only through this can peace and harmony be achieved in the congregation. To this I reply in the name of my fellow preachers [*Amtsbrüder*] and my congregation that we cannot renounce the church for the following reasons:

Firstly, my congregation cannot allow this at all, because it would cause them to travel 20-25 or even 30 versts to Ohrloff to attend church, because in our congregation the preaching service and the congregation belong together and form a whole. If one is now separated from the church, then the other is also excluded at the same time, and both parts are not willing to make such a long journey past their church;

Secondly, the church is common property and Ohm Warkentin and his congregation are equally at liberty to go to the Petershagen church. No one has denied them access, because we don't have the right to restrict entry to anyone since the churches have been given to us by the High Crown out of inestimable and gentle grace as a common property for everyone and as we also always used them in the past. By our renunciation we would disrespect this high gift from the generosity of our monarch, and this will not happen;

Thirdly, the very esteemed District Office cannot convincingly say that unity and true peace can be achieved only by the renunciation of said church, because such opinions have never been confirmed. For example, Aeltester Jakob Dueck was supposed to serve only this congregation to calm down and establish the peace which was missing. Secondly, it was said that the congregation would calm down if they had an Aeltester alone, and after this happened, they were not calmed down either. Thirdly, they said that the congregation would calm down if the service could be held alternately in the churches, and since we granted them this, there was no calming down. Finally, it was said that they would calm down and peace would be established if they were allowed to build a church at their own expense, as they had stated to the Office of the Guardianship Committee;

Fourthly, hatred and discord never subside after the fulfillment of an unreasonable demand; only when the sinful inclinations of the heart subside when one is earnestly intent on combating one's evil desires and sins through the help of the Savior Jesus Christ and seeking salvation and blessedness in him. It is therefore good, and the only means, to counteract the disruptive, discontented, spiteful and disobedient by instruction, rebuke and, if it cannot be otherwise, by clerical punishment, and not by unrighteous indulgence, for this only means making room for evil.

Since the esteemed District Office is involved in church matters, I ask it very kindly in the name of my congregation to help ensure that every Einwohner of our colony is preserved and protected in the freedom to go to any church. This cooperation should bring as much inner divine joy to the esteemed District Office as everyone would then be grateful to it. In general, I have complete confidence in the esteemed District Office that it will comply with this request. We will then have less trouble and both the preaching service and the District Office will have their job and business made easier. For this purpose, I extend a friendly hand in true brotherly love to the esteemed District Office and to every superior in the community. So let us walk hand in hand, without prejudice and without secondary intentions, united in the path of our duty, so that we may stand before God and man. If this does not happen, the disorder which the disobedient cause will finally bring disaster upon the colony, as every discerning person can easily see.

In the esteemed letter of the District Office, it is stated that the congregation has separated for known reasons. The establishment of the Bible Society, as well as that of the Ohrloff Central School, cannot be assumed as reasons for this. Should the ceded community have another reason, we ask that it be communicated to us in writing, because the previous answers: "You know it", are not sufficient for us. Because we do not know any reasons, but believe that only prejudice, error and misunderstanding are to blame for this.

In wishing the District Office God's blessings and warm greetings, I am always with sincere love

Halbstadt Church Aeltester: **Bernhard Fast**  
March 1, 1827

When now mediation by the District Office achieved nothing, the Aeltester Warkentin still firmly believed that he had a just cause.

He went to the Office with the following petition.

**Your Highness**  
**Senior Member of the Ekaterinoslav Office of the Guardianship Committee**  
**The Honorable Fadeev**

**From the Preaching Service of the Church Aeltester**  
**of the Molotschna Mennonite Church, Jacob Warkentin**

**A Most Obedient Request**

During your recent visit to the colonies in this district, and in response to the complaints of our opponents, you have requested a written explanation from us as to how the disagreements that have continued in our congregation for several years have actually arisen, and therefore we have the honor of submitting the following to your gracious consideration. Since the disagreement that has arisen in our congregation, we have always hoped that peace could be established among us through God's help, without burdening our most gracious authority with a request for help and assistance in this, especially since we have been granted complete religious freedom by the local high state authority in accordance with our creed. At the present time, however, we feel compelled to request the decision of the authorities in this matter, even though the good reputation of our church has unfortunately been extremely endangered by prevailing disagreements that are destroying the very foundations of our church.

Perhaps not long after the foundation of our church in our former fatherland, two divisions of Mennonites arose in it, one under the name of the Flemish and the other the Frisian congregation, the separation of which occurred several hundred years ago due to an assumed important difference in an article of faith, as well as some church customs that made up the differences between them.

A few years ago, a small Frisian Mennonite congregation under the leadership of its Church Aeltester Franz Goerz arrived here for settlement, emigrating from the Kingdom of Prussia, which we accepted in love and friendship as a congregation that exists especially for itself, but is very much connected with us. Immediately after the arrival of this congregation, its Church Aeltester Franz Goerz insisted that our congregation unite with him because of the aforementioned differences between them. This offer of his, if we were to enjoy the same special privileges in our new fatherland, and if we were not to allow any differences in the congregations of a church at all, was partly very rashly accepted by our congregation.

Immediately after this unification, the Church Aeltester Franz Goerz, together with the local Church Aeltester Bernhard Fast, who is now completely like-minded with him, took unauthorized actions and proposed unusual arguments, which are completely contrary to the principles of the Mennonites and cannot be permitted by any spiritual preaching ministry without the consent of the majority of the congregation, and were not approved by the majority of the congregation.

Nevertheless, we are obliged to tolerate, among other things, the unauthorized action of the Church Aeltester Bernhard Fast, which cannot be approved according to the principles of the Mennonites and is perhaps also not approved by any other Christian church, that one allows a foreign fellow believer to partake of the Lord's Table, as the Church Aeltester Bernhard Fast allowed and even forced on the missionary Moritz, who had come here for a visit. <sup>1)</sup> This arbitrary procedure would perhaps have been forgiven him, Fast, if he had admitted it to the congregation as a misstep in the principles of the Mennonites, but he nevertheless remained with his once adopted innovations and thereby expressed his stubbornness and conceit, together with his like-minded congregation. However, the other-minded part of the congregation still did not refrain from asking him, Fast, as well as his like-minded preaching ministry, to abandon their adopted innovations and to preside over and serve the congregation according to the former principles without deviation.

Aelteste Fast and Goerz, and their like-minded people, without informing the congregation and asking for their support contributed to the otherwise good work of the Bible Society <sup>2)</sup>, which made the majority of the congregation unhappy with them, since they wanted to participate in the good cause, but only as benefactors, by voluntary and small contributions.

The Aelteste of the church and their like-minded people got the very unfounded suspicion that we opposed the spreading of the Word of God, and even spread this story in writing, which however they will never be able to prove, since we had already collected several contributions and sent them to the main Russian Bible Society at the time when there was already a Bible Society among them. The first one was from the Russian Bible Society, which had collected several contributions and sent them to the main Russian Bible Society.

1) The missionary was not compelled, but demanded this participation so urgently that the Aeltester could not reject him for conscience's sake. Such communion is now generally exempt from the Federal Conference (item 1-1883) and belongs under the rubric of freedom of expression.

2) By an extensive circular letter of Aeltester Fast of 6 Oct. 1821 the whole congregation was made acquainted with this work, and asked to participate.

These and similar actions are, according to the commandments of the Holy Scriptures, completely contrary to the principles of the Mennonites and thus to the head pastor of a Christian congregation. These actions cannot be undone and therefore we wish rather to speak out against them, because they cannot bring us and our fellow brethren any glory.

On April 10, 1822, the Church Aeltester Bernhard Fast renounced his clerical office in a circular letter to the congregation, by which the congregation was thrown into great confusion, was therefore forced to take quick action to avoid the threat and the great unrest arising from this. A general meeting was called in the Petershagen church inviting the Aelteste, preachers and all the brothers of the entire Flemish congregation. In this meeting the Aeltester resumed his spiritual office, vowed to leave all actions done by him that were offensive to the congregation of Church Aeltester Franz Goerz and assured that all members of the congregation would be treated with respect and that all insults to the congregation in general or to some brethren in particular should be forgiven and forgotten, and that these disagreements should be thrown into the depths of the sea according to the words of the Holy Scriptures, which action was concluded with a prayer of thanksgiving to God. This promise given by him, the Church Aeltester Fast, while invoking the Word of God and bowing his knees, was unfortunately revoked very quickly. After only a few days he made the statement that he would rather remain in union with the Aeltester Franz Goerz, who was like-minded towards him, than to refrain from his once admitted actions and did not refrain from unlawful actions. It was therefore inevitable that the other-minded congregation would have a well-founded concerns about him, because he had broken his vow and violated our creed, which must absolutely remain a Yes, which is Yes, and a No, which is No. These unlawful actions of his were now in full view. Considering these unlawful actions of his, the majority of the Flemish congregation now renounced his further service as Aeltester, replacing him and to having another appointed according to the principles of the Flemish congregation. Despite the request of the majority of the congregation, the Aeltester Fast and his entire like-minded preaching staff and a small number of listeners did not refrain from holding their services as usual in both of the two churches built for the 18 villages in sight of the High Crown, but both the entire segregated congregation and the congregation of the old settlement remained in the church.

The large Flemish congregation and the four like-minded preachers followed their consciences and did not attend services in the church, when the declared unworthy Aelteste preached the Word of God and were forced, after they had asked in vain for the transfer of the church in Ohrloff, to hold their devotions scattered among the villages. They requested sacerdotal services from the Church Aeltester of the Chortitza congregation, Jakob Dueck. In these circumstances the Flemish congregation wrote to the West Prussian Flemish Mennonite congregations, their Aelteste and preachers, asking them for help, especially for the appointment of a new Aeltester, who would be elected from our midst and according to our principles, and also for a legal decision as to whether the church in Ohrloff should be ceded to us. Thereupon, the Prussian congregation repeatedly advised Bernhard Fast, in writing, to do everything possible to restore peace and unity among the offended and greatly agitated Flemish community and to completely change all of its offensive and illegal actions, as well as its unreasonable and strict procedures. Since all the very favorable and well-meaning warnings from the Prussian congregation to Aeltester Fast and his like-minded congregation remained fruitless, they decided to appoint another Church Aeltester, and therefore asked the Church Aeltester of the Chortitza congregation, Jakob Dueck, to confirm the selection of a Church Aeltester made in the large Flemish congregation here according to the customary principles, which order was then carried out by the Church Aeltester Jakob Dueck on July 7, 1824, under God's guidance. Therefore, we cannot be considered, as we are wrongly accused by the congregation of the Aeltester Fast, as a rebellious congregation or a new sect, but rather we have been confirmed under the old Flemish, Mennonite principles by our fellow believers in Chortitza, as well as the congregations in West Prussia. But that the Aeltester Fast and his like-minded people have really deviated from their Flemish Mennonite principles, is already evident from the fact that they explicitly say in a presentation to the Ekaterinoslav Office of the Guardianship Committee, which was addressed to them because of the disagreement that had arisen between Abraham Lemkisch and his like-minded community. "Since, however, according to our principles, no divorce may take place except for adultery," which principle, therefore, does not coincide with ours, because in the same it is said that no divorce takes place without exception. Nevertheless, we are far from intending to complain about these like-minded brothers in faith.

We gladly and willingly comply and we do not want to hinder them in the least in their once accepted principles, because each one is sure of his opinion and each one examines himself, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, and we also wish to expect the same from them. Concerning our other general worldly duties and business, it is and will always be our sincere wish to consider ourselves as fellow brothers of one congregation and to act accordingly, together with all our brothers in faith who are like-minded or unlike-minded from a spiritual point of view.

The West Prussian Flemish preaching service, however, at the same time gave the preaching service of Aeltester Fast its opinion that he and his like-minded congregation could very easily make do with one of the two churches and would therefore like to transfer the church in Ohrloff to us. But Aeltester Fast has not yet put this well-meaning advice into effect either, but has still rejected us with the answer he has already given. He, his like-minded preaching staff and congregation have never been of the opinion, and therefore far from disputing anyone's attendance of their service in the churches, therefore ask every worshipper in the congregation to attend their service in the churches diligently. For this reason, we were forced to build a church in the village of Lichtenau with our own funds in the fall of 1826. This church, however, is for our large congregation, comprised of 430 families in the 18 villages of the old settlement, not counting the individual families in the villages of the new settlement. On the other hand, the Aeltester has only 140 of families. Our new church building still not sufficient to hold our large congregation, which is why it is necessary to hold services in private houses in the most villages of this district and to build a second church on another end of the district of the old settlement at our own expense. The congregation is at present quite unable to do this, and with the 3 churches now existing in the colonies of the old settlement, it would be almost superfluous, if only our larger congregation of 430 families would like to receive, in addition to the church we built in the Lichtenau, the church built by the High Crown for the congregation in the old settlement in Petershagen.

Therefore, in the context of my preaching service and the entire congregation, I once again humbly ask Your Reverence to take these very difficult circumstances into the most gracious consideration and to help us to achieve the remaining goal of our wishes. We, on the other hand, flatter ourselves with the joyful hope that we will one day be able to show the clearest evidence of our pure intentions, that we will strive with all our strength to insist unwaveringly on our Christian principles alone whenever a misfortune threatens to push us away from the true path.

Considering my duty as leader of the flock entrusted to me by the all-directing Divine Providence, I and my like-minded brethren will also strive, as always, to implore the abundant blessing of the Almighty upon our God-ordained authorities for their protection and assistance entrusted to us, and will not seek to violate the same out of obedience and complete submissiveness due to Christian duty. I have the greatest respect and devotion for;

Altona  
May 7, 1827

Your Most Worshipful, Most Gracious Lord,  
Your most Devoted Church Aeltester  
**Jakob Warkentin**

To what extent the Aeltester Warkentin has kept the promise given at the end, not to violate the owed obedience and the complete submissiveness to our God-ordained authorities in accordance with Christian duty, is shown by the further course of history, but the following regulation of the Ekaterinoslav Office was made in response to the above presentation:

**From the Ekaterinoslav Office of the Guardianship Committee  
To the Molotschna Mennonite Church Spiritual Council,**

The H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers, upon the presentation of the senior member of the Office, informed him on November 19 that the cause of the discord among Mennonite brethren, called Frisians and Flemings, has its origin in the fact that the Church Aeltester of the Flemish congregation, Jakob Warkentin, stubbornly insists that the Friesian Church Aeltester should transfer to him the church in the village of Petershagen for the performance of the divine service after their manner, without the extraordinary member of the Guardianship Committee, whose tireless suggestions, advice and inspirations it is to whom the congregation of Mennonites owes so much of its prosperity, granting it. Nevertheless, Warkentin, in his obstinate manner, demanded that the matter of their dispute be decided by the secular authority, which the H. Chairman, as a right granted to him by the Mennonites, does not wish to reject the oldest churches in matters peculiar to their brotherhood

and therefore, prescribes to the Office to allow that their disputes shall be decided by the Mennonite Kirchenkonvent, namely by all present Church Aelteste of the Molotschna and Chortitza colonies by majority of the votes, and that it should be understood that they deliberate with common sense:

Firstly, what requires the colonial authority to bring an issue of mutual discord among the Mennonite Church Aelteste to the attention of the higher authority. For it is only from the church leaders that the division can spread to the congregations, which since then has been so distinguished by unanimous harmlessness, a decent life and brotherly love, and this will make it necessary for the authorities to change their former very favorable opinion regarding the whole Mennonite congregation;

Secondly, the churches, as they themselves are well aware, are built for the Mennonite brotherhood to worship in, without any division, and therefore no one may and can have exclusive claims to them, much less that they be transferred as property;

Thirdly, until the quarrels of the two church leaders, both the Frisian and Flemish brotherhoods held services in one and the same house of prayer, according to their recognized statutes, and this can continue until the Flemish congregation will be able to build their own church. It is a disgrace, however, to cause discord and unrest in the community, since in Germany even Catholics and Lutherans, who, however, make a far greater difference in their religion and customs, grant each other their churches for worship meetings;

Fourth, if the obstinate will not desist from their unfounded demands in spite of all admonitions, the colonial authorities will make it their duty to report this to the high authorities, who, in order to avert similar unrest and strife, will not fail to take the harshest measures against them, and may even make it an absolute necessity that those who are to blame for this unrest be removed altogether;

Fifthly, the colonist authorities entrust the Church Aelteste of the Mennonites, both of the Molotschna and Chortitza districts, with the task of deliberating and judging these disputes and thereby putting an end to them, so that mutual brotherly love may be restored.

The two congregations and their leaders, who are obliged by their duty to guard and strengthen their fellow believers in Christian love, but not to disturb and ruin them, will stand up for the old rights of the two congregations. In the hope that these honorable men, guided in their profession by the basic rules of the holy gospel and the spirit of truth, who have no part in the strife, all the malice and irreconcilability, will use every means to achieve this purpose, which is in no way in keeping with their status and from which all the strife for the whole of the congregation arises, and to invite the quarreling Church Aelteste to a peaceful reconciliation and to reconcile among themselves. And that Warkentin will not wish to appear before the high authority as unworthy, to continue to remain in the midst of the brotherly loving congregation of the Mennonites. The decision, of the united church leaders, is to be submitted to His Excellency for consideration.

Now, the H. Chairman of the Ekaterinoslav Office of the Guardianship Committee, to the Molotschna Mennonite Church Council, instructs the same to assemble all Church Aelteste and, after attentively studying the content of the Chairman's decision on this matter, to decide, with regard to the demand of Aeltester Warkentin, that he be granted the exclusive privilege to use the church in the village of Petershagen with his like-minded people, to arrive at a formal decision according to the majority of the votes and to send it with all signatures to the Office, to be presented for the consideration of His Excellency.

Dec. 9, 1827

No. 4894

The following report explains how the above order of the Chairman was carried out in full by the Mennonite Council:

**To the Office of the Guardianship Committee,  
From the Molotschna Spiritual Mennonite Council**

**Our most Humble Request**

The Office of the Guardianship Committee has graciously conferred to send to the Church Council on December 9, 1827, No. 4824, the regulation of the H. Chairman and H. Lieutenant General v. Insow concerning the local church disputes with the order that the entire church community of the Molotschna Mennonite Council be informed of the matter

and should decide on the demand of Aeltester Warkentin concerning the general use of the church at Petershagen according to majority and put an end to the disputes by peaceful reconciliation. For this purpose, the Church Council met on January 11 in the village of Altona and unanimously decided to once again extend the hand of brotherly love to the Aeltester Warkentin and his preachers and to invite them all to a peaceful reconciliation, for which purpose we, the undersigned Aelteste, sent a written statement of our attitude to him on January 11. However, we received only a verbal answer, which was not appropriate for a reconciliation of this kind. Thereupon, a second general meeting was scheduled for February 28. The Aelteste and preachers of the Chortitza colony as well as Jakob Warkentin and his preachers were invited to the church in Ohrloff, but no one from either party appeared at the meeting. Thereupon the local teaching service was invited by the Church Aeltester Jakob Dueck, Chortitza, to attend a meeting there on April 26th, in which the Aeltester Jakob Dueck made the inquiry to us whether we were now ready to cede a church, to which we replied that we were not entitled to do so, but only desired a peaceful union, to which, however, the Aeltester Warkentin as well as Jakob Dueck were not yet inclined.

Accordingly, the union we longed for, as well as the honored instruction of His Excellency the H. Chairman to put an end to the disputes in short, could not happen.

In the deepest devotion and greatest respect, the most humble servants of the Office.

May 24, 1828

The Church Aelteste: **Bernhard Fast, Franz Goerz, Peter Wedel**

The fellow servants of Aelteste Fast and Goerz still made an attempt to regulate or reconcile this whole matter, as the following letter proves:

**To Kirchenaeltester Peter Wedel in Alexanderwohl, Molotschna Colony,  
Jakob Dueck in Rosental and Jakob Hildebrandt,  
Insel Chortitza, Chortitza Colony**

First, from the bottom of our hearts, we wish you, esteemed brothers, the grace of God in Christ Jesus through the cooperating power of the Holy Spirit!

We, the undersigned church preachers and deacons of the Ohrloff, Petershagen and Rudnerweide congregations, hereby address you, Honorable Church Aelteste, with a matter that is of the greatest importance in regard to our congregations. The occasion for this has been given to us by your Church Aeltester Jakob Warkentin of Altona, Molotschna. As is known, he complained about the local community disputes in writing to the Office of the Guardianship Committee on May 7 with the request that the authorities should decide on the matter.

To justify his complaint, he contacted our Honorable Church Aelteste Bernhard Fast and Franz Goerz of Rudnerweide with claims which he is in no way capable of proving and would disqualify our Church Aelteste. We, as their humble assistants, cannot accept that such unfounded complaints about our Honorable Church Aelteste have been submitted to the high authorities without being refuted or revoked. The two Aelteste, have been slandered and portrayed as unworthy to continue to preside over their important and holy offices. For this reason, at the preachers' meeting on April 26 in Chortitza, we publicly asked him to prove the allegations he had made, and we declared that we would forgive him if he wanted to revoke his complaint about the two Aelteste, which he refused. We then had to explain to him that we would be forced to take the course of action that he himself has chosen. We also received from the Committee a copy of the complaint made by Church Aeltester Jakob Warkentin. Since, however, according to the teaching of the Gospel in 1 Cor. 6:5, it is against the wrath of the Lord and Master if his members go before a secular court, we have rather united to inform you, Honorable Church Aelteste, of the status of this matter with regard to the complaint of the Aeltester Jakob Warkentin and to ask you to review this situation. We hereby declare at the same time that we do not want to advocate for our Aelteste Fast and Goerz in any way. If it is found, after close and thorough investigation, that their position is completely contrary to Mennonite principles, as Warkentin contends, then they will be formally declared unworthy of their offices as Aelteste, they cannot continue to function as Aelteste in the congregation. When the facts of the matter are known, truth and justice must prevail.

It is not, honorable Aelteste, excessive haste and lack of deliberation that gives us the means, and

it is not accompanied by a feeling of revenge, but rather by an unavoidable necessity that has been examined and investigated during this time. Because the need for good order within the congregation, this situation urgently requires us to act, since this conflict has brought nothing but unbridled disorder. Therefore, honorable Aelteste, do not ignore this urgent request of ours, but take the matter at hand according to the facts, examine and test it according to the Word of God, according to our holy principles, and according to your duty, which is incumbent upon you.

Meanwhile, we will support you in this important business with our humble prayers and request God's assistance for you. We sign ourselves as your humble co-workers in the Word of God.

Church Preachers:	<b>Peter Neufeld, Heinrich Balzer, Isaak Neufeld, Jakob Loewen, Peter Enns, Abraham Isaak, Jakob Wiebe, Heinrich Balzer</b>
Deacons:	<b>Gerhard Reimer, Gerhard Enns, Jakob Dueck, Bernhard Friesen</b>

Ohrloff, August 20, 1828

The above request remained without success. The congregation was not only separated, but also remained unreconciled. An old man of that time wrote:

"The congregation was and remained separated and will probably remain separated until either all the preachers come to a better understanding or until an external need drives us."

In the further course of time, it turned out that Warkentin did not come to a better understanding at all by his defeat concerning the church. He wanted everything according to his perspective and according to his ideas. He did not know a boundary between clerical and civil duties, interfered with the orders of the authorities in order to punish those that displeased him, incited his member to disobey the local authorities, offered himself in place of a member of the congregation sentenced to penal servitude, became a deputy for the whole district congregation and traveled to Odessa to the Guardianship Committee, complaining about the District Office, which was proven upon investigation by the H. President of the Guardianship Committee to be groundless, that he unlawfully interfered with the community

in the selection of a District Mayor <sup>1)</sup> and by this unlawful and harmful influence he finally carried it so far that he was called to account by H. President His Excellency State Councillor v. Hahn who had clearly warned him in a letter from the Office on December 9, 1827, that he was declared unworthy of his office in a circular of May 20, 1842 <sup>2)</sup>.

The governments' favorable perspective that the Mennonites would be model colonists for the surrounding inhabitants, suffered a tremendous blow. The hatred on the part of those who wanted to separate the congregation now got even stronger, because the blame for Warkentin's fall was not placed in the actions of the Aeltester, but on Cornies and those who agreed with the colonial administration.

Because the Warkentin congregation was scattered in most parts of the district, or actually divided into three churches, an Aeltester was now elected for each church:

1842 on June 18, Heinrich Wiens was elected by the Margenau church in Gnadenheim and on July 5 he was confirmed to office by the Aeltester of the Waldheim church, by Peter Schmidt. Since that time called the Margenau church;

1842 On September 22, Dirk Warkentin in Petershagen was elected Aeltester for the churches of Lichtenau and Petershagen and confirmed in office on October 18 by the Aeltester of the Margenau church, Heinrich Wiens. Since that time called the Lichtenau-Petershagen church;

1842 on September 29 Heinrich Toews was elected by the Pordenau church in Pordenau and confirmed in office on October 25 by the Aeltester Heinrich Wiens. Since that time called the Pordenau church;

In 1844 the Waldheim Aelteste Peter Schmidt was declared unworthy of his office at the request of the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, v. Hahn, because he had admitted a young man of Lutheran denomination into his church without permission of the high authority and also banned members of other churches;

1846 on September 21, the Aeltester of the Margenau congregation,

1) This influence was already mentioned in the first section.

2) The reasons for the expulsion of some Church Aelteste are based on written information of the local authorities.

Heinrich Wiens, declared unworthy of his office for the following reasons:

In general, he completely followed in Warkentin's footsteps. On occasions he expressed his dissatisfaction about the other Aelteste as well as the local authorities and thereby planted greater congregational hatred and disobedience against the authorities. What finally overthrew him was that he pronounced a church ban on three persons of the Lichtenau church (i.e., induced the church to pronounce this ban) who had committed a criminal on the order of their village mayor [*Dorfsälteste*]. This came before the H. State Councillor v. Hahn, who confronted the Aeltester Wiens during a visit to the colonies in the presence of the area Aelteste, whereby Wiens invoked our Privilegium to justify his action, since this allowed us freedom of faith, and behaved so rudely toward His Excellency that, if all respect for the high authority was not to vanish, this could not remain unpunished. Before his departure, von Hahn said to the District Mayor that he would give the District Office a notice to demand the presence of all the Aelteste at the District Office and to inquire of them whether they also think like Wiens, in which case (if they all think so) he would want to be the first to request that the High Government abolish a privilege that is so harmful to us, but if they think differently, then they should take action against Wiens. The said regulation was not long in coming and reads as follows:

**From the Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Settlers**

**To the District Office of the Molotschna Mennonites**

Odessa,  
August 14, 1846  
No. 5108

It is known to this office that some landlords of the Blumenort village belonging to the congregation of the Church Aeltester Wiens were expelled from the congregation for having physically punished a Hutterite boy at the behest of their schoolmaster. Soon after, when these people had made amends at a church meeting and they were again granted admission. The act, for which the Hutterite boy was punished, should have been settled according to the existing laws by the secular authorities, on whom it depended entirely to sentence the culprit to a punishment and to carry it out. If the Association, the District Office or the Mayor's Office, where the matter should have been handled,

had shown partiality or injustice, they would also have to answer to the secular authorities set above them, which authorities in any case condemn not the executors of the judgment but the authors of it.

What did the congregation of the Church Aeltester Wiens do? He interfered in a civil matter that had no connection with a spiritual matter. He condemned people whose error was that they obeyed their church authorities according to duty and conscience, he inflicted on them a punishment which, according to the Mennonite creed, those who live by the flesh must be subject to it, especially that which is considered shameful and punishable by the authorities, and which punishment, by the same creed, must be inflicted only after admonitions in private and in the presence of two or three witnesses. He took the liberty of forgiving those under church ban, after they had made a vow not to carry out such orders of their immediate authorities any longer. I must call such a procedure rash and unjust, neither in accordance with the imperial laws nor with the creed of the Mennonites. He violated all order and stirred the people to disobedience to the secular authorities. For this reason I order the District Office to invite all Church Aelteste and preachers of the Molotschna Mennonite District to the District Office, to read the present regulation to them and declare that if any church congregation takes the liberty to interfere in a matter that is subject to the secular authorities or to confront someone clerically for the violation of civil regulations, I will see myself compelled to hand over the Church Aelteste and preachers of that congregation to the court as disturbers of the peace and agitators of disobedience.

However, since the Church Aeltester Wiens, during my declaration to him, took the liberty of justifying the order with reference to the privileges granted to the Mennonites, I must respond by calling this justification wrong. The privileges of the Mennonites are known to me as well as to anyone, and they do not in the least authorize the Mennonite clergy to interfere in secular affairs. Just as the Mennonite creed cannot contain the highly improper and censurable rule of being called to account clerically for fulfilling the first duty of every citizen, obedience to the power instituted by government, and even being subject to severe punishment. The Mennonites should be mindful that the rights and privileges granted to them on Sept. 6, 1800, are affirmed to the extent that

they do not run counter to the general state ordinances, and that since allowing the Mennonite clergy to interfere in secular matters or punishing people for obedience to the secular authorities would be completely contrary to these ordinances, I would be the first to petition the government for the abolition of such harmful and pernicious privileges, if what happened in the congregation of the church leader of Wiens were really based on the same.

I invite the church leaders of the other churches to pay special attention to this matter and to strive to avoid the consequences which they will inevitably bring about for themselves if, as the church leader of Wiens has done, they allow themselves to misinterpret the creed of the Mennonites, to overstep their power and to scatter the seeds of disobedience among the people.

The original signed:

State Councillor **von Hahn**

Right District Clerk: **Reimer**

After distribution of the above invitation given by the H. President of the Guardianship Committee, the entire Molotschna Mennonite clergy assembled at the District Office and the same was read to them. Wiens denied before this assembly his improper behavior against His Excellency and stubbornly persisted in his obstinacy. Thereupon, Wiens was declared unworthy to further serve in this office by the Aelteste Fast, Wedel and Ratzlaff in the church at Ohrloff. Although Wiens was informed of this, this written declaration of the Aelteste was completely ignored by him, he continued to serve in the office of Aeltester as before, and when this was reported to the Committee and His Excellency submitted this matter to His Excellency the Minister. Wiens was then expelled from the country according to the decision of His Excellency the Minister. This reads:

### **Circular Announcement**

Misinterpretation of privileges by some Church Aelteste and their interference in secular affairs have repeatedly caused discord in the Molotschna Mennonite District in recent years. In order to eliminate such abuses, which endanger the prosperity of the Mennonites and weaken the influence of the village and district authorities as required by law and order.

For this reason, His Highness, the Minister of Crown Lands, has been pleased to order that the church Aeltester, of the Mennonite Gnadenheim area, Heinrich Wiens, who has shown the most rebelliousness and blindness, be expelled from the country for which the Guardianship Committee has made arrangements.

At the same time, it has been made the duty of the Guardianship Committee to inform the Mennonites in the name of His Highness that if the government preserves and protects the privileges granted to them, then they, for their part, are obliged to behave peacefully, to obey the laws and the secular power, and not to arouse disorder or religious or other tensions, otherwise they will have to blame themselves if they thereby bring about disadvantageous consequences and lose their privileges.

Carrying out the will of His Highness, the Guardianship Committee hopes that this paternal admonition will have its desired effect.

At the same time, the Guardianship Committee prescribes that the Mennonite Wiens who has been expelled across the border should not be given a place of refuge in the colonies, but on the contrary, if he should return, he should be arrested and handed over to the authorities, otherwise one would expose oneself to legal responsibility for harboring vagrants.

Odessa  
April 8, 1847

Chairman of the Guardianship Committee:  
State Councillor **v. Hahn**

A friend of the present District Mayor, who was anxious to know the details of the Wiens affair, asked the mayor for a written account of it. The mayor granted this request and gave his account in plain words as follows:

Beloved friend!

The story of the expelled Heinrich Wiens is close to my heart as very successful and strange for our brotherhood, so I will only try to tell you this matter very simply.

In 1846, July 20, State Councillor v. Hahn arrived in Halbstadt, from there the Deputy Mayor Neufeld drove with him at his request to Juschanlee, where I was also. However, Chairman Cornies and the Honorable v. Flessier had just left for Ackerman. The H. President v. Hahn went with me into the forest and there he addressed the question to me: "What has happened to us again?"

I answered quite impartially that I did not know what! Then he told me that the Church Aeltester Heinrich Wiens had punished three Blumenort members with the church ban for having physically punished a Hutterthal lad on the orders of their schoolmaster.

The Councillor declared with earnestness that he could not be satisfied with this. Later on, after his departure with the Honorable v. Flessier to the Mariupol colonies, he ordered me to summon Wiens, the Mayor's Office and the three persons who had been punished by Wiens to the District Office on July 25. After his arrival in Halbstadt, His Excellency, in the courtroom of the District Office, first questioned the Mayor's Office about some circumstances, then he turned to the punished persons with the question; whether they were satisfied with the punishment they had received or not. The latter answered in a few words that they were already reconciled to the community again. The President was very surprised about this and asked the punished persons whether they were sorry to have done a sacred duty in the name of the Emperor, i.e., to punish a criminal at the command of the schoolmaster, whether they could have made amends and confessed that they were sorry? Peter Loewen answered this with No! The Honorable v. Hahn then said, but you had to promise not to do this anymore, otherwise you would not have been reconciled, and Jakob Bueg said, as far as I remember, the preachers would have come themselves and advised them to ask for readmission. That they did this, H. v. Hahn regretted very much. Wiens was then called in and immediately after his entrance, the President asked him how could he come to punish such people, who had fulfilled the sacred duty, the commandment of the Emperor, by banning them? Wiens answered roughly as follows: "According to the privilege bestowed upon us by the Most High," and asked with a rather scornful tone who had filed the complaint. The Honorable v. Hahn said, "the authorities complained". Wiens turned to the Blumenort landlords with the question, "Men, have you complained?" The H. President repeated to him that he himself was complaining. Wiens kept talking and H. v. Hahn could not get a word in edgewise, so he ordered him, Wiens, to be silent, your superior speaks. Wiens, however, did not remain silent and v. Hahn repeated his order many times and shouted at him, "be silent, be silent, be silent", and although H. v. Hahn persisted many times, he finally said quite carefully, Your Excellency, I will not remain silent. The Honorable v. Hahn threatened him with incarceration. Dirk Warkentin tugged at his shirt and whispered: "Ohm Wiens, keep quiet". After Wiens remained silent, the H. President explained a few things, which I can no longer give verbatim, but it was approximately as follows, who gave you such a privilege? I know your privilege just as well as one of you, if it entitles you to such actions,

I will be the first to ask for it to be taken away, because it would be harmful to you and lead you to commit unlawful acts, etc. He made it perfectly clear to Wiens each and every act which was contrary to the authorities, the law and the Emperor and continued in this declaration for a long time. After he had finished, he allowed Wiens to speak and he began again with the privilege that it allows us freedom of religion and so on, whereupon the H. v. Hahn repeated many more instructions to him, and also that he was only a landlord of 65 Dessiantine of Land and as a landlord he was under the Mayor and would also not be excluded from corporal punishment. I cannot describe to you, dear friend, this conversation of the H. President v. Hahn had with Wiens quite literally and in detail, but you will perhaps already be able to imagine the substance and actual meaning of it. Before the departure of H. v. Hahn, he told me in Juschanlee that he would give a summons to the District Office, which will demand all the Aelteste into the District Office and to inquire of them whether they also think like Wiens, so he wants to be the first to come to the high authorities for the abolition of such a harmful privilege, but if they think differently than Wiens, then they should take action against him. On August 14, 1846, we received the aforementioned summons, the content of which you will be familiar with. In accordance with this summons, all the Aelteste and preachers were gathered in the District Office on August 30 and the Committee's regulation was presented to them. Wiens did not let anyone get a word in edgewise, talked down to everyone as soon as he began to speak and wanted to throw all accusations off himself, wandered up and down in the assembly and spoke in a rather impudent tone. Then the district Aelteste explained how Wiens had behaved against the H. President of the Committee, v. Hahn and said to him that he would not remain silent. That he should have said this, Wiens insolently denied in front of the whole assembly. We believed he would admit his offense and ask the District Office and the preaching service to reconcile this with the Committee, which I think would have happened, but Wiens denied his words, spoken with good deliberation, that he would not remain silent. Thereupon, the District Office and the Agricultural Association wrote to the preaching services of all churches to dismiss Wiens, as he was found unworthy by the District Office and the Association. The Aelteste Bernhard Fast, Friedrich Wilhelm Lange together with their preachers sent on September 21, 1846 the formal declaration of dismissal of Wiens which meant that he not permitted perform any sacerdotal functions, or he would be reported to the authorities as disobedient. After this dismissal of Wiens, the Lichtenau and Margenau congregations elected a deputation, whose duty was to appeal to the authorities that Wiens should remain as an Aeltester and that such a penalty should not exist with us whereby congregation members would have to punish a convict with rods.

According to the testimonies of many inhabitants, they collected a large number of signatures, which were to serve the deputies to the authorities with the power of attorney and collected a very significant sum of money for the travel expenses of the deputies. It is generally known what the deputation was directed to do and how it was to use the monies received. The conclusion of the matter was that Wiens was expelled across the border.

Well, dear friend, what to say to such goings-on? It is extremely painful and saddening for every right-thinking person, but especially for the one who has heard and witnessed all the facts just described and who is entrusted with the handling of the legal order and official decrees. If we look into such actions, what harmful consequences can we take from them? I will try to explain my thoughts to you simply:

- 1) If an Aeltester in the church excuses members who have been punished for a crime by order of their Mayor who has done his lawful duty, is not this teaching the congregation to be disobedient to the law and the authorities? Oh, how sad it is that this evil and perverse spirit, which can bring us into misfortune, has taken root among us.
- 2) Whoever has seen or heard of Wiens's behavior against the authorities, as I have, must admit that it was rude, defiant, disobedient and contrary to our principles. Is not the congregation thereby likewise taught to behave against the authorities in the same way? And is it then the duty of an Aeltester to act in this way, and to stir up his congregants against the lawful authorities? I believe that the Holy Scriptures teaches us otherwise.
- 3) It is also the duty of a clergyman to punish liars. But what does Wiens do? He denied his words spoken in front of several witnesses to the H. President of the Guardianship Committee; "I will not be silent", in the assembly of all Aelteste and preachers. So, he thought it was acceptable to boldly lie and so he teaches the community that lies do not harm, and
- 4) To appoint a deputation to abolish the punishment of criminals and for this purpose to collect money and signatures, from such people who often deserve corporal punishment. These people relish the thought that we are Mennonites and cannot be punished. Our community will not accept this and will continue to fight against it as far as St. Petersburg. All this does is to highlight the madness. All this must sadden a right-thinking person. The disadvantage and loss for our community for many years to come is too clear.

Would it not be far better for our congregation if, for example, the punished would come to the Aeltester and complain to him that he had been physically punished by the secular authorities and that the Mennonites can't be physically punished. Then the Aeltester would answer him; Behold, how often have I taught you from the pulpit, be obedient to the gospel, how often have I punished the same (not physically), but you didn't listen, now you have fallen into the hands of the authorities. Now I cannot help you, for one who isn't obedient to the gospel, will run afoul of the authorities. Who is to blame now that you have been punished? No one but you yourself. This, I believe, would work on the obstinate and recalcitrant to convince him that he would not be supported in his mischief, and that the Aeltester hates the offenses and crimes as much as the District Office. Yes, I believe I can be convinced that then these crimes would be reduced to a minimum, and the authorities, both secular and clerical, would be able to perform their duties with far more enthusiasm than before. The time has not yet come for order to come into effect in our country, but I do not yet despair and hope that in time it will also come into effect in our country; all that is lacking is patience.

But so that a better spirit may enliven us all, let us implore our God and Father in heaven. In this important matter, I have only mentioned my thoughts in bits and pieces, but you, dear friend, will find the sticky stuff. According to your judgement you may give this letter to everyone to read, I do not want to make a secret of it, although I feel well that I have written it very imperfectly and very incorrectly and must not expose it to the criticism of learned men.

Farewell, with brotherly love your friend,  
**Abraham Toews**

The whole incident with Aeltester Heinrich Wiens was probably responsible for undermining the reputation of the Molotschna Mennonites with the government; but fortunately, the men like Cornies and Toews, who were at the top of the civil administration at that time, mitigated this harmful influence of the Aelteste Warkentin and Wiens, as we can see from the received letters of commendation and the High Visits from the Imperial House. The government seemed to want to ignore the harmful work of the Aelteste, because in the civic and economic spheres they were doing so much better.

At the end of the forties and beginning of the fifties there was a strong movement in the Gnadenfeld congregation. One part of the congregation believed that they could prove that their Aeltester Friedrich Lange was leading an unchaste life and called the other Aelteste to help. The other part of the congregation, not believing this about their Aeltester, called the Guardianship Committee to help them retain him. The Guardianship Committee demanded from the Aelteste that they should act together in such incidents and bring the matter to a conclusion.

After long debates in the community, the following decision of the Aelteste was finally reached on April 7, 1851:

We ask the District Office to send this letter of ours to the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, as a response to the same's regulation of February 6, 1850 under No. 22, with the addition that we fully recognize and agree with the Gnadenfeld congregation that the congregations of the Molotschna Mennonite District stand in mutual consultation and support of the entire Church Council, i.e. in a kind of subordination, as much as it appears most necessary, in spiritual matters in difficult cases that may arise.

Signed by the Aelteste:

**Bernhard Fast, Benjamin Ratzlaff,  
Heinrich Toews, Peter Wedel, Dirk  
Warkentin**

The aforementioned decision of the Aelteste caused some dissatisfaction, as it was thought that the Aelteste had thereby elevated themselves to the authority of a consistory. However, if one looks at this resolution impartially, one must admit that it is quite harmless, which, if applied correctly, could have been taken as a guideline without any harm to the welfare of the community. It is true that the word "subordination" is used somewhat inappropriately, but fortunately it is very clearly stated what this subordination consists in, namely quite simply in an advisory assistance.

By this advisory council, the Aeltester was declared unworthy by the community.

Explanatory Note. If the Aelteste do not help in an advisory capacity, but, as some facts prove, in their lust for power they prefer to pass judgments and try to subordinate communities in need of help in such a way that they have no voice, no recourse, as for example in the letter of June 11, 1860, then again not the rationale decision of the Aelteste, but the imperiousness of the Aelteste and the shameful abuse of this decision bear the whole blame for all the misery that is being caused.

## 2 - The Ohrloff Barley Dispute

You have profaned me among my people for a few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed those who should not have died and have spared those who should not live.

a)

The dissident party, which was strengthened in the time of the separation of the churches, never gained traction while Cornies was in charge. It was, however, always well-nourished and had to content itself in the meantime with secretly circulated papers in which the efforts of Cornies and the Committee President, H. v. Hahn were criticized, and all those who approved of their efforts were called the blind followers of Cornies. When Wiebe had resigned from his office due to illness and David Friesen took the helm, this spirit of hatred, which had been held in check for so long, was allowed to rear its ugly head and to let the smoldering hatred burst into flame. This opportunity was sought and found in the Ohrloff Barley Dispute, and from the course of this Dispute one can see how a quite insignificant matter can become great and ruinous in its consequences. It is only because of these consequences that this dispute is recounted here in as brief a form as possible, for the matter in and of itself would not be worth mentioning if it had been handled properly.

In the spring of 1858, Peter Janzen, an Anwohner of Ohrloff, had rented a piece of land from another Anwohner, Klaas Friesen, plowed it and sowed it with barley. At the urging of his stepfather Siemens, Friesen again rented this land to another resident, after Janzen had already rented it.

a.) Ez. 13:19

Janzen, aware that he had rented the land first, did not take any notice of it, but cultivated it. Now with the help of Siemens and the Village Mayor, Thomas Wiens, who took the side of the last tenant, Janzen was forbidden to harvest his barley so he turned to the District Office. But since the Village Mayor had to explain the matter to the District Office and his declaration was given as if the last tenant was the first. The District Office decided, because it accepted the statement of the Village Aeltester as truthful, that the one who had not sown the barley should harvest it and pay Janzen for plowing and sowing. However, since the bill for plowing and sowing was not completed to the satisfaction of the Janzen, the Lichtenau Kirchenvorstand wanted to try to end the dispute. But since the Village Aeltester Wiens was a member of the Ohrloff congregation, the Lichtenau Church Preacher Heinrich Neufeld also invited the Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand in an attempt for resolution. But since Janzen was not satisfied here either, he went again to the District Office and, as it turned out later, had said in his statement that in the council organized by the Lichtenau Preacher Neufeld, that Aeltester Fast had made the land lessor Friesen confess that he had rented the land to Janzen first. That Friesen made this confession was true, but fortunately or unfortunately, the Village Mayor Wiens as well as the Lichtenau church preachers wanted to postpone acting since it was assumed that the Ohrloff Aeltester Fast would not give a report about this resolution attempt to the District Office, because this was a matter of the Lichtenau Board [*Verstand*], which had given its report. The last request submitted by Janzen caused the District Office to ask Aeltester Fast to pursue the matter of the confession received from Friesen and to end it if possible. This could not be done, because most of the people involved were members of Lichtenau congregation, but he asked the Mayor Wiens, whom Fast had heard that he had entered into negotiations that contradicted his official submission, to end this matter if possible. The Village Aeltester again went to mediation, but could not bring the matter to an end. On June 14, 1859, all parties involved including the Village Aeltester Fast were invited to the District Office, but since the Village Aeltester was ill, he could not travel there, but informed the District Office of the true facts, as they had emerged in the conference organized by the Lichtenau Preacher Heinrich Neufeld, in the following letter.

**To the District Office in Halbstadt**

**Declaration**

According to the invitation of the 7th of this month under 131 we declare that the known dispute of the Ohrloff residents Peter Janzen and Klaas Friesen can only be a clerical matter if the necessary confession is to be obtained from one or the other person, but Friesen answered the question of Peter Janzen at a council organized for this purpose by the Church Preacher Heinrich Neufeld in the Ohrloff church. Well Clas, you do confess that you have rented the land to me, he answered a very clear yes, which hopefully was heard and understood by several. The mediation of the District Mayor and some private persons, who have testified to this, was to the effect that Friesen should pay Janzen 20 Rubles, to which the latter agreed, the former, after he had repeated the above confession, but later recanted it and did not pay. He had also confessed earlier to Ohm Kornelius Wall, who had occasioned to question him about it, because he himself had not heard the Wall remark (because of his distance from the speaker), that father Siemens had pressured him greatly. A later mediation, which is also available in writing in the District Office, where Friesen or his stepfather Siemens agreed to pay half of the debt of the damage calculated by the Mayor's Office, again Janzen did not accept. Thus, according to our understanding, the matter is a purely civil matter and as such cannot be submitted to the Kirchenkonvente for a decision, so we can do nothing more on our part than to ask the District Office to bring this matter, which is getting increasingly worse due to the length of time, to an end as soon as possible and to consider this short declaration sufficient for what a hastily called meeting would offer.

Tiege  
January 13, 1859

Aeltester: **Bernhard Fast**  
Preachers: **Harder, Isaak**

This letter was not well received by the District Office and the Lichtenau church preachers, because they had reported to the District Office that the matter was finished and settled. Since they didn't want to have contradictory submissions in the District Office, after a few days the District Mayor sent Johann Neufeld of Halbstadt (brother of the Lichtenau church preacher) with the above letter to the Ohrloff Aelteste with the request to take it back and to report again for what purpose the conference was held (thus something completely without substance) and that it was not necessary to go into the mentioned mediation and Friesen's confession. Since the Ohrloff Council was well aware that it had given the true facts in this letter,

it did not want to accept such an exchange of files and, as it became clear during the further course of the matter, should not have accepted it, but because the District Mayor had the messenger say at the same time that the whole matter was ended with this exchange and that the Ohrloff Council would not be involved in any further way. This Council, not suspecting anything bad, thought that the District Office might want to put an end to the whole matter by returning the incorrect petitions submitted by the Preacher Neufeld and the Village Aeltester, and went along with this exchange of files.

When it was now possible to remove the submission of the Ohrloff Council from the office, things turned out differently. Quite unexpectedly for the Ohrloff Council, the spirit that had made so many futile attempts to seize the rudder was revived. One believed now to have found a long-awaited starting point for a revenge for Warkentin and Wiens <sup>1)</sup>. In order to put this revenge into action, the Village Mayor now made a report about the Ohrloff Deacon Kornelius Wall to the District Office, as if he had initiated the matter again after it had been completed, although Wall had done nothing at all in the matter. The fact that the deacon had heard from Friesen himself that Father Siemens was actually to blame for the whole thing was too much, so that a quite senseless report had to be made, as if the deacon had instigated a finished matter and had pushed Friesen to this confession, although it was only the same thing that he had already confessed before several witnesses (in the council). Even if this was all contradictory and quite senseless, it was enough for the District Mayor, and the brother of the church preacher, who exchanged the letter to cover the Mayor's tracks, helped that the District Office on January 31, 1859 sub No. 1014, the Ohrloff Council requested that the Deacon Wall be held responsible for his irregular behavior, whereby the Council would not fail to direct its attention primarily to whether Wall could continue to his office after all this, all the more so since a good part of the trustworthy <sup>2)</sup> in the congregation might expect an energetic intervention from the Church Council, and demanded early resolution.

1) One was not afraid to say freely in private meetings, in which even the District Mayor participated, that now Warkentin and Wiens should be avenged.

2) The District Mayor labeled those who supported the mayor's untruthful submissions as trustworthy. They were his allies.

Now the intentions of the Lichtenau preachers and the District Mayor were clear to the Ohrloff Council, because now, after several years of unchallenged authority, the District Mayor believed that he had reached a level from which he could dictate clerical punishments and demand reports on their execution, and he called the disturbers of the peace in the congregation the trustworthy. The Ohrloff Council, which could not understand how the Village Mayor could come to such senseless accusation, invited him as well as the deacon to the Aelteste council on February 26, 1859, in order to find out, if possible, whether personal matters were the reason for such accusation and to bring them to reconciliation in that case. Their speeches concerned the negotiations between Janzen and Friesen because of compensation, at which negotiations at the request of the Village Aeltester also the Deacon Wall and the merchant Heinrich Reimer who had been present and since now Wiens and Wall did not agree in their presentations, also Reimer was still invited to the Aelteste council. These two, Reimer and Wall, testified and Wiens testified that Friesen had confessed in his presence that he had first rented the land to Janzen and that he, Wiens, himself had ordered Friesen to satisfy Janzen and that he had awarded the latter 20 Rubles. Wiens confessed before the entire Ohrloff Council and before Reimer and Wall (i.e., 6 witnesses) that he had based his denunciation of the deacon on the fact that the people in the village said that Wall had stirred up a finished matter anew, and the innocence of the deacon was clearly confirmed here.

On March 21, 1859, the District Office invited the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, but a three-hour discussion was completely fruitless, because the District Mayor rejected the testimony of 6 witnesses and still believed the story of the Village Mayor, who, in the District Office always said the opposite of what he had confessed in the presence of the Ohrloff Council.

Since the District Mayor had already decided that something had to be done in the matter of the Lichtenau Kirchenvorstand, even if it was only a deacon for two Aelteste for the time being, he brought this matter before the entire Kirchenkonvent and held a conference with them without the Ohrloff Konvent, in which the District Mayor succeeded in getting the Aelteste to agree completely with him! In a second general conference held on May 4, the declaration of the Ohrloff Konvents was not heard, but the 6 witnesses were characterized as liars and the Village Mayor Wiens as truthful.

This conference is one of the darkest stains in the history of Molotschna Mennonites. The District Mayor had raised himself to the level of the presidency of the Church Aelteste and they could not and would not do anything other than his bidding. The subordination of the Aelteste was complete, and for several years, until the government not only settled this Barley Dispute, but also, as the course of history proves, the Church Dispute, which was occurring at that same time, and took such a tolerant position in the controversy surrounding the separation of the Mennonite Brethren that the activity of the District Mayor as the President of the Aelteste went unnoticed.

After the mentioned memorable general conference held on May 4, the Aeltester Fast called a congregational meeting for May 27, 1859 and presented the whole matter to it. The congregation asked the Aelteste Wedel, Ratzlaff and Lenzmann, who had no members involved in this matter, as follows:

### **Congregational Resolution**

**To the Honorable Church Aelteste,  
Peter Wedel in Alexanderwohl,  
August Lenzmann in Gnadenfeld,  
and Benjamin Ratzlaff in Rudnerweide**

The Church Aeltester Bernhard Fast explained to us today that at the last Alexanderwohl conference, because of the Ohrloff Dispute, the order was given to inquire of our congregation whether we still wish to retain Deacon Kornelius Wall as such, and the Kirchenkonvent also wants to have this resolved. The congregation, however, is not authorized to decide on this matter until it has been impartially investigated by the Kirchenkonvent with the involvement of the witnesses concerned. Furthermore, what is even more important to the congregation, our Aeltester, as he has shared with us today, is declared to be a liar, because his testimony is not believed relative to the confession of Klaas Friesen. Therefore, the congregation feels compelled to seriously ask the Kirchenkonvent, the sooner the better, to impartially and thoroughly investigate this matter on behalf of our Aeltester Fast and Deacon Wall, with the involvement of the relevant witnesses, and then finally decide.

Signed by: Board and  
the congregation  
of the Ohrloff church  
May 27, 1859

Mennonite principle has always been as it follows here:

The various congregations of Mennonites, even the smallest, are each autonomous, i.e., each congregation legislates for itself and administers its affairs independently. Only in a few cases, when a congregation cannot cope with its affairs or grievances, does it ask the help of the councils of other congregations, which then assists that congregation with advice or encouragement, but which acquires no power to end the matter in question by a decision, but if its advice and influence are not able to resolve the misunderstanding that has arisen, the termination is left to time and to changing views and circumstances.

That this principle was not entirely foreign to the Aelteste in the early fifties in the matter of the Gnadenfeld Church Dispute seems to be evident from the decision of the Aelteste of April 7, 1851. Now, however, when the Aelteste had placed themselves under the direction of the District Mayor, they no longer seemed to remember this principle, on which the Mennonite faith has been based since the founding of these congregations.

According to the 300-year existence of the cited principle, the authority of the Mennonite clergy is not to pronounce decisions in the affairs of other congregations, but to provide help to needy congregations through advisory assistance. The Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation, however, because in this matter not only the spiritual Council, but also the entire local authority stood against them, went much further in their congregational decision to give authority to the aforementioned three Aelteste that they demanded from them not only an advisory assistance, but a thorough investigation and conclusions. The Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation was well aware that they would have to submit to this decision without fail. But these Aelteste were not authorized by the aforementioned decision of the Aelteste in 1851, nor by the ever-existing principle of the Mennonites, but only by this congregational decision given to the three Aelteste in this extraordinary way. But these Aelteste probably suspected that if they were to submit to undertake this investigation and make a decision, they would not be able to decide according to the wishes of the District Mayor and the Lichtenau church preachers, and therefore preferred to reject the request of the congregation.

From this written refusal, the Ohrloff Council saw that these Aelteste either did not understand the whole matter or did not want to understand it. The Ohrloff preachers went to these Aelteste and explained the whole thing to them, who, however, had to come to the conclusion that a decision would not be in the interest of the District Mayor, etc., and again decidedly rejected the request for an investigation. After repeated written requests on the part of the Ohrloff Council and after they were also requested to do so by the Agricultural Association, or rather had received permission, they finally came to Ohrloff on July 28, 1859, where the matter was then negotiated in the church in the presence of all those involved, and the result of this investigation was given in writing by these three Aelteste to the Association, of which the Ohrloff Council received a copy through the Aeltester Lenzmann. This letter reads:

The Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent wrote to us on July 17 and repeated the same orally when we were there, that Thomas Wiens testified to his [*Ohrloff*] Kirchenkonvent, that Klaas Friesen confessed to Reimer and Wall, that he had really rented the land to Janzen first. Wiens himself admitted before his Council that he had ordered Friesen to satisfy Janzen. He admitted to his Council that he had orchestrated the matter and, since he no longer had time, had instructed Reimer and Wall to conclude this settlement, for which he had suggested to them the price of compensation. He admitted to his [*Ohrloff*] Kirchenkonvent that the deacon's complaint was based only on general village gossip. Thomas Wiens, however, does not admit that he confessed this to his [*Ohrloff*] Kirchenkonvent. According to God's Word that all things should be based on two or three witnesses, we cannot but believe the testimony of the Kirchenkonvent. With the heartfelt wish that the Lord will have mercy on us, we sign ourselves as follows,

Alexanderwohl,  
August 2, 1859

Aelteste: **Benjamin Ratzlaff,**  
**Peter Wedel, August Lenzmann**

Because, according to the above letter, there was no guilt at the Ohrloff Council, the whole thing was finished so far that only Wiens should admit his mistake, to which he was also invited, but he did not appear, therefore, the congregation was called together on October 27.

When the District Mayor was informed by the members of the congregation, who from the beginning had supported Wiens in his untrue submissions, of the congregational meeting that had been called, he hurriedly summoned the Aelteste (except Ohrloff) to the District Office, and after he had briefed them, a conference was appointed for October 25, the day before the Ohrloff congregational meeting, to which the Ohrloff Council and also the Deacon Wall and the Halbstadt church leader Johann Neufeld were invited. Instead of rejecting all further attacks on the Ohrloff Council, even the Aelteste, who had investigated the matter and justified the Ohrloff Council by their report to the Association, were tempted by the District Mayor to get involved in new difficulties and to rise up against the Ohrloff Council, but nothing was done at this meeting.

The Ohrloff Council had what it needed for its justification, namely the letter of the three Aelteste, and at this conference rejected all attacks, because the whole matter had reached its conclusion through the aforementioned letter, but repeatedly offered the hand of reconciliation to all and wished that everything that had happened be thrown into the sea of oblivion, but in vain, because the goal that had been set for the time being, the overthrow of the deacon, had not yet been achieved. The next day, the congregational meeting was held and the congregation passed a resolution:

### **Congregational Resolution**

As is known, Thomas Wiens could not prove the accusations about the Deacon Kornelius Wall against the Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand, but he testified that Klaas Friesen had confessed. Reimer and Wall had testified that he had really rented the land to Janzen and that he had immediately ordered Friesen to satisfy Janzen, indeed, he himself confessed that he had conducted the matter and since he had no longer had time, he himself had instructed Reimer and Wall to conclude this settlement and had also suggested to them the price of the compensation, and also confessed, that the deacon's report was based only on a general village chatter and subsequently disputed this again, and therefore the Ohrloff congregation, in order to gain certainty, presented the matter to the Kirchenkonvente for impartial investigation and resolution, so the latter, because the Agricultural Association also requested its mediation in writing, has now found in a specially held conference that Wiens, vis-à-vis the Kirchenvorstand, whose testimony according to the statement of the Holy Scriptures is based on witnesses, is nevertheless has the right of appeal. He immediately reported this to the local authorities.

Consequently, the congregation, following the advice of the Kirchenkonvent, has sincerely tried in every possible way to bring him, Wiens, back from this and to reconcile him with the Kirchenvorstand and the congregation again, but unfortunately without any success, while Wiens continues to burden the Kirchenvorstand with all kinds of obvious untruths without any reason and treats it with the greatest disrespect at every opportunity.

In view of this, the Kirchenvorstand and the congregation cannot continue to have any fellowship with Thomas Wiens in clerical matters. We sincerely wish that every member of our congregation, and especially the spiritual council, should the opportunity arise, to try to lead him, Wiens, back from his aberrations and to instill in him the duties of a member of the congregation.

From the Ohrloff Church  
October 27, 1859

Aeltester: **Bernhard Fast**

Preachers: **Abr. Isaac, Johann Dueck,  
Kornelius Penner, Jakob Martens,  
Johann Harder, Franz Isaac, Johann  
Regier Penner, Jakob Martens, Johann  
Harder, Franz Isaac, Johann Regier**

The signatures of the members of the congregation follow

The foregoing congregational resolution was sent to the Kirchenkonvent, the District Office and also Thomas Wiens and apparently everything was now calm, but instead of Wiens confessing his error, after 2 ½ months' notice he sent a long letter to the Aeltester Bernhard Fast, in which he calls the conduct of the same a Pharisaic tribulation and completely rejects his clerical censure. "By the same Lord and Savior, for whom you, honorable Aeltester, have planted me, I will sue you. He shall and will judge and also repay our malicious ways and doings." With the return of this long diatribe, the Aelteste wrote to Wiens, without going further into the content of his writing, that he might well consider that before the judgment seat of Christ it would not depend on our rights and that he might nevertheless take his presumption to heart. He, for his part, did not want to sue him, but prayed to the Savior for him that he would have mercy on him. After Wiens had given his farewell sermon, he was invited again [*by the Ohrloff Council*] to find out whether he had been readmitted [*by the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Council*]; but since this had not yet happened, the Aeltester demanded that he be given notice whether he had been readmitted. However, since Wiens' hoped for readmission had not happened, the Aelteste summoned the congregation to a meeting on February 24, 1860.

After this meeting was announced, immediately an Aelteste Konvent was held again on October 27, 1859, of course without the Ohrloff Council, and from the same the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Council received just before the congregational meeting the following unusual letter:

### **To the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent**

Beloved Brethren in Christ!

That the Ohrloff dispute was brought to the attention of all Kirchenkonvente because of Deacon Kornelius Wall, and that Deacon Wall was unanimously declared guilty of this dispute by all the assembled Aelteste and preachers, is known to you from the conference held at the beginning of May in Alexanderwohl, where you were also present. Nevertheless, it must have become sufficiently clear to you from the conferences already held on this matter that it did not occur to us to want to interfere with your congregation, but rather that we strove, as much as we could, and advised you, that this dispute, which, the longer it continues, the more complicated, obstinate and pernicious it becomes, should be settled as soon as possible, conscientiously and without regard to the person, by the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent and in the Ohrloff congregation itself, bearing in mind the biblical passages of 1 Cor. 6:5, James 3:17 and Matt. 5:9.

However, since all our efforts and work in this well-meaning intention have so far been unsuccessful, in that the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent has not taken any peaceable steps toward either its congregation or the District Office that would lead to an end to the dispute, and since this dispute has in the meantime only become more difficult and more troublesome, we have been placed in the unpleasant position that in the interest of general order in our Mennonite brotherhood that, since we are firmly convinced that Deacon Kornelius Wall has made himself unworthy of his office in the church congregation through his guilt in a dispute that has brought so much harm, we now expect that you, in community with your dear congregation, will relieve him of his office. By repeatedly assuring you that it pains us deeply in our souls to have been urged to take this measure, we do not consider it superfluous to remind you of the decision of the Aelteste of April 7, 1851, which obligates us to take this very step, and which literally reads thus: "We request the District Office, etc." (See page 122).

We wish and ask you to make this declaration of ours known to your dear congregation and wish with all our heart that the Lord, who is a God of peace and order, as in all the congregations of the saints, may succeed in 1 Cor. 14:33 to help you further to cordial harmony and peace in the congregation, as with our colonial superiors, according to His grace. Yes, the God of peace and love be united with you and with yours in the Lord.

Alexanderwohl  
February 22, 1860

**Benjamin Ratzlaff, Peter Wedel,  
Heinrich Toews, Dirk Warkentin, August  
Lenzmann**

The Ohrloff-Halbstadt church was not deterred by the above letter, which was contrary to the decision of August 2, 1859. Wiens, since he accused the board and the entire congregation of the greatest injustices and not only persisted in his earlier lies, but had even invented new ones, was separated from the congregation by this congregational meeting according to the word of the Holy Scripture; "Expel the wicked person from among you" 1 Cor. 5:13. A second decision was to elect a deputy for the infirm Aeltester Fast, in accordance with his long-cherished wish, for which the next March 3 was determined.

The Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand responded to the above letter received from Aeltester as follows:

**To the Molotschna Mennonite Kirchenkonvent,**

In response to the letter of today's date from the five Church Aelteste Warkentin, Toews, Ratzlaff, Wedel and Lenzmann, made known to the Ohrloff congregation on the 22nd of this month, the same has taken into consideration with its board that the verbal decision of the Kirchenkonvent of May 4, 1859 for this very reason, and because the District Office also referred to it, the Ohrloff congregation urgently requested the Kirchenkonvent to properly investigate and decide the matter immediately with the involvement of the relevant witnesses. This also happened and the written result of August 2, 1859, of which we received a copy through the honorable Aeltester Lenzmann, shows no blame on the part of either us or Deacon Wall, and we are confident that the higher authorities will protect us in this matter.

That we gladly submit to the clerical as well as the secular authorities at all times, we have clearly proven with this, because we

did not want to judge for ourselves from the outset, but left the judgment to the Council. If the Kirchenkonvent has been too hasty with the first decision, although it is said that it is based on the Holy Scriptures, on which all our later actions are based and from which the Church Aelteste are now again completely diverting without reason, then we ask repeatedly with this that the matter be investigated more thoroughly with the involvement of the relevant witnesses, whatever our wish may have been, but in the meantime not to expect the Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand and the congregation to act completely against our principles and conscience.

The Ohrloff church  
February 24, 1860

Church Aeltester: **Bernhard Fast**  
Preachers: **Abr. Isaac, Kornelius Penner,**  
**Johann Dueck, Jakob Martens,**  
**Johann Harder, Franz Isaac,**  
**Johann Regier**

The Aelteste did not respond with a further investigation, but the restless members, supported by the Aelteste, rebelled against the election of the deacon, because the congregation did not remove the deacon from office according to the letter of the five Aelteste but on the contrary, they put Wiens under ban. Now the main blow should be struck, because just while the congregation was gathering for the election, the board received a letter from the restless members of the Ohrloff congregation and one from those of the Halbstadt congregation. It was calculated by the District Mayor and the Aelteste that if these letters were to arrive with signatures just at this moment, then confusion would probably arise and the congregation would finally be brought to the intended splintering. This was expected all the more since the Ohrloff church must have known that behind the restless members, the District Mayor and the Aelteste lay in ambush with all the power at their disposal. After the reading of these two letters agitating against the election, the Church Preacher Johann Dueck, as the secret representative of the troublemakers, appeared with all his eloquence and all possible proofs of his loyalty and attachment to the congregation, with a proposal. He suggested that now, when the congregation was meeting for the purpose of the election, this election would already be held here in the Ohrloff church; but that it would contribute a great deal to calming things down if a special day were set aside for the election in the Halbstadt church, until which day the result of today's election could remain a secret. This speech had a somewhat depressing effect, but one of the preachers, who clearly saw through this ruse, stepped in.

Dear Ohms and brothers, the entire congregation decided on February 24 that the election of the Aelteste should take place here in Ohrloff today, and this decision of the congregation, which is already assembled for this purpose, must be finally carried out today if we do not want to cause a disruption of the congregation ourselves. The oppressive mood, which had already taken hold of some of those present during the speech of the Preacher Dueck, was immediately eliminated, the Aeltester and all the preachers went into the assembly and the decided election of the Aeltester was carried out, the Church Preacher Johann Harder from Blumstein was elected as Aeltester.

What the Church Preacher Dueck intended with his speech was that then, if one goes for a second time, the restless members would be given leverage by announcing the Ohrloff election result to finally elect the elders, in which election they (and only they, because the others were involved in the election in Ohrloff) should of course participate and would also have had an easy game. If the implementation of this plan had succeeded, then the intention of the District Mayor and the five Aelteste, namely the destruction of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt church, would have been achieved, because the election could have hit no one else but the Preacher Johann Dueck, because he, despite a week earlier (on 24 February) Dueck was not only a secret supporter, but also as hidden a leader of the unruly party, and worked together with the church builder Johann Neufeld, the District Mayor and the Aelteste, whereby also, if this election had succeeded, the acquisition of the Halbstadt church would have been easy.

But that all attempts failed and the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation in all its actions referred to the decision of the Aelteste of August 2, by which it also hoped to find just protection with the government, and could not be intimidated by anything, was too much for the District Mayor and of course also for the Aelteste. Now the three Aelteste who had investigated the matter made it clear to the Ohrloff Council, or more precisely, they wanted to make it clear to him that the matter of Thomas Wiens and that of the deacon were two completely different, completely unrelated matters and that their letter of August 2, 1859 did not have the meaning that the [*Ohrloff*] Kirchenkonvent found in it. This letter, in which the Aeltester want to make two from one thing, reads:

### **To the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent,**

In response to your letter to the Molotschna Mennonite Kirchenkonvent dated February 24, we, the undersigned, feel obliged to make the following declarations to you and the Ohrloff congregation in all love, in order to prevent any misinterpretation and confusion of meaning, as much as we can.

In your above-mentioned letter you accuse us of being wrong in our judgment of the Ohrloff disputes, in that; 1) at the conference in Alexanderwohl on May 4, 1859, we declared Deacon Wall guilty in your Ohrloff Barley Dispute, which decision you, as being better informed of the matter, could not have accepted, whereas 2) our letter to the Agricultural Association of August 2, 1859, blames neither the Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand, or the congregation, or the Ohrloff Deacon Wall, and finally 3) you accuse us of distracting from this second decision, which is based on the Holy Scriptures, for no reason at all.

It will certainly still be fresh in your memory that the meeting in Alexanderwohl on May 4, 1859, was presented with the sole question of whether Deacon Wall was guilty or innocent in the Ohrloff Barley Dispute, and that after ample consideration of what was presented there for and against him, we unanimously pronounced him guilty. If the other dispute of the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent with the Ohrloff Mennonite Thomas Wiens had been presented to us there for evaluation, we would have pronounced the same verdict there as we did later in writing on August 2, 1859, because the dispute in which the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent got into with its member Thomas Wiens does not have the remotest influence on the guilt of Deacon Wall in the Ohrloff Barley Dispute. \*)

On July 19th of this year, we received a letter from the Agricultural Association and then on the July 28th a letter from the three Ohrloff Church Preachers Penner, Harder and Isaac addressed to us. Only the dispute between the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent on the one hand and the Ohrloff congregation on the other hand was presented to us for examination. The first dispute it is a matter of Thomas Wiens denying that he said to the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent what the latter claims to have heard from him, and there we have evidence at hand

\*) The Aeltester Lenzmann and the author of this writing were quite inventive, as if any knowledgeable person of this matter would believe that these were two different things; but one had to try to wriggle out of it, one had spoiled it too much with the letter of August 2, 1859 at the meeting with the District Mayor present.

to the contrary, orally and later, in writing, on August 2, 1859 against the Agricultural Association, simply stating that in this case, that Thomas Wiens has no witnesses refuting his [Ohrloff] Kirchenkonvent.

According to God's Word that all matters should be based on two or three witnesses, we must believe the testimony of the Kirchenkonvents. However, we have been careful not to pronounce any further judgment on Thomas Wiens, nor to allude to the guilt or innocence of the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent or the Ohrloff congregation or Deacon Wall in your Ohrloff Barley Dispute, for the simple reason that all three Councils had already pronounced a judgment on this last dispute in Alexanderwohl, and we three did not want to participate in this Barley Dispute without the other two.

We freely confess that it is completely incomprehensible to us and astonishes us how you and the Ohrloff congregation met in the church at Ohrloff on February 24 of this year can interpret our simple declaration that in the dispute of the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent that we are blaming Thomas Wiens about the single point mentioned, according to God's Word we cannot believe anything else but the statement of the [Ohrloff] Kirchenkonvent, can be expressed in such a way that through this declaration we do not blame the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, nor the congregation, nor Deacon Wall in the slightest. Our simple statement is so clear that we do not see how it will serve you, in this isolated dispute regarding Thomas Wiens, to find protection with the high authorities everywhere. \*)

Thus, however, you have not provided us with the proof that you willingly submitted to the clerical and the secular authorities, but these words of yours, as well as your actions, prove something completely different. So that neither the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, nor the Ohrloff congregation, nor anyone else can misunderstand our previous and also the current statements about the Ohrloff Disputes and interpret them differently than they are, we once again state most definitely that we make a distinction between a Dispute in which the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent is involved and the Dispute in which the Ohrloff congregation is involved, and the Barley Dispute, which arose and was ended in the Lichtenau congregation and which the Ohrloff Deacon Wall, thereupon at the beginning of all and now in the community with the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent and a large part of the congregation against the District Office continues.

So, when we wrote to you and the Ohrloff congregation again in February 22 of this year that Deacon Wall, through his guilt in the Ohrloff Barley Dispute, etc., had made himself unworthy of his office in the church,

\*) This hope was completely confirmed, because the authorities did not allow themselves to be made to see two out of one, just as the Ohrloff Council did not allow themselves to be made to see two out of one.

we did not in any way deviate from our resolutions and judgments about the disputes in the Ohrloff community, as you accuse us of doing, but we based this on our statement about the guilt of Kornelius Wall in the Barley Dispute, which we had already given verbally in Alexanderwohl on May 4, 1859, before you and the members of the congregation, and we adhere to this statement according to our innermost conviction. Of course, it could not occur to us to attribute all the blame for the Ohrloff Barley Dispute to Deacon Wall alone, and for this very reason we declared that Deacon Wall was unworthy of his office through his guilt in this dispute. And just as little does this repeatedly pronounced judgment of ours stand even in the remotest dependence or relationship, thus also in no way in contradiction to the Ohrloff Barley Dispute to the written verdict pronounced on August 2, 1859, concerning the other point of dispute which Thomas Wiens mentioned above. If the Deacon Wall is guilty in the Barley Dispute, it does not follow in the least that no one else can be guilty in other disputes or even in the same dispute, and if Thomas Wiens has no witnesses to his [Ohrloff] Kirchenkonvent, and according to God's Word one must now believe the testimony of the [Ohrloff] Kirchenkonvent, it does not even follow with certainty that Thomas Wiens is a liar, but only that he cannot legitimize himself as innocent without witnesses, but it does not follow that no one else can be guilty in other disputes. By the way, we hope that the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent will keep the same principles and the same certainty by which it was guided when it signed the decision of the elders addressed to the District Office for transmission to the Guardianship Committee on April 7, 1851. In this case, there can be no question on the part of the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent or the Ohrloff congregation that we, in conjunction with the other council members of this area, would allow the Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand and the congregation to act completely contrary to their principles and conventions.

Finally, we assure you in sincere love and friendship that we, mindful of the words of Holy Scripture Philippians 2:3, James 3:14-18, are not willing to argue with you or the Ohrloff congregation, which however would be unavoidable if we wanted to continue an exchange of correspondence with you about your disputes \*) since you proved to us only too conclusively by your letter of February 24 that you either cannot or do not want to understand our statements, however clearly expressed, or that you interpret them in a way to which we have not directed them, and that you are

\*) It would have been better for you to conclude with the letter of August 2, 1859, then they would have been spared an ignominious retreat.

do not accept any advice given to you by us in your disputes \*).

By confirming our previous judgments and pronouncements in your two Ohrloff Disputes and, as we hope, by explaining in a generally understandable way what we have really judged and what we have not judged, we believe that we have now reached the point where we can reasonably consider our written correspondence with you about your Disputes to be ended, and we leave it to your conscience to clarify for you what position you now take towards all other Councils of this Mennonite district.

Alexanderwohl  
March 10, 1860

**Ratzlaff, Wedel, Lenzmann**

The three elders wanted to upend the understanding of the situation on which the Ohrloff Council and congregation had based all their actions, because if their letter was invalidated, they naturally wanted to declare all actions of the Ohrloff Council as invalid. This concern later proved to be true. The Ohrloff Council could not quite see from this letter whether these Aelteste themselves were already suffering from the confusion of meaning that they wanted to prevent, or whether they really believed to see clearly and only the Ohrloff Council did not know and understand its own matter, or whether ignorance and malice were paired with each other. Instead of the Aelteste, as already noted, having written their letter of August 2, 1859, the final letter of the whole dispute, they tried to invalidate it themselves. However, they had made a big mistake with their investigation and decision and consequently also the conclusion of this matter with the District Mayor. But the matter was not be finished yet, no victim had been punished yet and if they had succeeded in invalidating the August 2 letter, they would of course have sought additional victims. They would then have believed that they were completely entitled, and even obliged, to follow through.

The Ohrloff Council answered this confusing letter from the three Aelteste:

To the Molotschna Mennonite Kirchenkonvent.

After the general conference in Alexanderwohl on May 4, 1859, where we, the entire Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, had given the Village Mayor,

\*) The Ohrloff Council understood very well, but despite all the Christian love of the Aelteste, could no longer accept advice or judgment from them.

Thomas Wiens, notwithstanding the fact that we had already been presented as liars to the District Office before the unlawful accusation of Deacon Wall was made known on February 10 of the same year the Council summoned the congregation and presented the matter to them. The congregation, however, unanimously said that it could not and would not judge the matter in any case, but that it wished without further ado that the Kirchenkonvent impartially investigate and decide the matter immediately with the involvement of the witnesses concerned, as has been the rule for similar cases in our country since 1851. Because of this request, the Church Aelteste came to Ohrloff, investigated the dispute and gave the local authority the written decision that, since according to Holy Scripture everything must be based on two or three witnesses, they, the Church Aelteste, believe the statement of the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, although Wiens had not admitted his earlier confession.

On this decision, which was requested by the congregation unanimously, completely impartially, in accordance with the order, all our resolutions and subsequent actions have been based since October 27, 1859, and also our last petition to the entire Kirchenkonvent of February 24 of this year, which is why we cannot possibly respond to the declaration of the three Aelteste of March 10, 1859, but ask again from the bottom of our hearts in the interest of the whole to come to our aid in accordance with the decision, so that the sixteen members of the Ohrloff congregation, mostly relatives of Thomas Wiens, who trust in protection from outside, and rebel against the congregation at every opportunity and seek to disturb the order, may be led to obedience and under the assistance of the Lord, all may be reconciled again.

Blumstein  
April 8, 1860

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**  
Preachers: **Penner, Isaac**

Instead of complying with the above request, namely to help bring the disobedient members to obedience, the Aelteste invited these members as well as the Ohrloff Council to Alexanderwohl on April 15, because they believed to have a good support among these members against the Ohrloff Council. The Ohrloff Council traveled there, but since no suitable steps were taken that could lead to peace, but rather the invited members were strengthened by misleading speeches of the Aeltester Lenzmann, e.g., that they, the Aelteste, hadn't thrown off their night caps and were only half awake, [*“noch nicht mit der Schlafmütze geschossen seien”*], to even greater disobedience against the board and the congregation, the Ohrloff Council withdrew.

After a short discussion, a congregational meeting was called for June 3, and the decision was:

"The congregation has decided to give all members who do not comply with the earlier decisions about Thomas Wiens and the election of the Aeltester a period of reflection until the 9th of this month, and if after that, as soon as the spiritual board has consulted with them about it, they still do not want to join the congregation and recognize the above-mentioned decisions, the congregation can have no church fellowship with them. The mistrust of the congregation against the Preacher Johann Dueck and Deacon Bergmann has unfortunately increased by their non-appearance at today's meeting of the brotherhood, for which reason the congregation unanimously wishes from the bottom of its heart that, in order to eliminate this, both of them may also co-sign this resolution, or otherwise be put on an equal footing with the above members."

This community resolution, signed by the board, was sent to those concerned and they were invited to consult, but in vain, they still believed that the District Mayor, the Aelteste, etc. would finally succeed in splitting the church and that they would then receive the Preacher Dueck as Aeltester and the Halbstadt church for their exclusive use, and they now turned again to the Aelteste, and this time also the Preacher Dueck and the Deacon Bergmann. The Aeltester wrote:

To the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent,

With the feeling of the sincerest regret, we must once again inform you through two petitions submitted to us on the 9th of this month namely first from 11 members of the [*Ohrloff*-] Halbstadt church and second from the Church Preacher Johann Dueck and the Deacon Peter Bergmann, that the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent not only will not take appropriate steps to eliminate the difficulties in the Ohrloff congregation, which are due to its own fault, according to the clear statements of the Holy Scriptures, but that, on the contrary, it is trying to mislead the members who support it by one-sided ideas and to put itself together with them in a kind of defensive position, which is incompatible with the teachings of our Savior and His apostles. Profession and duty, therefore, urge us to consider the following, with all love, but also with all the seriousness that the matter requires:

- 1) It has not occurred to us to want to interfere in your church affairs without being called on to do so, but after we have been called upon by the District Office and by yourselves to

judge the grievances with in the Ohrloff congregation and to re-establish a Christian orderly state in it, we were not able to avoid this heavy duty by virtue of the Aelteste resolution [*Aeltesterbeschluss*] of April 7, 1851.

- 2) Since the time when the Ohrloff congregation, through its Konvent, claimed the judgment and decisions of the other Kirchenkonvente of this district, the congregation, instead of its Kirchenkonvente, by virtue of the decision of the Aelteste of April 7, 1851, has been subordinate to the latter, insofar as it has to submit to the decisions and judgment of these united Kirchenkonvente in order to regain its independent and well-ordered position as soon as possible.
- 3) The present position of the Ohrloff congregation therefore entails that the latter, as long as the discord within it has not been eliminated and it is subordinated to the judgment and decisions of the other Konvente, may not take any steps at its own discretion in its disputed matter without the advice and express permission of these Kirchenkonvente. \*)
- 4) Since the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent has not seemed to be aware of its present situation and standing for some time, in that it has recently allowed itself various actions which are incompatible with its real situation. We hereby declare according to duty and conscience that we consider the punishment of Thomas Wiens in Ohrloff as invalid and as not having taken place, and we request the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent to report this to Thomas Wiens without delay, so that we also have to make the request to the Ohrloff Council about this, that the congregation members of both churches, who, like us, do not agree with several actions of the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, will not be held responsible before the rest of the congregation, nor will any punishment be imposed on them.

We hope and expect that the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent will carry out both our conference resolutions and our earlier resolution of February 22 of this year, because in the contrary case it would only make its own situation more dangerous and the rift in the congregation more disastrous.

From the Conference at Gnadenfeld  
June 11, 1860

The Church Aelteste:  
**Toews, Warkentin, Ratzlaff,  
Wedel, Lenzmann**

\*) This was the highest step Lenzmann ever climbed.

The Ohrloff Council responded to the above-mentioned letter:

**To Church Aelteste:  
Peter Wedel, August Lenzmann and Benjamin Ratzlaff**

When these three Aelteste, in their decision of 2 August 1859, which was requested by the Ohrloff congregation in accordance with the decision of the Aelteste on April 7, 1851, and which was submitted to the local authorities, says that they believe the oral and written statements of the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, by which the accusations against Deacon Wall become completely groundless, and if this congregation now also believes its board, can one then still rightly say that the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent, is misleading its congregation and working itself into a defensive position? Wasn't the congregation then completely in the right and obligated to establish order and to admonish the obvious disturbers of the peace, several of whom went so far as to travel around in the congregation and tried to extort signatures against the congregation, by appropriate clerical means according to our creed, and where this was not sufficient, also to punish them?

If now the Aelteste, after they themselves have already acknowledged this earlier, now declare it null and void by referring to an earlier verbal statement made long before the investigation and decision, and based on this, the relatives and followers of Thomas Wiens here in Ohrloff, as well as in Halbstadt, inflict on us all imaginable offenses and seek to disturb order everywhere. Even the Preacher Dueck and Deacon Bergmann now also find it in their interest. The Preacher Dueck has acknowledged the banning Wiens as perfectly in accordance with the Word of God. Can the welfare of a congregation be promoted this way and can the Aelteste say that the difficulties are our fault, since we are convinced that we only wanted the truth?

The Ohrloff congregation, after the whole spiritual board had already been publicly declared liars, cunningly deceived with the exchange of their petition to the District Office and driven by the accusations against Wall, did not carelessly submit to the judgment of the three Aelteste. It fully realized the importance of the moment, and also that it had to comply with its pronouncement, and that is why it kept to the decision given to the local authority and acted without being disturbed by the later deviations from the established decision.

Because the decision is counteracted without any reason and the discontented members are strengthened in their actions against their own congregation and the discord is perpetually maintained, we see ourselves compelled to ask our government for paternal support and protection. This campaign is obviously aimed at taking revenge on the Ohrloff community, or as the Lichtenau Aelteste and preachers say in their contemptuous description of the actions of the present Senator v. Hahn, as the blind followers of the deceased Cornies, and therefore it is necessary to come to a thorough understanding of the whole situation before peace and order can be restored.

Until the government decides on this, we will stand by the last congregational decision of March 3 and hope to God that, despite the efforts of individual members to confuse others, as some have already done, will also see the truth and return to order.

Blumstein  
June 22, 1860

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**  
Preachers: **Abr. Isaac, Kornelius Penner, Jakob Martens, Franz Isaac**

Now the two Aelteste Bernhard Fast and Johann Harder asked two congregational members, Philipp Wiebe and Johann Cornies, to travel to Odessa to ask the government for advice and protection, because the existence of the Ohrloff church was endangered without higher protection. This written request to Wiebe and Cornies with a declaration of the facts reads as follows:

**To the Members of the Ohrloff church, Philipp Wiebe and Johann Cornies**

In response to the letter from the Molotschna Mennonite District Office of January 31, 1859, No. 1014, in which the Deacon Kornelius Wall is accused of having persuaded the stepson of Kornelius Siemens, Klaas Friesen, to make a confession appropriate to his interests, and on the basis of which the local Anwohner Peter Janzen had come back with a petition, the Church Aeltester Bernhard Fast replied on February 10 to the District Office that the Deacon Wall had conscientiously declared to the [Ohrloff] Kirchenkonvent that he had neither persuaded Klaas Friesen to a confession appropriate to his interests, nor could anyone prove that he had in any way persuaded Peter Janzen to submit a petition to the District Office. Thereupon, under No. 1510, the District Office also demanded that the plaintiff give a truthful statement, which,

according to our report of February 26, No. 1510, this could not be done, but we hold that Wall must to be convicted of a false statement of conscience by thorough evidence. After that we had a discussion in the District Office, but could not come to a resolution, because apart from the report of the mayor there was no evidence or witnesses that could make it possible to declare Deacon Wall guilty. We answered an earlier invitation from the regional office on January 7, before the first formal accusation about Wall reached us, on January 13. Soon thereafter, Johann Neufeld, a resident of Halbstadt, came to us on behalf of the District Mayor and wished us to give different report, because, as he said, the District Office would then immediately end the matter and we would no longer have any part in it, which is why this exchange of reports was to be kept secret. When we later heard that the Mayor's Office had compensated Janzen in the amount of 15 Rubles 7 ½ Kopek and had certified this with his signature, we concluded that the District Office was of the same opinion as us and had come to a very different conclusion regarding this matter. We believed that everything was finished and refrained from any further assessment of what had been done, until everything was stirred up anew by the above-mentioned letter of January 31.

At the aforementioned meeting in the District Office, we explained that the Mayor Wiens had admitted to us, that Klaas Friesen had admitted to Reimer and Wall that he had really leased the land to the Janzen first. Wiens admitted that he had ordered Friesen to satisfy Janzen, he admitted that he had managed the matter, and since he no longer had enough time, he had instructed Reimer and Wall to conclude this settlement, for which he had suggested the price of compensation. He admitted to us that the deacon's complaint was based only on general village talk. The District Office informed Mayor Wiens of this and he claimed that he did not owe his clergy an answer. The District Office then brought this matter to the entire Kirchenkonvent and the latter, considering the presentation of the District Office and the Association, without paying attention to the fact that there were six of us who could truthfully testify to it and that the mayor stood alone, nevertheless declared the deacon guilty and belittled the entire Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand. A written report regarding this meeting was not made.

Deeply saddened by this, we wrote to the District Office on May 8, 1859, in order to try everything that would not burden our conscience, that if the statement of the Lichtenau preachers should apply in this matter, namely that with the reconciliation in the congregation, Janzen's claims for compensation, which he claimed immediately and which the Mayor later brought to him, were cancelled, the deacon was guilty, asked for his forgiveness and the unfortunate dispute might come to an end.

The District Office, however, very unkindly sent us back to our own congregation, saying that for the last time it was up to us to dispose of Wall ourselves, and therefore the Ohrloff church board immediately called the congregation together and presented the matter to them for the first time.

The congregation unanimously said that they could not and did not want to pass judgment in this matter, but wanted the Kirchenkonvent to impartially investigate the matter immediately with the involvement of the relevant witnesses and decide, as in similar cases according to the rule of 1851.

After this request written by Deacon Wall and Church Aeltester Fast, signed by the members, the Church Aelteste came to Ohrloff, investigated the dispute in the church and gave the local office a written decision that, since according to Holy Scripture everything must be based on 2 or 3 witnesses, they, the Church Aelteste, believe the statement of the Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand, although Thomas Wiens had not acknowledged his earlier confession.

Since October 1859, all our clerical decisions and actions have been based on this written decision, which was unanimously and impartially requested by the congregation, with which we have rejected the later repeated attacks of the District Office led Kirchenkonvent and in the first reply have asked in vain for a further investigation and in the second in the interest of the whole, come to our aid, so that the 16 members of the Ohrloff congregation, for the most part relatives of Thomas Wiens, who trust in protection from outside, rebel against the congregation at every opportunity and try to disturb the order, may be led to obedience and everything may be reconciled again under the assistance of the Lord. But not only did we ask in vain, but based on renewed attacks by the [Ohrloff] Kirchenkonvent, the relatives and followers of Thomas Wiens have also taken the same position against our congregation in the Halbstadt congregation.

We cannot help but notice that especially at one of the conferences all the clerical and secular leaders voted in favor of reconciliation, but the District Mayor did not respond, although he admitted that mistakes had been made on the part of the District Office, and without considering the results of the investigation, they still insist that Deacon Wall is guilty. Since these disputes have kept our minds in constant turmoil for two years now and everything suffers from it, we ask you, since you as members of the Ohrloff congregation who are perfectly familiar with the matter,

to seek gracious advice from our fatherly authority [*väterlichen Behörde*], since the existence of the Ohrloff congregation is already endangered without higher protection.

The Ohrloff Church Aelteste: **Bernhard Fast, Johann Harder**  
June 30, 1860

Wiebe and Cornies left on June 3 and returned on the 13th and after a few days, a member of the Guardianship Committee, the Honorable Councillor Joseph Lange arrived in Molotschna and, after hearing both parties, invited the Aelteste to Halbstadt on July 22. Here H. Lange explained to the Aelteste that the deacon had not done anything that made him guilty, and this had such a strong effect that during the peace negotiations there was no more talk of such guilt. The H. Court Councillor asked the Aelteste and the District Mayor on behalf of and in the name of the H. President to establish peace, which was initiated by the Aelteste on the same day, after they had been dismissed. The Aeltester Harder demanded the withdrawal of the letter of June 11, and the five Aelteste demanded that the congregation release the members excluded from church fellowship without further ado. Since the Aeltester Harder could not agree to this, he organized a general meeting of the church on July 26 and the congregation decided:

The spiritual board and the congregation do not wish to remember the personal insults and offenses that have been inflicted on us from inside and outside of the congregation for a long time. We only want to restore order in the congregation in accordance with the vowed and privileged confession of faith, i.e., that is, the members of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation are to confess, without regard to person, their wrong, which was deliberately committed against our congregation in the matter of Thomas Wiens and both elections of Aelteste, in order to then be able to reconcile with the congregation. It is quite obvious that according to God's Word we are not allowed to release these members, because our confession of faith expressly forbids it, and therefore would have the saddest consequences for the whole, because in such a way we would encourage irreconcilability and all order would cease, which has already been recognized by all the Church Aelteste and for the very important reason that any similar release is forbidden, unless someone converts to another denomination.

Furthermore, in the interest of all church congregations of the Molotschna Mennonite District, the congregation wishes that the Church Aeltester Dirk

Warkentin and Heinrich Toews, to revoke in writing the document published about us and our board, with which we cannot agree and by which the discord in recent times has been particularly renewed, and to inform their congregation of this, so that not only in our congregation, but also in the whole Mennonite brotherhood, in the true sense of the word, all further discord will be abolished and a real unity established, \*) in order to promote from now on all together the welfare of the whole and thereby also to thank our wise fatherly government for the indulgence shown to us since the settlement!

The church in Ohrloff,  
July 26, 1860

the original signed by  
the Church Board and the Members

This community decision was presented to all Aelteste (the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde was also present at the request of the H. Councillor) in Alexanderwohl on July 27, but the acceptance of the same was prevented by the Aeltester Lenzmann, because he did not yet want to descend from the height to which he had climbed when the letter of June 17 was composed. Since the conclusion of peace was still prevented by Lenzmann this time, the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde asked the Lord Privy Councillor not to consider him and his community responsible for the fact that peace had not been established, and that His Highness might also help us to end the dispute, which was so detrimental to the whole. Since the H. Councillor knew that the Aeltester Lenzmann had prevented the conclusion of peace, he disregarded him, but visited the other Aelteste on August 3 and 4, and on August 5 there was again a general conference of Aelteste, with the following result:

All Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite district wish that the members of the Ohrloff and Halbstadt church, who have been excluded from the church community, as this congregation decided on July 26, wish to realize that they have not acted correctly towards the church in matters of Thomas Wiens and in the election of Aelteste, in order to be able to reconcile themselves with their own church. If someone does not want to return under such conditions and the other Aelteste agree to accept such members, the Ohrloff and Halbstadt congregation will not object. In conclusion, the Church Aelteste want to forget everything that has happened in the past.

\*) This document was confiscated and sequestered by the District Office.

in this matter occurred and in the name of the Lord the love care.

This was acknowledged by 6 Church Aelteste in the conference on August 5,

1860 certified with written signature of  
Church Aeltester **Johann Friesen**

At the request of the Honorable Councillor certified, by  
Aeltester **Johann Harder**

Because what is acknowledged here by the Aelteste completely contradicts their letter of June 11, Aeltester Lenzmann could not yet descend from his height, therefore only six Aelteste signed. Because Lenzmann made it difficult for the other Aelteste to sign the above letter, they asked the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, Johann Friesen, to sign it, that he would certify their recognition with his signature. The H. Councillor, who knew well that the District Mayor had nurtured and led this whole dispute, demanded the report on the resolution of the same, not from the Aelteste, but from the District Office, which is why the Aelteste were obligated to report on their peace agreement to the District Office, and this was done as follows:

To the District Office in Halbstadt

All disputes arising from the Ohrloff land matter are ended, and everything that happened in this matter, we Church Aelteste want to forgive and forget and in the name of the Lord build and plant love among ourselves, which we testify with our signature.

From the Alexanderwohl conference  
August 5, 1860

The Aelteste:  
**Benjamin Ratzlaff, Peter Wedel,  
Heinrich Toews, Dirk Warkentin,  
August Lenzmann, Johann  
Friesen, Johann Harder**

Only the two Aelteste Friesen and Harder felt obliged to thank the H. Councillor and presented him with the following letters of thanks before his departure:

**Honorable Privy Councillor!**

Thanks to your benevolent care, we Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite District succeeded with God's help yesterday,

On the 5th of this month, have settled the sad disagreements. This circumstance urges me to express my heartfelt thanks to you, H. Councillor, in writing in the name of the Ohrloff community, with the obedient request that you kindly forgive us for the trouble caused to you, and also to express our most humble thanks to Your Excellency, the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee. All our efforts shall be directed, with the Lord's assistance, to show ourselves worthy of this grace of the high authority.

With this faithful assurance, I have the honor to be Your Most Worshipful Servant  
**Johann Harder**, Church Aeltester

His Honor, Member of the Guardianship Committee,  
Councillor Lange

Since, through God's mercy and your blessed efforts, the long-awaited peace between the local communities came about yesterday, I feel compelled, on behalf of my congregation, to offer you my heartfelt thanks, hoping that you will graciously accept this simple proof of our love and gratitude, and at the same time request that our gratitude and submissive attitude be brought to the attention of His Excellency, the H. Chairman of our Guardianship Committee. In our intercession for the welfare of our gracious father we will not fail to remember you, as well as all our high patrons, lovingly and always strive to show ourselves increasingly worthy of the grace we have experienced so many times.

Neukirch,  
August 6, 1860

**Johann Friesen**, Aeltester

The members excluded from the clerical community received a copy of the recognized peace treaty with the following accompanying letter:

**Beloved friends!**

We are sending you a copy of the decision of the last conference in Alexanderwohl, from which you will see that reconciliation between the Aelteste has been established, which we owe to the grace of God and the efforts of the benevolent authorities. Before this reconciliation, there was a meeting in Ohrloff and it was decided not to let the members who were excluded from the church community go unreconciled and without confessing their wrongs in order to prevent disorder. This meeting took place on July 26 of this year, and you will find the wish of the Aelteste expressed in this document

that you may see your err and reconcile with the congregation according to the clear resolution of July 26<sup>th</sup>. You will see that the guilt of Thomas Wiens has been acknowledged by this very resolution. By informing you of this, we wish that after the conclusion of our external matter, the order of our internal affairs may now proceed.

From the conference in Tiegenhagen  
August 11, 1860

Church Aeltester  
**Johann Harder**

The Aelteste, because they had not taken a copy of the resolution in Alexanderwohl on August 5, partly due to lack of time, partly due to discomfort about the unexpected course of the matter, received the following letter from Aelteste Friesen and Harder, enclosing a copy of it:

**To the Church Aelteste**  
**Dirk Warkentin in Petershagen, Peter Wedel in Alexanderwohl,**  
**Benjamin Ratzlaff in Rudnerweide and Heinrich Toews in Pordenau**

In order to be able to prevent the spreading of incorrect representations of the decision in the last conference held on the 5th of this month, you will not be unhappy to receive a copy of the enclosed resolution, from which everyone can convince himself that the err of the excluded members and the guilt of Thomas Wiens are recognized by the Aelteste.

August 11, 1860

The Church Aelteste:  
**Johann Friesen, Johann Harder**

This short letter with said copy of the conference resolution was not well received, as the following letter proves:

**To the Church Aelteste Johann Harder and**  
**Johann Friesen**

With the return of the two writings, we declare to you that we have not fully acknowledged the letters \*) signed by Ohm Friesen, which is also proof that we did not sign it ourselves. But whoever of your members should have failed in this matter, which has been in dispute for a long time, be it in words or otherwise, then it is only right that he should listen to his conscience and acknowledge this before the writings, Kirchenkonvent.

\*This writing was not signed by Friesen, but he had certified with signature that it was recognized by the Aelteste.

As far as the matter of Thomas Wiens and the election of Aelteste is concerned, however, we did not grant the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent the right to force a confession from the members that they must admit their wrongdoing in this matter, since we ourselves did not recognize it as a wrongdoing. It was decided that the members who did not want to be moved with love by the Ohrloff Kirchenkonvent to return to their congregation are free to go to another congregation. By the way, the dispute is over with us and we will therefore cease all unnecessary correspondence.

From the Conference in Pordenau  
August 23, 1860

The Aelteste: **Ratzlaff, Toews,  
Wedel, Warkentin**

The Aelteste Harder and Friesen replied:

We are least of all inclined, and even find it inappropriate, to resume correspondence about this unfortunate dispute which, with the help of the Lord and our fatherly authority, came to a final settlement in the general conference on the 5th of this month, for which reason, since we must all conscientiously remain faithful to the same resolution for the glory of God and our own welfare, it will hopefully serve for the general good to return to you, dear fellow ministers, your letter of the 23rd of this month. We sincerely ask you not to give way to the impulses of individual selfish persons at the expense of truth and peace, and thereby to steer the matter into an even worse course for the whole. This is what your fellow servants wish from the bottom of their hearts and hope to God.

Blumstein  
August 26, 1860

**Johann Friesen,  
Johann Harder**

Some members of the congregation, who had initially allowed themselves to be seduced by the leaders in order to increase the number, soon returned to the congregation when they saw themselves betrayed, but the others, who let it come to the point of exclusion from the church community, were excluded from the Lichtenau-Petershagen congregation in September 1860, among them the Church Preacher Johann Dueck and the Deacon Peter Bergmann, and especially Thomas Wiens. On the other hand, members of Lichtenau, who did not agree with such admission and had generally recognized the right in the dispute, joined the Ohrloff community, and thus the Barley Dispute was finally ended after 2 ½ years, but true peace was not established, because the defeat suffered by the District Mayor too great for him to accept.

Immediately after the departure of the Honorable Councillor, he went to the Aeltester Johann Friesen and sought to invalidate this peace agreement, but the Aeltester was not the man to be tempted. The Aelteste wrote that they had not fully accepted the decision, and soon these peace conditions were disputed and acted against, and the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Council was not at all surprised when the District Mayor made new attacks on it. The District Mayor could not easily get over the fact that the deacon had slipped away from him and he had to find a new victim. He thought that he had found a new victim in the fact that Abraham Isaac, a preacher of the church, had facetiously misrepresented the situation by telling another that the matter was completely different, and the District Mayor was, of course, mentioned because he had been the one who was running the whole dispute. The reprimanded person took advantage of this and denounced Isaac as the preacher who had made unjust accusations against the District Mayor. Since the District Mayor was fond of interfering in church affairs, he summoned Isaac to the District Office, but Isaac refused to appear, saying that it seemed improper to him that those preachers who reprimand disobedient members or teach the misguided about the true meaning of a joke should be called to account for it in the District Office. On December 1860 No. 9153 a strict invitation was issued to Preacher Isaac, and that if Isaac found the summons inappropriate, it would be legally obliged to take appropriate measures for the enforcement of this order. The board of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt community saw through the intentions of the District Mayor, and the Aeltester wrote:

To the District Office at Halbstadt.

After the Church Preacher Abraham Isaac was again summoned by the District Office by a letter of the 24th of this month. We find ourselves compelled to report to the District Office that, as the Guardianship Committee has instructed us, in civil matters we recognize and have shown that the church preachers are in complete subordination to the District Office. In the present case, however, which is a clerical matter, such an accountability would have to take place before the Church Council. As far as the way of declaration of the Preacher Isaac himself is concerned, the Ohrloff and Halbstadt Council is prepared to take responsibility.

However, at present, because we are exposed to renewed attacks at every opportunity, we feel it necessary to ask the high authority for protection and, in the interest of the whole, for an early order that peace and order be established among us.

Blumstein  
December 27, 1860

On behalf of the Board  
Aeltester **Johann Harder**

On the same day, the board of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt [church] council wrote:

**To the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers in Odessa**

The care and efforts of Councillor Lange succeeded in getting the Church Aelteste to reconcile the sad discord on August 5, of this year. Unfortunately, of the District Mayor, who immediately after being informed by all Church Aelteste of the end of the disputes, traveled to the Aeltester Friesen and sought to reverse the recognition of the specially drafted peace agreement, but also in acting against them, and thus all order was suspended. Since not only the undersigned Kirchenvorstand, when it rebukes members who are provoked to disobedience, is therefore exposed to renewed attacks, but since in general the discord is nourished and the well-being of the whole is endangered, we see ourselves at present in the necessity of asking our fatherly authority for protection and, in the interest of the whole, for an early order that peace and order be established among us.

Church Aeltester:	<b>Johann Harder</b>
Preachers:	<b>Abr. Isaac, Kornelius Penner, Franz Isaac, Jakob Martens, Aron Rempel, Johann Rempel, Franz Klassen</b>

What the District Office received from the Guardianship Committee in response to the above request was not made public, but the Church Preacher Abraham Isaac was left in peace. That, however, because it had still not cost the Ohrloff community a sacrifice, the desire for revenge remained unsatisfied, and a new sacrifice was contemplated, is told us in the following part of this section.

### 3 - The Halbstadt Church Dispute

The stone church built in Petershagen in 1810 had become in need of repair and the congregation had already decided to repair it when, through the persuasion of the present church leader Johann Neufeld in Halbstadt, they decided to build a new one in Neuhalbstadt. Neufeld gave the congregation the promise that the construction would not cost more than 100 Rubles for the fireplace and at most 10 Rubles for each member of the congregation. The congregation agreed and in May 1852 an elected building commission, with the help of the congregation, demolished the old church and transported the old wood and the stones from the walls to the new construction site in Neuhalbstadt. Without the knowledge of the community, Neufeld changed the construction plan, according to which the building would become more expensive and this overage would be charged to the growing families and gradually paid off. This caused discontent in the community, but the laying of the foundation from the stones of the old church was accomplished in October of that year. In the course of 1853, there was no construction and on February 22, 1854 it was decided to stop the construction for the time being because unrest caused by the war. In June 1856, after the end of the so-called Crimean War, Neufeld made an offer to the congregation that he would build the church on the laid foundations at his own expense and then, after the completion of the construction, the congregation members could give voluntary contributions, but he would sacrifice what was missing. When he was told that the contributions might not be enough for him, he answered: "It will be enough!" The condition was, however, that the community had to provide the building material. Although some members did not really trust the whole thing, this offer was accepted and the church was completed and on December 28, 1858 it received its clerical consecration. Because the Aeltester Bernhard Fast was ill, the other Aelteste were invited to this consecration and the Aeltester of the Gnadenfeld community, August Lenzmann, gave the consecration speech. The actual words of consecration were as follows:

I consecrate this house by virtue of my office as a called and ordained minister of the Word to be a place of peace, a place where the glory of the Lord dwells and a temple where the congregation of the redeemed come together and sing praises to the Lord

and his grace and truth, your most holy name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I consecrate this house as the place where He feeds and waters us with His body and blood into eternal life. Where the songs of praise and thanksgiving of our hearts and lips ascend to the throne of grace, where the Lord through his servants blesses the church as his elect. I consecrate the place where the Word of God is read and interpreted, for the preaching of the Law and the Gospel, so that faith may come from preaching, and preaching by the Word of God, and thus for testimony before Him who is, and who was, and who is to come. I consecrate this church, which shall henceforth bear the name of Jesus, in the name of God the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! Amen.

On January 12, 1859, the builder of the church, Johann Neufeld, handed to the Aeltester of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation, Bernhard Fast, a handwritten letter which reads as follows:

Since the good Lord showered us with so many blessings in the years 1855 and 1856 during the time of war, and some of our brethren have suffered in comparison during the war. We have resolved, since the construction of the church in the craftsmen's village of Halbstadt would be burdensome for many families to bear in equal parts the costs by make even deep sacrifices. I have voluntarily declared myself to let the construction be carried out by me alone, without the congregation putting up any initial money. But the congregation is obliged to provide the materials on a regular basis and when the church construction is completed, the board will make a general collection from the members, as much as is in their power, i.e., voluntarily, according to the principles of tithing, encouraging them and making it an obligation, for which we will sacrifice what is lacking.

January 2, 1858 [1859?]

**Johann Neufeld**

Not long after the delivery of this document, Neufeld complained that he had to pay 200 Rubles for transports, which according to the agreement the community was obliged to provide. Although the board knew that Neufeld should not be required to make this expenditure, because not only the members of this municipality, but also the civil district municipality was obligated to provide these services, and thus he had sufficient transports at his disposal. In order to prevent disputes, these 200 Rubles were refunded to him, but now Neufeld wanted to settle the construction with individual members of the community, who, in his opinion, were to blame for the fact that he had to pay for the transportation. The family would have to pay the same amount as the whole construction costs.

Although he had been compensated for the damage, he had suffered by allegedly not providing the transports, he still wanted to punish these people with a significant sum of money and the community could not agree to this. In order to put an end to all the quarrels, wealthy community members, who valued peace more than money, decided to be willing to help him in this, too, which gave the board the opportunity to promise Neufeld the money that would be due to the families in question in the case of such a settlement.

As we have seen in the account of the Barley Dispute, a congregational meeting was held on February 24, 1860, and Neufeld was invited to the same. He came to the preacher's room before the opening of the congregational meeting and the board promised him the money he had asked for, whereupon he immediately appeared before the entire congregation and himself declared to them that he was satisfied and that his concerns had been met. When later the Aeltester Harder, elected on March 3 and confirmed on March 17, wanted to transfer the money granted by wealthy members (the 200 Rubles had already been paid on September 2, 1859) as well as voluntary contributions to the Ohrloff congregation to June 9, 1860, Neufeld rejected this money with the words: "I won't accept it, I want to have the church," to which the Aeltester answered: "The church belongs to the congregation."

In order to understand how Neufeld came to this demand despite his own declaration (on February 24) that he was satisfied and that his concerns had been met, one must remember from the account of the Barley Dispute that Neufeld and the Church Preacher Johann Dueck joined the restless party because of the election of the Aeltester and the treatment of Thomas Wiens and now nothing less was planned than to acquire the new church for this party as well as in general for the Lichtenau-Petershagen congregation. On July 14 Neufeld announced without the knowledge of the board of the Halbstadt congregation that because of elections in the church that Sunday meetings were to be stopped. When this was announced to the Aeltester, he wrote to Neufeld on July 19, asking him to stop painting under the existing conditions. Neufeld turned to the District Office and the latter demanded on the 23rd from the Aeltester Harder that he should not put any obstacles in the way of the completion of the church, which caused the Aeltester to explain the following to the District Office:

To the District Office in Halbstadt.

As is known, Johann Neufeld undertook to build the church in Halbstadt in such a way that the members of the congregation would later give their contribution without any coercion. Before the church was finished, Neufeld gave cause for mistrust and therefore some members insisted on making the matter secure going forward. Neufeld, however, did not want this, but finished the construction and the church was handed over and consecrated. When the contributions were collected and the account was to be closed, Neufeld first demanded a sum of 200 Rubles which he had spent more than necessary because of the transportation of a materials, and secondly, he insisted on settling with individual members who did not agree with his conduct, and that they should pay him the whole construction cost, which the board of directors, of course, could not agree to, as it was contrary to the formal agreement. After that Neufeld made every effort to discourage and offend the spiritual board and to make the members of the community turn away from us, so that finally we were forced to call a congregational meeting and to present the whole matter to the community for evaluation.

Here, in the church, before the matter was discussed with the members, Neufeld united with the board, which, through wealthy members, was in a position to pay him not only the 200 Rubles but, in order to prevent all further disputes, also the other sum of money that he demanded, which is why Neufeld immediately appeared before the entire church and himself declared that the matter was finished.

Nevertheless, Neufeld has not agreed to a final settlement until this day, but, like the Preacher Dueck, continued to make new difficulties in other matters of the congregation, so that the congregation felt compelled to deny them spiritual fellowship until they realized their wrongdoing and reconciled with the congregation. In this state, after nothing had been done to the church for 1 ½ year, he recently took the liberty, without telling the Church Aelteste, to cancel the service and to paint the church, while the actual construction had not yet been billed and therefore new difficulties must be feared, because we do not even know whether Neufeld is doing this on his own account or expects the congregation to cover the costs. Neufeld, if he wants to make a sacrifice, is not forbidden in the letter of the Aeltester to paint, but on the contrary, the community would accept it with gratitude, but in the way he started it and, in the relationship, as he currently stands to the community, it should not be.

With this declaration of mine to the Molotschna Mennonite District Office, I ask you to humbly decree that Neufeld must follow his

promise made to the entire community, as we have already completely finished the matter with him, in order to also settle the church construction and to be able to put everything else in order with the community, which is very displeased about such a course of action. Should Neufeld, however, not keep his voluntary promise and not want to establish peace, the District Office would like to submit this correspondence to the H. Councillor Lange <sup>1)</sup>, as they have already requested the most important papers concerning this matter.

Blumstein  
July 28, 1860

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**

The District Office did not order anything, did not submit the correspondence to the H. Councillor, but everything remained quiet until the congregation made preparations for painting the church in the spring of 1861. This preparation caused the former building commission, which was controlled by those who had rebelled against the election of the Aeltester, but who had long since (since September 1860) been incorporated into the Petershagen community in the absence of Neufeld, to contact the District Office, and the latter wrote:

**Molotschna Mennonite District Office**

**To the Church Aeltester Johann Harder in Blumstein**

April 8, 1861, No. 3145, Halbstadt

The building committee of the Halbstadt church writes in a request to the District Office of 5th of this month, that, since disputes arose during the construction of this church building and through the entanglement of the same, after the church was quite finished, the benefactor who built it, with the members who helped the most, were banned in an unlawful manner <sup>2)</sup> and the Ohrloff community, their opposing party, wants to take the same as property and begin to paint it etc., before it is decided whether the church belongs to them or not. Therefore, the building commission, since the benefactor Neufeld is not at home at present, asks in his name for the order of this District Office, so that the Ohrloff party may not do anything concerning the ban of the church until the decision of this matter.

Informing you, honorable Aeltester, of this, the District Office requests you to follow up with your order, because

1) Lange was involved because of the Barley Dispute in Molotschna.

2) Exclusion from the church community is called expulsion from the congregation – an obsolete term.

in your letter to the District Office of July 28, 1860, you state that the church construction with Neufeld has not yet been settled, and that new work on it by other persons will only make the matter more complicated. The District Office asks to be informed about the success.

District Mayor: **David Friesen**

Deputy Mayors: **Johann Wiens, Klaas Wiebe**

The Aeltester replied:

#### **To the District Office in Halbstadt**

How the matter of the church building in Halbstadt has been concluded before the assembled congregation, the District Office has seen from my statement of July 28, 1860, and the congregation will continue to act accordingly, and therefore I kindly ask the District Office, as a result of the letter of the 8th of this month under No. 3145, to reject such unfounded attacks against our congregation.

Blumstein, **Johann Harder**, Aeltester.

April 11, 1861

Furthermore, Aeltester Harder wrote:

#### **To the Church Aeltester Dirk Warkentin in Petershagen**

As we see from a letter from the District Office, some of the members whom you have admitted into your congregation are making very suspicious attacks against our congregation in the name of Johann Neufeld of Halbstadt, concerning the Halbstadt church, accompanied by untrue accusations; but since such things would lead to great unpleasantness if continued, and you, beloved fellow Aeltester, are responsible for such unfounded attacks emanating from your congregation. This is why I sincerely ask that you do your part so that no new strife arises.

Blumstein

your fellow Aeltester **Johann Harder**

April 11, 1861

In the matter of the Ohrloff Barley Dispute, the Aelteste, as we have seen, were entirely subordinate to the District Mayor, and it was not difficult for him to persuade the Aelteste to take on this matter \*), which had already ended on February 24, 1860. The Aeltester now held conferences and on April 27, 1861, sent two preachers and a deacon to Aeltester Harder in order, as it must have seemed, to get clarity in the whole matter. These three

\*) When Neufeld told the congregation that he was willing and his cause was finished.

men convinced themselves from the files and oral declarations of the Aeltester that Neufeld had no claims to make on the church, but that the matter was completely finished. But because the District Mayor did not find it consistent with his and Neufeld's plans, but wanted to pursue the acquisition of the church with the help of the clerical powers, the report of the three delegates had to remain unheeded and a conference of the Aelteste had to be held, to which the Aeltester Harder received the following invitation:

**To Church Aeltester Johann Harder in Blumstein**

Since an entire conference of Aelteste has been arranged because of the Halbstadt church matter, you are requested to appear on the 3rd of this month, as Wednesday at 9 o'clock in the morning in Alexanderwohl in the church, in order to possibly conclude the matter.

Written at Waldheim  
Aeltester  
May 1, 1861

**Benjamin Ratzlaff,**

The two Aelteste Ratzlaff and Wedel had to be pitied that they were so weak as to be used as tools for the execution of such a plot, but the Aeltester Harder did not go to a conference where what had long been completed and not only understood by Neufeld and there, as the Aeltester Harder clearly foresaw, this matter was only becoming more entangled. He [Harder] saw the intent of Neufeld and cohorts to, if possible, to put a noose on him from which he would not be able to pull himself out. The Aeltester Harder sent the following letter to this conference:

**To the Church Aeltester Benjamin Ratzlaff**

The situation concerning the construction of the church in Halbstadt has been completely settled and concluded with Neufeld by the general brotherhood in the church in Ohrloff on February 24, 1860. If necessary, the entire board and all members of the congregation will sign, and therefore I request the Church Aeltester to ask the members of the congregation in Halbstadt and Johann Neufeld, to behave in such a way that he, in accordance with the promise made before the entire congregation, may receive the money still promised to him and not disturb the peace any further.

Tiege  
Aeltester  
May 3, 1861

**Johann Harder,**

The decision of this conference was reported by the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, Johann Friesen, as follows:

**To the Church Aeltester Johann Harder in Blumstein**

According to your wish, we report to you that the Church Aelteste in the general conference in Alexanderwohl on May 3 agreed that the church building dispute should remain as it was ended according to your report sent to this conference on February 24, 1860 in the church in Ohrloff with the then church leader Johann Neufeld.

Neukirch  
August 15, 1861

Aeltester: **Johann Friesen**  
Preacher: **Abraham Friesen**

Since the Church Preacher Johann Dueck worked to acquire the church to the best of his ability and generally made common cause with Neufeld and all members who had transferred to the Petershagen congregation, the Aeltester Harder asked the Aeltester Warkentin in a letter dated August 27, 1861 to instruct the Preacher Dueck that he should cease to use language which has a harmful effect on the congregations and which is contrary to the terms of the church building matter resolution between us and Neufeld, where Dueck himself was present, but also to what the Aelteste agreed upon in a conference on May 3, 1861, which, as we have learned from the Aeltester Johann Friesen in writing and from the Preacher Riediger orally, is a simple confirmation of our agreement.

Neufeld had already approached the Guardianship Committee on June 14, 1861, which consequently instructed the District Office to reach an agreement and end this matter together with the Aelteste and members of the Agricultural Association, for which purpose Aeltester Harder and some members of the congregation were invited to the District Office on October 6, 1861. However, nothing came of it, neither in the District Office nor in a conference held on October 17, because Neufeld now, since he had little prospect of obtaining the church, demanded his sacrifice back and therefore the following letter was issued in a general brotherhood:

The Ohrloff and Halbstadt congregation hereby resolves that, since the Church Aelteste did not take into account the agreement made on Aug. 5, 1860, we 1) in the matter of Thomas Wiens in Ohrloff must simply act accordingly, as 6 men conscientiously testify to him, Wiens, and the Aelteste Ratzlaff,

Wedel and Lenzmann have confirmed it in writing and 2) as far as Johann Neufeld in Halbstadt and the church have emerged from the whole matter, we will stick to it, as he himself has ended the matter in the church in Ohrloff in all our presence. In a word, we stick to what the Holy Scripture gives us as a guideline. If the other Aelteste wish to strive for real harmony on the basis of this, they may continue to discuss the matter with us together in this church and establish peace. If, however, they do not wish to take any step in earnest, but merely persist in what Wiens and Neufeld are stating without any evidence, we are forced to declare ourselves in due place about the accusations and oppressions levied against us and to leave further matters to the Lord.

Thus, done  
signed in the church at Ohrloff  
directors  
October 28, 1861

The original have  
by the spiritual board of  
and the members of the  
congregation

2 copies of the above congregational decision were sent to the Church Aelteste with the following accompanying letter:

**To the Church Aelteste**

As a result of the conferences held in the District Office, we held a general conference, the resolution of which I am sending you a copy.

October 30, 1861

Johann Harder. **Aeltester**

Quite unexpectedly, Aeltester Harder (the others also) received the following letter from the District Office with the following copy of a dispatch:

**Molotschna Mennonite District Office**

**To Church Aeltester Johann Harder in Blumstein**

No. 9337  
Nov. 1, 1861  
Halbstadt

The District Office is honored to send you a certified copy of today's telegraphic dispatch from the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee in the name of the District Office and the Church Aelteste.

District Mayor, **Friesen**

No. 3145. Received November 1.

M. G.

Telegraphic station

No. 2629

Submitted in Odessa on October 28th 7 a.m.

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Telegraphic dispatch  
words 46.

From Melitopol by mounted courier [*Estafette*] to Halbstadt District.

The Guardianship Committee has learned that there are negotiations in the Mennonite District about the removal of the Church Aelteste. Such action is hereby forbidden until further notice. Tomorrow I will travel to Molotschna.

President: **Hamm**

Right Secretary: **Martens**

Although the Ohrloff Barley Dispute had already ended on August 5, 1860 by agreement of the Aelteste. However, the Aelteste had completely disregarded this peace agreement and, even revoked it (see their letter of September 1860). If it is now a matter of removal from office, it must be remembered that this is not only a church matter, but also a matter of a new church. Since the above-mentioned peace resolution had been revoked, there was also the problem that the responsibility for this conflict had not been placed on anyone, and since the Aeltester Harder did not want the District Mayor and the Aeltester meddling in matters of the congregation and did not cooperate in the shameful oppression and mistreatment of the same, he stood in the way of all their undertakings. But who was standing here in the waiting room and who brought to the attention of H. President the plan of the District Mayor and the Aelteste who had been sucked into it, which was believed to be secret and yet had been discovered? This did not become known, but someone with a sharp eye was keeping faithful watch.

It was hardly conceivable that the Aeltester Wedel and Ratzlaff should have been involved in this secret plan beforehand, but it was also not necessary, because they were not allowed to do anything more than give their signatures, as for example on July 13, 1860, when the Aeltester were inaugurated. July 1860, when the Aelteste of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt community wanted to make their present position clear in their own way, because the District Mayor had entangled these Aelteste in his network to such an extent that they would have given their signatures for the imposition of the now designated scapegoat (the third one).

When the H. President arrived, the Aelteste received an invitation to meet on November 7 in the office of the H. Inspector, at 10 a.m. in the morning.

After urgent exhortations to establish peace, given by the H. President, the Aeltester promised that they would do so, and the Aeltester Wedel was immediately instructed by the others to determine a day and to invite them to Alexanderwohl for a conference. When this invitation went out and the District Mayor learned that they intended to hold a conference without him and without his permission, he prevented this conference with the consent of the Aeltester Warkentin, because H. President had already left and so the District Mayor could again completely dispose of the Aeltester, as he had planned for so long. Now the Aeltester were invited to the District Office on November 18, and the result of this meeting in the District Office was written by the Aeltester Harder to his members:

Beloved brethren!

Although it is well known to all of us that the church building dispute with Johann Neufeld took place on February 24, 1860 in the church at Ohrloff was completely resolved, i.e., just as he himself wished it. However, almost all of our members are aware that now Neufeld, despite his own written promise, still persistently demands a monetary payment and only as a result of such persistent demand by the declarations of several members, that peace is worth more than money, we are not only prompted, but also encouraged, to ask all members of our community for a further, but entirely voluntary contribution, in order not to leave the last and possible thing undone for the establishment of peace. The contributions can be listed below, but payment will only be accepted if this attempt of ours is successful.

Blumstein  
November 27, 1861

**Johann Harder**, Aeltester

Since the Aeltester had given the H. President of the Guardianship Committee the promise to eliminate all disagreements and after a month nothing had happened, and on the part of the other Aelteste no invitation was issued for this purpose, the Aeltester Harder wrote:

**To the Church Aelteste Dirk Warkentin, Peter Wedel,  
August Lenzmann, Heinrich Toews and Benjamin Ratzlaff**

When we think back to the day on which the Chairman of our Guardianship Committee with so earnestly and lovingly

sent us such urgent and, as you all know, deeply emphatic exhortations to resolve the disagreements that had existed among us for such a long time. We should keep the explicit promise given to His Excellency that we would put an end to all disagreements in accordance with His wishes at the time when His Excellency dismissed us. We wanted to eliminate what we so earnestly, so urgently requested and promised to do with our word of affirmation and handshake in a conference of the Aelteste at Alexanderwohl, for which Ohm Wedel was to determine a day and invite us. If we consider all this, we have to say that we have done nothing yet, then truly none of us will be able to calm down in this way, rather we must become fearful and anxious, and that not only because we have not been able to comply with the so serious wishes of the H. President. We do not respect the fact that we must be the most strenuous supporters and that, as a result, we must be disgraced before our high authorities for the present, but mainly because what is now being done by the oldest churches will be more or less decisive for the future existence of our entire brotherhood, and will in any case will have incalculable consequences.

Aelteste! You know very well how we were prevented from carrying out the strictest order of the H. President to us, "to eliminate the clerical disputes in order to be able to judge the church building dispute correctly", and prompted by this obstacle, I consulted with my congregation, and it was decided to ask the District Mayor to have the orders of the H. President be carried out. In a private conversation with him, he promised that in the future he would not prevent a conference of the Aelteste, but would himself see to it in his own part that the establishment of peace would be promoted as much as possible. As a result of this conversation, I have waited in vain for an invitation from any of the fellow Aelteste and therefore feel compelled, since a prolonged failure to obey the orders of the authorities would appear to me to be very disadvantageous, to invite you, beloved fellow Aelteste, to the Alexanderwohl church on Saturday, the 16th of this month. and since we will all understand and feel the urgent necessity and the duty incumbent upon us to end the disputes according to the precepts of the holy Word of God, I am of the firm hope that in this important matter no one will be absent.

Blumstein  
December 6, 1861

**Johann Harder, Aeltester**

But even by the fact that the District Mayor had given the promise not to prevent any Aelteste conferences, nothing was achieved, because the Aelteste were so strongly under his influence that still in the December 16 conference, no peace agreement was reached, and the Aeltester Harder wrote:

**To the District Office at Halbstadt**

According to our knowledge, Johann Neufeld does not have any further legal claims for money from the community according to our agreement with him. We have already declared this to the District Office on July 28, 1860. It obviously makes no sense that he now says that he has been expelled from the church. No one has forbidden him to enter the church, but he was, according to our confession of faith, denied the spiritual community, because Neufeld and some other members not only rejected the decision of the congregation regarding the election of the Aelteste, to which they were not opposed, but also tried to incite other members against the congregation. In order to withdraw from his congregation later, Neufeld sought and found acceptance in another congregation, after which he now demands back the donation he made to our congregation several years ago for the construction of a church, about which relevant documents are available. However, in order to pursue peace as much as it is up to us, the congregation agreed to organize a voluntary collection among themselves, which, with only what Neufeld had already received earlier, except for the old stone church used in the process, yielded 6,566 Rubles silver, or just as much as the new church of the same size would have cost us, if, as other churches here and in Chortitz prove, we ourselves had determined and directed the construction.

Blumstein  
Aeltester  
December 19, 1861

**Johann Harder,**

If the District Mayor had not been well acquainted with everything, the above letter could have already made the matter clear to him, but he wanted neither right nor truth, and even if the Petershagen community could not obtain ownership of the church through his and Neufeld's work with the help of the Aeltester, he could not abandon the revenge plans that he had long since forged against the Ohrloff-Halbstadt community and had now been working on the execution of the same for several years.

In order to continue to create in this matter, a general conference was scheduled for January 2, 1862 the District Office scheduled a meeting and

in the same, the proposal was made if the municipality, because Neufeld was tired of offering his sacrifice, bore  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the construction costs and Neufeld bore  $\frac{1}{3}$ . The congregation, regardless of the fact that it owed Neufeld nothing, willingly agreed, but had only agreed to it because Neufeld offered it, but it only agreed on the condition that a final letter be signed by the church and regional Aelteste that with this step the disagreement, as far as it concerned the Halbstadt church, would be completely ended. In a letter from the District Office to the Aeltester Harder of January 19, 1862, the latter reported that Neufeld also agreed, but only under the condition that the church admits that it really owes this sum \*). If the church agreed to the condition set by Neufeld, the District Office demanded the settlement with Neufeld, and after that the desired final letter should follow.

On January 26, the Aelteste replied that the church would not allow itself to be forced by coercion and could not possibly admit that it owed this sum, because Neufeld had now told it that he was willing and that his cause was finished. As for the cause itself, why the congregation, according to Neufeld's statement in the District Office, should owe the entire building costs of the church, namely because of the expression "church community", we praise the Lord, who made us do the right thing, so that we, in agreement with all Christianity of all times and what is more, we are justified by the Word of God, and thus this cause is also completely removed, because exclusion from clerical communion means temporary removal of the brother from the sacrament until the sinner repents, a removal that every congregation has a right to determine for your fallen ones.

Since the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde also participated in the conferences, but because of his conscience, as he declared in writing in the District Office, he could not agree to everything, he asked for exemption from this participation, but the District Office demanded of him in a letter of February 10, 1862, that he should explain briefly and simply, but thoroughly, to whom, in his opinion, the church should belong, the Halbstadt congregation or Neufeld and consorts, which was then also done with the following words:

\*) The exclusion from the church community, should cost the community over 5000 Rubles

But since the District Office demands that we should say to whom the church belongs, we must say, according to our insight, that it must belong to the Halbstadt and Ohrloff congregation, for which it was built.

Aeltester: **Johann Friesen**

The further course of this matter up to the final conclusion of the whole long Church Dispute is explained by the following documents, which are accompanied by only a few remarks.

### **To the Church Preachers Jakob Martens and Franz Isaac, and Member Peter Epp**

Because the termination that came about through the efforts of Guardianship Committee member H. Lange on August 5, 1860 was reversed after his departure, the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee v. Hamm has once again advised us in earnest and love to peace and resolution among ourselves, with the assurance that in the contrary case an investigation and decision would take place. After that, various proposals were made to the Halbstadt and Ohrloff congregations one after the other regarding the church, to which the latter responded each time and finally showed itself willing to pay  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the building costs to the former church leader Johann Neufeld, without any mutual reproaches, so it had also been discussed verbally, however, our Aeltester received a letter from the District Office, in which it was demanded that we should make a confession of debt at the same time as this payment, which the congregation could not agree to for the sake of conscience.

At present, the community has begun to make preparations for the construction of a caretaker's house near the church and, after obtaining permission, to carry out the construction as soon as possible, which, however, was forbidden to us in a letter from the District Office dated March 12, No. 5962, with reference to an expected decision of the Guardianship Committee. However, since this building is very necessary and other inconveniences also make a quick decision absolutely desirable, we hereby lay this matter to your heart, dear brethren, with the request to travel to Odessa and, for the sake of the well-being of the entire Mennonite confraternity, to use yourselves in the proper place and to ask for as much help as possible

to ask for an early termination in order to prevent a further attachment of our rightful property.

Ladekopp  
May 26, 1862

Aeltester: **Johann Harder,**  
Preachers: **Abr. Isaac, Korn. Penner, Johann Regier, Franz Klassen, Bernhard Harder, Kornelius Isaac, Franz Balzer, Aron Rempel, Abr. Regier**  
Deacons: **Diedrich Hiebert, Peter Friesen**

In the next few days, the commissioners traveled to Odessa and asked the Guardianship Committee according to their order and as a result the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Council received in a letter from the District Office dated August 1, 1862 No. 8669 regarding the committee decision of July 20 sub No. 269 as follows:

"The above-mentioned church is to be given to the members of the Ohrloff congregation with obligation of the latter to pay the Neufeld  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the cost of the building in payments on a bi-weekly and no longer than a three-weekly schedule, etc."

Now the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Church Council convened a membership meeting of both churches and the congregation decided:

Since not Neufeld alone, but the whole congregation built the church and also together completely finished the matter, after which later he, Neufeld, with his associates separated from us without reason and according to the written report of the Aeltester Warkentin, is not at present a member of the Halbstadt, but of the Petershagen congregation, so we cannot in conscience see our way to paying him, Neufeld, the sum of money demanded, if we should have incurred a debt thereby, which in fact does not rest on the church, and are therefore rather willing to relinquish altogether the possession of the church, our rightful property.

From the brotherhood  
The Halbstadt-Ohrloff congregation  
congregation  
August 10, 1862

The original has signed  
the church board and the

Now the Aeltester Harder writes:

To the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers.  
From the Church Aeltester of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation.

In response to the letter of the Molotschna Mennonite District Office of March 1, No. 8669, containing the determination of the

Halbstadt church, the municipality, in order not to impose any constraint on its conscience, has decided to relinquish the possession of the same church. I have the honor to present this to the Guardianship Committee most obediently,

Blumstein  
August 16, 1862.

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**

The same was also communicated to the District Office, through which Neufeld now learned that the congregation would not pay, which is why he turned to H. Inspector Andre. Whether the latter was not well informed of the matter or really intended to fight against the community decision can be left unanswered here, but he threatened with police coercive measures in a letter from the District Office of September 4 to Aeltester Harder, which, however, remained without further attention on the part of the Aeltester, because the community decision had not failed to have a decisive effect.

At night from August 31 to September 1, the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee (in Prischib) explained to Aeltester Harder and the Church Preacher Jakob Martens, how the decision of the Guardianship Committee regarding the church building was meant, and as a result of this the Aeltester and the Preacher Martens wrote:

#### **To the Molotschna Mennonite District Office at Halbstadt**

In response to their letter of March 4, No. 9953, we inform them that, after the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee has personally informed us that the obligation to bear  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the costs of the construction of the church is based on our voluntary commitment and that no religious matters at all are involved in the decision, we have consequently been relieved of the scruples of conscience, have at the same time delegated two men to close the account with Neufeld and will thereafter firstly also hold a community meeting and pay off the money without delay.

Blumstein  
September 7, 1862

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**  
Preacher: **Jakob Martens**

On the same day Neufeld gave the following account to the two men deputized to him in this matter:

The church costs	11766 Rubles,	71 Kopeck
Of which $\frac{2}{3}$ is	844 "	47 "
Paid on this earlier	2743 "	41 "
Still to be paid	5101 "	6 "

Since the removal of this sum was the last step to end the long dispute, the congregation showed itself willing and active, and in a few days the Aeltester was able to send the offering voluntarily made by the congregation to Neufeld, and thereafter wrote

**To the Molotschna Mennonite District Office in Halbstadt**

After the personal opinions of the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, which had already been communicated to the District Office on the 7th of this month under No. 15, were made known to the congregation yesterday, the congregation consequently sent its voluntarily offered collection to Neufeld, of which the Guardianship Committee was informed at the same time.

Blumstein  
September 15, 1862

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**  
Preacher: **Jakob Martens**

The following letter was sent to the Guardianship Committee:

**To the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers  
in Odessa.  
From the Aeltester of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Congregation.**

After the H. President of the Guardianship Committee, personally informed us in Molotschna on March 31, that the obligation to bear  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the church construction costs is based on our own voluntary commitment and that no religious matters bear on this decision, the congregation, as a result of this it is subject to its conscience as mentioned in the letter of August 10, the community has today made its voluntary offering to the Halbstadt resident Johann Neufeld, which we have the honor to bring to the attention of the Guardianship Committee.

Blumstein  
September 15, 1862

Aeltester: **Johann Harder**  
Preacher: **Jakob Martens**

On June 10, 1863, the congregation bought a keeper's house near the church and the congregation of Neuhalbstadt granted this keeper's position some privileges by a congregational decree and in a peaceful way.

**The Church Dispute was over.**

## 4 - Exit of the Rueckenauer or Brüdergemeinde [Mennonite Brethren Church]

As we have seen in the first part of this document, there had already been, specifically in 1812 and at the beginning of the twenties, congregational separations and the formation of new congregations and now again, during the time of the Barley and Church Disputes and in 1860, when some members, scattered throughout the congregations, believed that they saw a decline in the Mennonite brotherhood. This resulted in a third separation and the formation of a new congregation. Eighteen such members, who saw the general decline, to which the Barley Dispute conjured up by the Lichtenau church preachers contributed significantly, gathered on January 6, 1860 in the village of Elisabetthal and wrote the following letter:

### **To all the Church Aelteste of our Molotschna Mennonite Congregations**

We, the undersigned, by the grace of God, see the decline of the whole Mennonite brotherhood and for the sake of the Lord and our conscience cannot participate in it any longer, for we fear the inevitable judgment of God, because the wickedness and openly ungodly life cries out to God in heaven. We also fear the loss of the rights and privileges granted to us by our benevolent authorities, because the transgressions and disobedience against them are increasing. It is sad to see (O Jesus, have mercy and open the eyes of the spiritually blind) when at the fairs our Mennonite brothers lead such a satanic life before the eyes of our neighbors and the preachers themselves silently witness it, even sitting still at banquets, watching and listening to it as one serves the devil. Of such people it says in the Scripture Ps. 109:17-18, They put on the curse like a shirt, they want to have the curse and so it will come to them. The preachers do not step in front of the gaps, as in Ezek. 13:5. Therefore we completely renounce these ruined churches but plead for our brethren that they may be blessed. We want to be innocent of the souls of the erring. But you, Lord Jesus, equip right living witnesses to point your children and the work of your hands to you. Amen.

We had in mind here the whole Mennonite brotherhood, because it is considered by the high authorities as a one true brotherhood. In the articles we are in agreement with our dear Menno, according to our conviction from the Holy Scriptures.

We confess baptism by faith, faith wrought in a crucible (not a learned faith, as it is done now), but the true living faith, created by the Spirit of God, because without faith it is impossible to please God, Heb. 11:16. And whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ is not His. Rom. 8:9. And again our dear Savior speaks to Nicodemus in John 3:3; without the new birth no one can see the Kingdom of God. Baptism is not the rebirth itself, as the unconverted say, but only serves as a sign to the baptized that he is truly born again. We confess that Holy Communion serves to strengthen the faith of true believers, who remember and rejoice in their mighty salvation through the death of the Lord Jesus. It serves as a sign that they are in close contact with Jesus, their Savior, 1 Cor. 10:16. Furthermore, it serves as a sign of the covenant and fellowship of believers with one another, v. 17, and not as a sign of believers and unbelievers with one another, as is the case now. Likewise, Menno also confessed it, as it can be read in his Foundations Volume I, page 115-121. On page 121 it says: As long as someone errs in doctrine and faith and is still carnally minded, he can in no way be admitted with the godly and penitent etc. The apostle Paul says 1 Cor. 5:11, "If any man be called a brother, and be a fornicator, or a covetous man, or an idolater, or a drunkard, or a robber, will we not refuse to share a meal with him; how much less shall we partake of the holy supper with him? Unfortunately, there are many miserly, drunkards and blasphemers today with whom one takes Holy Communion. For not only these are drunkards, who are almost always drunk, but also those who drink and eat to their fill now and then or at fairs and banquets. 1 Cor. 10:20-21 says that what the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to the devils. So also, the carnal minded cannot give glory to the Lord in the Lord's Supper, because they do not know Him, but as usual, they serve the devil, because no one can serve two masters, Matt. 6:24. But Paul does not want the believers to be in fellowship with the devils and to be one body with the idolaters who serve the devil 1 Cor. 10:17. The Savior says in Rev. 18:4, "Come out from among them, my people, that you may not be partakers of their sins, lest you receive of their plagues. 2 Cor. 6 says that believers should not have fellowship with unbelievers but go out and separate themselves. We confess the washing of feet as the Lord Jesus instituted it in John 13 to fellowship with one another, where one is blessed in deed, not in knowledge. We confess the election of preachers in two ways according to the Scriptures, some are chosen without the intervention of men, by the Lord alone, and sent by his Spirit, as with prophets.

The same happened with the house of Stephen, which ordained itself to the service of the saints 1 Cor. 16:15. Paul also speaks of such things in 1 Tim. 3:3, others are ordained by the help of the true believers, as Acts 1 says. Menno also recognized this, as he clearly proved in his Foundations, Volume 1, page 149. Of the ban we confess that all carnal minded and willful sinners must be excluded from the fellowship of believers, as Paul testifies 2 Thess. 3:14-15. But if it happens that someone secretly falls into an abomination of the flesh, from which God protect us, and if the Spirit of Christ, who alone must work true repentance in us, convinces him to confess and repent, the church has no power whatsoever to banish such a penitent sinner, since the forgiveness of sins is not obtained in or through the ban, but in the merit of Jesus Christ. So also, Menno recognized it, as can be read in the 3rd book, page 334-335. But an unrepentant sinner may not be received into the fellowship of believers until he converts to Christ from the heart. In all other points of our confession, we also agree completely with Menno Simon.

Elisabettal	Elisabettal:	<b>Abraham Kornelsen, Kornelius</b>
<b>Wiens, Isaac</b>		
January 6, 1860		<b>Koop, Franz Klassen, Abr. Wiens</b>
	Lichtfelde:	<b>Martin Klassen, Abr. Wiens</b>
	Schardau:	<b>Daniel Hoppe, August Strauss</b>
	Rudenerweide:	<b>Jakob Becker</b>
	Pastwa:	<b>Isaak Regehr, Andreas</b>
		<b>Voth, Jakob Wall</b>
	Liebenau:	<b>Heinrich Hiebert, Johann</b>
		<b>Klassen</b>
	Mariental:	<b>Dietrich Klassen</b>
	Ladekopp:	<b>Peter Stobbe, Abraham Peters</b>

Note: The Aelteste should be informed, if they want to contact our community in the aforementioned matter, those designated are: Abraham Kornelsen and Isaak Kopp, Elisabettal and Johann Klassen, Liebenau.

This was too much for the Aelteste, that the whole Mennonite brotherhood should be characterized as so decayed, they could not accept, and as they were in the Barley Dispute, they placed church matters under the direction of the District Mayor. They could not find a more suitable means in this matter, than these people, after they had received the letter of resignation issued by them, handed it over to the District Office on January 18 with the following letter:

#### **To the District Office in Halbstadt**

On January 6, 1860, a letter was sent to us, signed by the Church Aelteste, from the following persons (the names follow),

in which they completely renounce these decayed churches, as they put it, and as can be seen from their letter, want to form their own congregation. On January 18 of this year, it was decided at a general conference of the Aelteste that this could not be allowed, and because these members have completely renounced us, we leave them in the hands of a benevolent District Office with the request that they also do what they can to dissuade them from their erroneous intention.

Alexanderwohl  
January 18, 1860

The Aelteste:  
**Heinrich Toews, Benjamin Ratzlaff**  
**Peter Wedel, Dirk Warkentin**  
**August Lenzmann**

After the District Office demanded a declaration from those who had left, they replied on January 23 that they would have preferred to remain in their congregation, but because the preachers did not act according to the Word of God, they could not do so. They could not remain because of their conscience, and therefore they wished to form their own congregation as Mennonites. As a result of this declaration, the District Office gave a strict order to the village offices to exercise the closest supervision so that no more meetings of a religious nature would take place in private homes in the colonies. This order reads:

#### **To the Mayor's Offices!**

Since, as most of the Mayor's Offices will already be aware, some members of the Molotschna Mennonite congregation have committed the impertinence of celebrating Holy Communion and, in spite of the admonitions issued to them, still do not want to abandon their erroneous beliefs, but rather have renounced in writing to their respective congregations their intention to form a separate congregation and hold meetings among themselves, the District Office finds itself compelled, on the basis of Article 362 of the Penal Code (enacted 1857), which reads:

"The founders and heads of secret societies \*), which, although they do not have an obviously harmful purpose, are nevertheless forbidden by special decrees and orders of the government, are subject to a sentence of imprisonment for a period of 6 months to one year. The members of such societies, if they were aware of the prohibition, shall be subject to arrest for a period of 7 days to 3 weeks."

The Mayor's Offices are strictly enjoined to exercise the most careful supervision, so that in villages of the above-mentioned

\*) As if they were secret societies.

and among other members, no more meetings of a religious nature will take place in private houses.

The Mayor's Offices are to bring this to the attention of the general public, and the violators of this prohibition, as well as the landlords in whose houses the meetings are to take place, even though they do not belong to the community, are to be presented to this regional authority for further disposal under the responsibility of the Mayor's Offices.

District Mayor: **Friesen**

Deputy Mayor: **Wiebe**

The representatives of the members who had withdrawn, Abraham Kornelsen, Isaak Kopp and Johann Klassen, now had to sign a document with the H. Inspector, *of the Guardianship Committee*) that they would not perform any sacerdotal duties that were forbidden by the Church Aelteste until they had received permission from District Office to form their own congregation.

As a result of the directive of the H. Inspector, the Church Aelteste were requested to answer the following questions in a letter from the District Office dated 5 March 1860:

- 1) What is the essence of the new religious movement?
- 2) What harmful consequences can result from it for the Mennonite brotherhood, and
- 3) What measures must be taken to disband this association?

At the same time the Aelteste were invited on March 11th to the District Office, because in order to answer these questions according to the directive of the District Mayor, the conference had to take place in the District Office and the answers to the above questions were presented to the Aelteste ready for signature, which they signed without refusal. The Ohrloff Aeltester Fast did not take part in this conference because of old age (the newly elected Aeltester was not yet confirmed) and the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde was not invited, so the letter completed by the District Office could only be signed by 5 Aelteste, but nevertheless they gave this letter the following letter from all the Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite District.

This so-called Five Aelteste Letter reads as follows:

**To the Molotschna Mennonite District Office.****From all the Church Aelteste of the Molotschna  
Mennonite District****Declaration**

In response to the letter of the Mennonite District Office of the 18th of this month, requesting a statement from us by the H. Inspector of the Molotschna Colonies, dated the 1st of this month, No. 293, concerning the members who have left our Mennonite brotherhood, we declare the following in accordance with the truth:

- 1) The direction of these lost members consists essentially in this:
  - a) that they understand, explain and apply the Holy Scriptures in a one-sided way, and claim that their understanding and application of individual passages of Scripture is the only correct one, which is why they have proven themselves to be inaccessible to any rebuke and instruction;
  - b) that they do not respect the existing clerical order and institution, considering them only human constructs and saying that God must be obeyed more than man, which, according to their conception, they also did when they celebrated Holy Communion among themselves in private houses, and finally;
  - c) that they consider themselves to be the only true Christians and declare the whole Mennonite brotherhood in their sacrilegious presumption and blindness to have fallen into the devil's service.
- 2) Already from the actions of those people and because they have renounced our fellowship, it is evident that a peaceful coexistence with them is not possible. If then, they should exist as a new religious community among us, only aggravation and disorder will arise. And after our interactions with them there is no reason to believe that they will deviate from their fanatical errors and chosen path at this time. Rather it is to be expected that they, dependent on themselves alone, would make even more rapid progress toward fanaticism. Since, as a result of their leaving the Mennonite brotherhood, there would only be the most regrettable disruptions in these families, especially in the case of possible marriages of our church members with theirs.

We also fear that their restless work for their views would draw even more innocent and well-meaning people into the same enthusiasm, because they carry on their activities under the umbrella of true Christian conviction.

- 3) That we cannot give our consent to the formation and existence of a free and new religious community in the midst of our Mennonite brotherhood is self-evident from the above. We have, however, by all means at our disposal from the clerical point of view, lovingly and earnestly influenced the erring ones in order to dissuade them from their errors. But they did not pay attention, and in order to withdraw themselves from any further effect of our church discipline, they renounced our Mennonite brotherhood in writing on January 6. We now consider them no longer members be our Mennonite brotherhood and have reported this to the District Office on January 18 of this year. We do not consider ourselves entitled to make any suggestions to the secular authorities regarding their further treatment or punishment, except to ask that, as far as the law permits, less severe measures be taken before the most extreme measures are taken.

Halbstadt  
March 11, 1860

The Church Aelteste:  
**Ratzlaff, Warkentin, Wedel,  
Lenzmann, Toews**

Those who left are called lost in this document, but who was more dangerously lost than the Aelteste? They themselves had no input, they let everything be dictated to them, they were so ensnared that they had no idea of the consequences of this letter, if it was to be acted upon. The Aelteste had never made even one attempt to influence these people with earnestness and love. \*) And how did the Aelteste want to prove that these people had renounced the Mennonite brotherhood? Where did the Aelteste try to apply church discipline, of which they seemed to have no knowledge, while they were completely dependent on the District Mayor? The dependence had grown to such an extent that they were no longer allowed to bother about how to handle church issues that arose. As already mentioned, this letter had already been prepared when the Aelteste gathered in the District Office.

\*) On January 6, the brothers completed the letter of resignation. Now note the time before it reached the last Aelteste and also the time it took to invite the Aelteste to their conference, was it still possible to influence these people in earnestness and love during the 12 days (from January 6-16)? But it was dictated to the Aelteste and they only provided their signatures.

Those who have read the first section of this little work, will perhaps have discovered the same vituperative spirit in the writings forwarded to H. Islawin, which predated the writing of this Five Aelteste Letter, because this like that (five years apart) flowed from one and the same source, but the five Aelteste signed; despite their consciences.

The Aeltester (Bernhard Fast) of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt church was asked by the District Office to sign this letter signed by 5 Aelteste (it was sent to him). He wrote to the District Office on March 5 that he could not do so because the matter of these brothers was unknown to him until now, but that he would give a declaration after he had gained clarity and conviction. At the same time, he said that since the H. Inspector demanded this declaration from all the Church Aelteste, he considered it necessary to demand one from the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde as well.

In order to clarify the situation, the Ohrloff congregation invited the representatives of the withdrawn to a meeting on March 19, and they were given a copy of the letter signed by the 5 Aelteste in the District Office, whereupon they declared themselves in writing as follows:

#### **Declaration of the Withdrawn from the Ohrloff Kirchenvorstand**

In accordance with the request, we hereby declare that, as we have stated in the letter of January 23, of this year to the District Office, we would have preferred to remain in our own congregations, but because the preachers do not preach according to God's Word, as we also stated in our letter. This is our duty and we are ready to prove it, therefore we find ourselves forced to leave for the sake of conscience and wish to form our own congregation on the same basis and confession like all other Mennonite congregations. To the declaration of the five Aeltester to the District Office of the 11th of March we answer:

- 1) a) That the Aelteste will not be able to prove to us that we take the Holy Scriptures in a one-sided way and only take individual passages from the Scriptures for ourselves, and that proofs from the Word of God that we are really mistaken have not been given to us despite our request.
- b) That we recognize church discipline is clear from our writing of January 6, but we observed the Lord's Supper was because we didn't find it sinful from the Word of God and couldn't observe it in the fellowship of unbelievers, e.g., drunkards, etc., because of our conscience.

- c) With regard to "c", we must declare it to be a falsehood that we consider ourselves to be the only true Christians, by admitting at any time that there can also be true Christians whom the Lord alone knows. Also, the sentence that we declare the whole Mennonite brotherhood to be completely addicted to the devil's service is also exaggerated, but that we call evil good and good evil, the Lord will save us from that.
- 2) We have no other primary direction at all and also do not seek to form a new religious community but wish to live peacefully together as Mennonites on the confession of our fathers, which is the reason no disruptions are to be feared. We also do not advocate for our views, but to lead desolate souls to Christ is a joy for us and will remain so.
- 3) As I said, we do not want to form a new religious community, nor have we been admonished in seriousness and love by preachers from the Word of God, but rather threatened and judicially treated from the beginning. We did not renounce the entire Mennonite brotherhood in the writing of January 6 of this year, but only the churches that had fallen into disrepair. Even now, we would be happy to join them and stand by their side, if the preachers would seriously address the decay of the churches according to the Word of God and help to build and plant the churches with God's gracious assistance.

Ohrloff  
March 19, 1860

With 33 signatures

After the withdrawn had given the above declaration and had explained themselves verbally and in detail before the Ohrloff Council, the Aeltester Harder (who had been confirmed in office by the Aeltester Fast on March 17) wrote:

**To the Molotschna Mennonite District Office**

Since we for our part, due to ignorance of the matter, could not make a declaration in the conference on March 11 about the religious association that has arisen in the colonies, we invited some members of this association to meet with us, in order to receive a more detailed written declaration regarding their intentions and to be able to use this as an answer or declaration of the points presented to us in a letter from the District Office of March 5th, No. 1783. During the conversation with them, we have explained to them that a celebration of the Lord's Supper

as some of their company have done, even assuming that all are true Christians, could not be permitted at all, because with such freedom the most reprobate and vicious sect would consider itself just as entitled to it, and would thereby bring about the greatest disorder. Even if it is not written [in Scripture] that only an Aeltester can distribute bread and wine to the congregation, it is nevertheless written, "Be subject to all human order for the Lord's sake", 1 Peter. 2:13, and this applies here because our church order proscribes that only an Aeltester can only distribute it. They allowed themselves to be reprimanded in this and will not continue to do so in the future, as they already told the H. Inspector on February 10 of this year in writing. As far as their renunciation of the fallen churches is concerned, we have urgently requested and earnestly advised them that they should return to the same, about which they have declared in writing thus:

"We would have preferred each one to remain in our churches, but because the preachers do not preach according to God's Word, as we stated in the letter of January 6, of this year, and are ready to prove it, therefore we also found ourselves forced to withdraw, for the sake of our conscience, and wish to form our own congregation on the same basis and confession as all other Mennonite congregations, but with joy, even now, if the preachers would like to address the decay of the churches with all seriousness according to the Word of God, we would join them, stand by them, and help to build and plant the congregation with God's gracious assistance."

Since we will, however, be gladly prepared to oppose the decay of true Christianity on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, according to the declaration of this association, which is signed by 33 members of the same, the matter could be ended in another way.

Blumstein  
March 25, 1860

**Johann Harder**, Aeltester

This other way was not accepted, because the District Office demanded in a letter of March 26 from the Aeltester Harder the direct answer to the 3 questions posed above. The Aeltester answered these questions as follows:

**To the Molotschna Mennonite District Office at Halbstadt**

In consideration of our letter of March 25, we declare the following about the Mennonites who have left our congregations:

- 1) The direction of the striving of these people is expressed in the desire to establish their own congregation on the same basis and confession as all other Mennonite congregations and, according to our most privileged freedom of faith, to live out their faith in the midst of the other congregations, because they hope to be able to establish a better congregational order in this way. If they keep this goal firmly in mind, it is likely that
- 2) The consequences that may result from this for the whole should not be harmful, and the deviation in the celebration of Holy Communion that has once occurred should be forgiven them, to which I hope everyone who knows how to appreciate the mercy of God and the gracious toleration we enjoy in this country will be willing.
- 3) The means to dissuade these people from their plans to form their own congregation is that we all begin to act according to God's Word with all seriousness, that the congregational order be established, and the congregations be improved, for which God will grant us the willingness and ability by grace. However, if someone is a delinquent, the church of God uses as a rule and guideline what the gospel of Christ teaches us, that is, to separate from the church and have nothing to do with him until he repents. This measure proves itself time and again, if it is handled in such a way that the Lord can acknowledge it and give his blessing. But if the behavior of a member of the congregation should challenge the power of the authorities, we remain silent, for they do not bear the sword in vain, but are set to avenge the wrongdoers and to praise the pious.

Blumstein  
March 29, 1860

**Johann Harder, Aeltester**

With his first declaration (of March 25) the Aeltester Harder intended, if possible, to steer the whole matter into another course, but the options were very limited and one would have had to accept a little examination from those who had left, if they had returned, and they could not do this. Since this failed, the Aeltester was gladly prepared to answer the question directly, but there could hardly be anything more unsuitable for the District Mayor and the Aelteste than this second statement by Aeltester Harder, and yet it later became apparent that a way out had been found here as well, namely, when this entire matter was presented to the high authority, the declarations made by Aeltester Harder on 25th and in order to make the projected intention, namely, to make those who had left as unhappy as possible, they gave their main file of March 11 a heading from which the authorities could only see the unanimity of the entire spiritual board of the Molotschna Mennonites.

Later, in 1864, the Prischib Pastor Dobbert was commissioned from St. Petersburg to give his expert opinion to the government about those who had left and also about the attacks made and the treatment of them on the part of the clerical and secular boards, for which purpose he also requested the necessary files from the Inspector, the files of Aeltester Harder were not there, which is why H. Dobbert requested them himself from Aeltester Harder. The mentioned files, consequently also the fraud committed by the District Mayor and the Aelteste, became known only through the H. Pastor when he gave his expert opinion to the government. The request of Aeltester Fast that an explanation be demanded from the Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde could not be avoided, but the latter declared himself only briefly and in the same way as Aeltester Harder, he knew only clerical decree according to Holy Scripture, which then also remained unheeded.

When the whole matter was handed over to the Guardianship Committee by the H. Inspector, things stood still for some time, but on October 25, 1860, the Church Aelteste, as well as the representatives of those who had left the church, were invited to a meeting at the District Office, but nothing significant came of it. First of all, the District Office wrote to the Aelteste on December 14, 1860, that the Committee demanded:

- 1) A list by name of all Mennonites belonging to the new sect;
- 2) to indicate the main propagators of this sect, who exerted the greatest influence on the minds;
- 3) what measures were taken by the local authorities to suppress this sect;
- 4) by what means the further spread of this sect is to be prevented and completely eradicated.

What the other Aelteste answered on these points is not known. Aeltester Harder gave his answers on December 30, 1860, as they follow here:

- 1) Only Heinrich Hiebert from Liebenau is from our community.

- 2) I cannot say with certainty who has the greatest influence at present.
- 3) The third point, I believe, is a matter for the secular authorities.
- 4) The answer to the 4th point I cannot give other than what I already said in the declaration of March 29th of this year, the means, the people etc.

After a long break, on June 5, 1861, the Aelteste were invited to the District Office for a meeting regarding those who had left. This conference was prompted by several writings of Johann Klassen, a resident of Liebenau, which he had sent to the District Office from St. Petersburg, where he had been working for recognition and land for those who had left. The contents of these writings were: 1) in a letter dated April 29, 1861, he asked the District Office for a new passport and 2) for confirmation of a power of attorney for land acquisition. The power of attorney reads:

#### Klassen's Power of Attorney

We, the undersigned, members of the Mennonite community on the Molotschna, Taurida Governorate, desiring to move from our places of residence to other places of the Russian Empire, hereby authorize the colonist Johann Klassen, to negotiate on our behalf with the government in St. Petersburg or elsewhere in the Russian Empire, for the resettlement of us and our families, on Crown or private lands, by means of Crown grants, purchase or lease from private persons. For this purpose, H. Klassen has the right to enter into negotiations with crown authorities and private authorities in our stead, to submit appropriate petitions, to conclude contracts, agreements and all kinds of obligations, to draw up bills of sale, in a word, to act as only he can, and trusting him, H. Klassen completely, we ask him to represent us and our interests completely in this matter, and what he will do, within the law, remains undisputed by us.

This power of attorney belongs to Johann Klassen, Mennonite of Liebenau, Taurida Governorate.

Date

Signatures  
Notarization

Although the District Office was obliged to send a new passport as well as to confirm the power of attorney, it refused both and this refusal was supported by the Aelteste. The people who withdrew intended to move from the Molotschna region by acquiring new land.

However, since there was no legal reason for the refusing to do so, the District Mayor, accompanied by two church preachers, traveled to Odessa on June 16, 1861, to the Guardianship Committee to seek support for his refusal. The five Aeltester also contributed by means a peculiar letter, which the two church preachers traveling with him presented to the Committee in support of the declarations of the District Mayor as far as possible. The letter reads:

### **To the Guardianship Committee in Odessa**

At a conference held on June 5, the Oblast Office presented us with a communication and request from Johann Klassen, a Liebenau resident in St. Petersburg, and we find ourselves compelled to make the following statement:

- 1) In a writing to the Church Aelteste dated January 6, 1860, it literally says:  
Therefore, we completely renounce this fallen church.
- 2) According to Matt. 13:24-30, we believe that in a Christian community those who are no longer members of the Body of Christ, who do not have the true faith, will heal and therefore give Holy Communion to all who are baptized into their known faith and not live in manifest sins. Those who have left the church, however, teach that Holy Communion may only be given to true believers, and therefore call the celebration of Holy Communion in our churches a service of the devil.
- 3) In our churches, water has always been poured on the head of the baptized. But these teach that baptizing means immersion and have now begun to baptize again by immersion in the rivers of the steppe not only the unbaptized youth, but also those who have long since been admitted into the church by baptism.
- 4) In our churches, public worship has always been celebrated by singing, prayer and preaching of the Word, after Paul's admonition, usually only one, but occasionally two or three, speaks. But these hold their meetings in such a way that all speak, all pray one after the other, and while they speak and pray, the others make loud exclamations, applause, e.g., Victory, Glory, Hallelujah, and laugh, and when the hours of the service are over, they raise a clamor, a jumping and a raving, so that people who have seen it testify that it is worse than in a tavern, and what is more,

the most horrible thing is that they call their mad behavior the influence of the Holy Spirit.

All this confirms what we have said in a letter to the H. Inspector (March 11), that if they are left to themselves, they will not stand still in their fanaticism, but will make serious progress, because after they have given the H. Inspector their signature that they will not separate from their congregations, nor will they perform any sacerdotal acts until they have received permission to do so from the high authorities, they have repeatedly held communion and elected preachers, and have also begun to baptize in the steppe rivers and to behave as if they were a church community on an equal footing with all others and recognized by the High Government, as is also sufficiently proven by Klassen's appearance in St. Petersburg and his writings to the District Office. We, however, by reporting them to the authorities right at the beginning of their existence, seriously refuse to take any responsibility for them.

To this declaration we add the request that the authorities take appropriate measures so that those who have left will have no harmful influence on our communities. Should they, however, which is not yet expected, come to the point that they should wish to rejoin our congregations in the manner prescribed by our church, then we are heartily prepared to accept them again.

June 10, 1861

Aelteste:

**Ratzlaff, Toews, Warkentin,  
Lenzmann, Wedel.**

By informing the high authorities that the Mennonites serve the Lord's Supper to all who have been baptized in the known faith, even if they do not have the true faith and are not true members of the body of Christ, the Aelteste, in their own blindness and error, are giving themselves a rather strong testimony of their inadequacy. By writing, "But these who have left teach that Holy Communion may be given only to true believers", they bear witness to the authorities in a way that could not be more impressive, more beautiful and more in accordance with Scripture, and what must be quite striking here is that this magnificent testimony stands here as an indictment. What might the authorities, who know our creed so well, have thought about it? In the third point, it is the outward form of baptism, which is why they can no longer recognize these people as Mennonites, by which they present themselves to the authorities as such, who are deviating from the essential, which is

is a condition of baptism. In the fourth point, they are exposing themselves to the fact that their reports about the behavior of those who have left their congregations are only based on hearsay, and experience teaches how absurd the village chatter can be. Neither the well-known author of this document, nor the five Aelteste who signed it, nor any of the preachers of these five congregations have visited worship services of the Mennonite Brethren congregation in order to make themselves aware of the true facts. The preachers of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation, prompted by several requests from the District Office to explain themselves about these people, have often visited these services, but found no evidence of the things that the Aelteste accuse them of, but rather realized that these people were seriously striving to create their worship experience with fear and trembling. Even if it cannot be denied that there were individuals who let themselves be carried away with enthusiasm, this had its reason, as Pastor Dobbert expresses himself in his report, in the fact the letter had hastily woven the martyr's crown for them. Some of the brothers prayed, but there were no disturbing expressions, so that one came to the conclusion that what the Aeltester had reported to the Committee was not based on anything more than a common village gossip. They could be better served by brotherly encouragement than by continuing to accuse and slander them before the high authorities. In the end, the Aelteste say that they were heartily prepared to accept these people if they should wish to be readmitted in the manner prescribed by the church; but even if the principle of the Aelteste is that believers and unbelievers may partake of Holy Communion together, such a reunion was not possible.

The fact of what the District Mayor and the two preachers had done in the above letter was not made public and was consistent with their other actions, for how could such a letter annul a legal obligation to grant a passport and a confirmation of power of attorney? As long as Klassen was still in St. Petersburg, those who had left remained unnoticed. Klassen had submitted the following petition to the Emperor:

## **Most Sublime Emperor Most Gracious Lord!**

With hope and trust, the undersigned humbly submits to you, Emperor, for protection in a matter of which, on the one hand, justice and, on the other hand, outrageous abuse of force, deliberate distortion of the truth, persecution, maltreatment, etc., are clearly evident from the enclosed correspondence \*).

The brief summary of the matter is as follows; a number of (about 50) Molotschna Mennonites, in Taurida Governorate, Berdjansk District, on January 6, 1860, after recognizing the moral decay that had occurred among their fellow believers, both in church and in private life, came to the decision to form an independent church congregation according to their convictions as true and strict followers of the teaching of the Gospel and of their Preacher Menno Simons. The right they have according to the teachings of Menno Simons gives them a guideline, as well as previous similar examples in the Molotschna Mennonite congregations, such as the Lichtenau congregation and the so-called Kleine Gemeinde, which continue to exist in a recognized form to this day. Nevertheless, the Church Aelteste, to whom the formation of the new community seems to be an act contrary to their authority, induced the local District Office to take such oppressive and persecuting measures that the newly formed community was not only exposed to complete ruin in economic terms, but also actually lost many civil and clerical rights and privileges, and this course of action forcefully brings to mind the times of the medieval inquisition.

The Guardianship Committee for the Foreign Colonists, although it has been apprised of the above-mentioned grievances, has not only refrained from putting a stop to the arbitrariness of the District Office, but has rather strengthened it in its arbitrary procedure, both by its decrees and especially by the fact that it is still in the process of establishing its own laws and regulations, and especially by the fact that the orders issued several times by the Ministry of Crown Lands to give a declaration in the present matter, as a result of the complaint of the undersigned, have been left unanswered by the Guardianship Committee for almost a full year now.

Although this last-mentioned circumstance can in itself serve as proof of the unjust conduct of this matter on the part of the colonial administration, it nevertheless only has the consequence that the non-submission of the declaration demanded by the Guardianship Committee, by which the Ministry of Crown Lands was given, the

\*) Klassen had enclosed the correspondence on this matter on the part of the District Office, the Aelteste, etc.

the Emperor is deprived of the possibility to take appropriate measures for the protection of the new Mennonite community, and to continue to threaten people with total ruin who are devoted to their faith, Emperor and fatherland with a loyal heart.

Most gracious Emperor, lend a sympathetic ear to a humble complaint of your faithful children who seek help from you next to God! Their request is that they be given just protection in the exercise of their evangelical worship and thereby be protected from all further persecution on the part of local administrations and be allowed legal freedom in the exercise of their church and civil rights.

**Johann Klassen**

Of course, nothing detailed can be given here about the effects of the above request; all that can be said with certainty is that in a conference on October 11, 1862, the District Mayor put the matter of those who had left the church in this way, "Either exclusion from their colonist status or recognition." The Aelteste were to consult with their congregations about this and report the result to the District Office. What the five Aelteste told the District Office about this remained unknown, but the message of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Aeltester read as follows:

**To the District Office in Halbstadt**

After October 11 of this year, in the District Office, the District Mayor presented the matter of the Mennonites who had left the fallen churches in such a way that either the people must be excluded from having colonial citizenship and removed from here, or they must be recognized in the future as a congregation with equal rights with all other Mennonite congregations. Our congregation, on presentation of this matter, declared that, not finding the former founded in God's Word, it would consent to the latter on condition that the confession of faith of these people, if they were requested to issue one, must be in substantial agreement with ours. As a result of our instigation, those who have resigned have declared in writing that the confession of faith published under the title:

**Creed of those who are called the  
United Flemish, Frisian and High German  
Mennonite Congregations, issued by the congregation at  
Rudnerweide in South Russia,**

is theirs, and consequently there is nothing to prevent the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation from recognizing the Mennonites in question as a separate community

of which I am notifying the District Office by verbal agreement.

Blumstein  
November 12, 1862

**Johann Harder**, Aeltester

Now there were still unsuccessful attacks on the Mennonite Brethren congregation, e.g., in 1863 the Liebenau Mayor's Office, which had always proved helpful on this side, reported Johann Klassen to the District Office and when several questions were submitted to him by the District Office for answering, the report collapsed into nothing by the answering of the same. One later attack, which was also brought about by the Aelteste, should be mentioned here, which was made against the Mennonite Brethren congregation in 1868, namely because of the baptism of Johann Friesen; but since David Friesen had already been dismissed from his District Office by the government in Sept. 1865, when he had been baptized, so this matter was handled quite differently by the District Office. When the present District Mayor, Kornelius Toews, was asked by the government to make a declaration in this matter, he said, among other things:

Since the Molotschna Mennonite District is divided into several churches and each of them has a Church Aeltester, this matter was discussed by them at a general conference. However, the Church Aelteste could not come to a common decision, but on the one hand they declared that this baptism was not performed according to Holy Scripture, on the other hand the opposite. These Church Aelteste all stand in the same rank and the pronouncement of the same has the same meaning before the law, but which of the two declarations is the correct or finally decisive, cannot be determined by this District Office, because the matter is a purely spiritual one, but can only say so much that a similar special congregation \*) has also been formed here earlier, which has had its Aeltester confirmed by the congregation itself, and has been recognized by all other congregations as well as by the government.

June 1868

District Mayor **Toews**

If such Canaan language had been spoken in David Friesen's time, it would probably never have come to bringing the Mennonite Brethren matter before the high authorities, but even now such language did good and bore its good fruits. The whole matter found its conclusion for the time being

\*) The Kleine Gemeinde

and a part of this congregation came to settle in the Crown land area negotiated by Klassen, and if one looks around now, everywhere where Molotschna Mennonites have settled, they are there, have their own churches and number in the thousands, and no one has heard that they have given rise to quarrels and disputes.

The latter attack on the Mennonite Brethren caused them to publish the following document:

### **Brief Statement of the Rules and External Ordinances of our congregation**

Due to an inquiry of the high state government to the Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite district 1) Whether the baptism of Johann Friesen, performed by the Preacher Jakob Reimer, came to the knowledge of the Mennonite clergy; 2) Whether the baptism was performed according to Holy Scripture? 3) Whether the baptism was recorded in a church book and namely by whom and when? and on the subsequent declaration of some Aelteste: "We don't know", we find ourselves compelled to publish our church rules and external orders for everyone's review.

However, we leave it to everyone to consider and examine how it is possible that these same Aelteste, who in 1860 thought they had reason enough to hand us over to the authorities, and at present can agree to the simple questions of the high state government with a: "We don't know". Under the rigorous examination by the authorities of our affidavits and declarations regarding the confession of faith issued by the congregation of Rudnerweide and approved by the Odessa authorities and thus published for everyone's review to show that we are not a new doctrine, but have founded and established our church on the faith doctrine of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His apostles and prophets, which has already existed for 1800 years, and that in the fear of God, neither to add to nor to subtract anything from the Word of God, lest we incur in the first case the plagues described therein and in the second case the loss of the portion out of the book of life and the holy city (Rev. 22:18-19). Since in the mentioned creed also the rules and external orders are already included, so that every interested person could convince himself of it, we publish herewith only those points in which we differ from the rules and external orders found in the existing churches.

- 1) In our meetings and worship hours we have from the beginning tried to follow the rule and order described in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, i.e., that one or two or at most three, one after the other, should preach. We can see the loving intention of the apostle, to improve the church, to awaken the spiritual gifts, to prepare the saints for the work of the ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all come to the same faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and become a perfect man, according to the measure of the perfect likeness of Christ, so that we are no longer children, being swayed and lulled by all kinds of wind of doctrine through the cleverness and deceitfulness of men. (Eph. 4:12-14).
- 2) When receiving members who come to us and ask to be accepted into our church through baptism, we examine them according to their confessions and heart experiences, how or by what means they come to the knowledge of their sins. When they come to peace with God the Father through faith in our Lord Jesus, and thus can make a covenant in good conscience with God according to 1 Peter 3:21. After they have testified to this by public confession before the congregation, for which witnesses are also called who can testify to his change of mind according to human standards, they are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, i.e. immersed in water, upon their confession that they believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is to symbolically represent a burial. The dear Savior in his many parables, which he takes from nature and from natural life to compare the kingdom of heaven, so also through baptism it is to be shown to those who still do not believe what the person believes, namely; that he died with Christ to sin and the old man (Rom. 6:11). Just as in natural life a dead person is buried in the ground, this act should be performed in the likeness of the form of death, namely in water (Rom. 6:3-4). Thus, water becomes one of the three witnesses on earth (1 John 5:8).
- 3) Likewise, when the Lord's Supper is served, the distribution of the bread and wine is the duty of the Aeltester or ministers [*Diener*]. But since it is written in Acts 2:46: and they were daily and always together with one accord in the temple, and broke bread from house to house, and according to the apostle's instruction to the Corinthians 11:23-34, we do not find that preachers must always be present. Exceptions may be made, for example, in times of persecution, or in the case of a sick person who has a great desire for it, the preacher should be present.

If a brother should have it and would have to do without it because of the absence of the ministers, we would not consider it an offense if he also demanded to take it from a believing brother, because it is sanctified by word and prayer. Incidentally, as far as the celebration of the body and blood of Christ is concerned, what is it but the righteousness of Christ appropriated to us through faith, regarding which we are instructed in the whole gospel. For this purpose, our Lord and Savior instituted the Lord's Supper and said to his disciples: "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you shall proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. As sin entered the world through eating, so here again it is said: Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6).

By publishing this for everyone's edification, we also add our heartfelt wish that every interested reader would look up on the passages of Holy Scripture cited in order to convince himself of the truth. In general, we would like to urge everyone to consider what is necessary for his salvation, to hurry and save his soul. Let no one take it so lightly as Lot's sons-in-law did when they disregarded Lot's request to flee Sodom because the Lord wanted to destroy the city, and so they perished in the rain of fire and brimstone (Genesis 19). According to all the testimonies that are reported to us as harbingers of Jesus Christ in his word, the hour may soon, indeed very soon, strike when the judgments prophesied in Revelation chapters 17, 18 and 19 will come upon the earth with great power. Blessed are all those who then have found refuge in the wounds of Jesus, and even if the body is robbed of its life, the spirit and the soul will attain their rest.

#### **Expert Opinion of Pastor Dobbert about the those who have left the Church.**

A proper understanding of the religious movements that have occurred among the Mennonites in the last few years, and especially of the schisms, is hardly possible without going back a few years and not ignoring the effectiveness of a man who has exercised an unusual and special influence here in the South, I mean the Pastor Wuest. When the royal consistory in Würtemberg made changes in the agendas and introduced a new hymnal, many wanted to preserve their traditions for themselves and their children. Russia kindly gave shelter to those who left their homeland for the sake of faith.

They settled on the Berda River in four colonies and were given the freedom to use their books, among them the good hymnal, the old Latin liturgy (the *articulus Diaboli* is not missing here), and to elect their teachers and preachers from among themselves. However, with the external peace and protection that the congregation enjoyed, it did not grow stronger spiritually. Disputes and friction between small parties all too soon consumed its best strength, and it finally came to the decision to appoint a preacher from Württemberg. Wuest was the man who followed this call in about 1845. Much has been said about this man in his time. Friends as well as enemies of him have made much clamor about him, and one day will make it obvious and clear how many of the accusations made against him are true. What cannot be denied, and in this both friend and foe agree, is that he was a man of special talent. The power of his speech was captivating and convincing, but at the same time he was also a personality who had allowed himself to be seized by the love of Jesus. His words ignited his listeners because he brought them out of the emptiness and desolation of their hearts, into the fullness of divine mercy, as such is revealed in the Savior on Golgotha, as the center and focus of all God's ways with the lost and forsaken. After years, a brother minister, in whose church Wuest had preached as a guest, told me about the impression of the powerful testimony on him and all who had listened to him. In addition, Wuest was a man of the people, affable and friendly in his dealings. He did not like to be alone and was seldom alone, but he always knew how to turn small gatherings in such a way that he came to speak to the state of the heart of the individual, to point out to him what was needed; such hours also received their special spice through the rich abundance of wonderful songs and melodies that were at his disposal. Careless people, mockers of the truth, became curious and questioning, raw impudent sinners fell silent, not indifferent to their salvation, from near as well as far soon gathered to him in the South. From Odessa to the Caucasus, from the Crimea to Kharkov, even as far as St. Petersburg, his connections went, from all sides he was besieged with invitations and requests and not out of ambition, as it was probably often imputed to him, I will rather say, the zeal to bring souls to the Lord for the kingdom of the Lord, whom he loved, because He loved him first, to work as long as it is day, made him use the opportunity that presented itself.

Whoever knows our conditions in the South, both in the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and among the Mennonites, will not be surprised at such influence on the minds. From the midst of these, which, are divided into several congregations of quite different coloration, voices are raised that

the people of the country, who deplore the deep moral decay, call for revival and renewal. Here, in the area of religion, the masses who had immigrated from various regions, most of whom were degenerate in body and soul, first had to be educated for a better understanding of things. This could not be done in one fell swoop; after years, schools were established and there was again a lack of capable teachers. In large areas there were large congregations where there was only one preacher, and when 18 villages were served by a sickly, frail man, there can't be any talk of caring for the individual, who, even if he were a faithful servant, in his isolated position, without any ministerial interaction and mutual strengthening and consolidation, all too often lacked the necessary freshness and joyfulness. It was inevitable that the spirits would collide, there was a change in the masses and the malice beneath was stirred. Those who neither know nor want anything of the faith, to whom the word of the Cross is only a nuisance, to whom repentance and conversion, the circumcision of the heart is the yoke of the clergy to subdue the people, and the people rose up and rebelled. There was too much singing, as the song "Create, so that you may be saved with fear and trembling", to such people is always fanaticism. The church is in danger, was the cry of the day, but they did not mean the state of the church, which adorns itself as a bride of the Lamb and prepares its lamps for the time of the cry at midnight. "The bridegroom is coming", but how they dreamed of a church according to their heart's conceit. When now, as will follow below, in the immediate environment of Pastor Wuest, alarming rumors circulated; the baby was thrown out with the bathwater, stories were invented and spread for money, which I prefer not to repeat, with a spitefulness and bitterness one stood up against a man who probably should have been honored as were the early church fathers Rom. 15:20. But the church, because it did not want to confess its own deficiencies and corruption and remedy them as far as possible, gave the appearance, which must have confused the conscience of many, that it tolerated the sins in its own midst (obvious adultery should still be remedied today with a confessional admonition) against the call to faith, to sanctification, but gave the excuse for blasphemy. The church has become a Babel, from which one must leave. I must mention here that the Honorable Konsistorialiat Föll, pastor at Hochstädt, despite repeated requests, did not sign the accusations made against Wuest, and Landesén, who had already gone home, always remained in cordial contact with Wuest in Kharkov. Among the Mennonites such occurrences did not happen at that time, indeed Wuest's influence was so unrestrained and significant here that he went to Gnadenfeld to bless their newborn children in the church. As mentioned above, it did not remain unheard of that even in Wuest's immediate circle there were annoying, deplorable aberrations.

But this can only mislead those who forget how the Lord does not build his little church anywhere without the devil being able to build his chapel next to it. The man's powerful testimony of the Lord's love seeking sinners, full of the sinner's justification by grace, was not appreciated by some. The Pauline doctrine of grace was too narrow for these spirits, drunk with the spirit of false Christian freedom, they entered a path on which Christianity could also be misused as a cloak of wickedness and sin, and gaped at the punishing word of Paul Gal. 3:2, etc., you ignorant Galatians. At the beginning, Wuest still had his old bad habits which occasionally became evident. He struggled to overcome them but they sometimes overwhelmed him. He didn't want to have others copy his bad behavior (In a counselling session in which he spoke about the chastening grace, he had to hear many a harsh speech from this side, and I myself had the opportunity to read a letter of Wuest from this time to a friend in Barmen years later, he was full of sorrow and pain about those seduced by Satan) he rejected his behavior out of shame. If Wuest by such earnestness most clearly demonstrated that he stood in the truth, then by himself the schism and separation of the so-called hoppers or merry-makers occurred, who in their bitterness against Wuest were not ashamed to accuse him of suicide by poison and to roundly deny the blessedness of a Pharisee like him. The main representatives of this free movement were, Klassen from Liebenau among the Mennonites, Hoffmann among the Würtembergers and Kappos among the Evangelicals on the Mariapol Plane. It should be noted that Klassen and his followers, although emphasizing free grace, never went as far as the Würtemberger and the Hoppers on the Plane, who, as I have learned from credible people, as I was told about the distress in their families, saddened fathers, which I gladly leave to the pen of another to elaborate, living in obvious sins and abuse, praising the freedom of believers. Since Klassen from Liebenau, belonged to the Gnadenfeld congregation, the Aeltester of the congregation, Lenzmann, who was also intimately connected with Wuest, and as he himself writes, must confess that the hours of remembrance of the brotherly connection which he had with the dear Pastor Wuest until his departure from contending toward the triumphant church will always remain blessed to him, and that he did not share the mistake of that member and his followers and thus the beginning of new entanglements and disputes were already occurring in the Gnadenfeld congregation. The Aeltester Lenzmann himself relates how he had to accept the request of some of his members, them and those who will call them believers,

especially and as often as they will feel the need to serve Holy Communion (a Sunday is set aside for the public celebration of Holy Communion twice a year among the Mennonites; Holy Communion at the bedside of the sick is foreign in some congregations), according to their understanding of Scripture and according to their conscience. The report clearly shows that the church had to reject the communion with the unbelievers in the congregation as a hitherto unprecedented innovation that disturbed the unity of the congregation and was therefore inadmissible. From this report it is quite clear that Klassen, like his followers, did not enter the battle with carnal weapons; he had openly decried the decay of church discipline, its Achilles' heel, and had urged that it be corrected, as he also wrote in a letter to all Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite congregations of January 6, 1860. He explained himself briefly as follows: For the sake of the Lord and our conscience, we can no longer go along like this, because the obviously godless life cries out to God in heaven. He therefore renounces the ruined churches and with the same right as the other congregations he wants to form his own congregation on the confession of Menno where the principles of true Christian living are found. He rejects the existing practice of baptism and demands baptism based on the true living faith worked by the Spirit of God, rather than a faith learned by rote. The Lord's Supper is a sign of the covenant of fellowship of the Lord with His believers, as well as of the believers among themselves (not a sign of fellowship of believers and unbelievers, as it is practiced now), for which the basic foundations of Menno Simon are still cited, where it is read: "If anyone errs in doctrine and faith and is still carnally minded, he cannot in any way be admitted with the godly and penitent, as it is written in 1 Cor. 5:11 and 10:20-21. According to Rev. 18:4 and 2 Cor. 6, leaving the church is a duty and a commandment. The ban should also be practiced, but not in such a way that it is imposed on those who confess and repent of their sins, as some churches do (it is hard to believe), while the unrepentant continue to live unhindered in their sins. Was Klassen wrong in his demand? Is his view an exaggerated one? And as he is accused by the majority of the Aelteste, did it come from a one-sided view of Scripture? Is he in contradiction with his confessional writings? How was his speech finally received? And what answer did they give him? At a conference of the Aelteste on January 18, 1860, the request for recognition as an own congregation was briefly and simply denied, without further explanation, "this could not be permitted", and one has to ask, but with what right do the other congregations exist, each of which has its own special coloration, and at the same time the Mennonite District Office has also requested

to try his best to dissuade the people from their erroneous intention? The signatures of 5 Aelteste adorn this *testimonium paupertatis*. The Aelteste of the Ohrloff and the Kleine Gemeinde are missing. It is quite obvious that if the Aelteste at this conference had had an eye and an ear for what was being said by their opponents as a truth that could not be denied and concealed, and had initiated a cessation of the abuses, an understanding would still have been possible and the division would have been prevented. The latter in a writing of January 23, 1860 they declare: We are not a church, we are a community, we would have preferred to remain in our own congregation, but because the preachers do not follow the Word of God, we cannot do so for the sake of our conscience and wish to form our own congregation as Mennonites. Was it to be praised and approved that the people were handed over into the hands of the secular authorities without further ado? Why did the Aelteste not rather judge the erring according to their rules? When Pilate said to the rulers of the Jews, "Take him, then, and judge him according to your law," the Jews said, "We must not put anyone to death. I hope that everyone will agree that the most unsuitable and unspiritual means were chosen to prevent a separation from that conference of the Aelteste. No attention was paid to the fact that by handing over Klassen and his comrades to the regional authorities, they were hastily given a martyr's crown, and by such a halo they promoted the progress of the latter to fanaticism. All the more gratifying and refreshing is the prudent statement of the Ohrloff congregation on March 29, 1860, as a result of a request from the Molotschna Mennonite District Office. The disorder of the celebration of Holy Communion in the houses is not approved of at all (those of the Klassen party received this reprimanded at the conference and agreed to not repeat it in the future), but since the striving of the people finds its expression in the desire to form a congregation of their own on the basis and confession of all other Mennonites. The Ohrloff congregation does not see how they could be harmful to the whole, and sees the most suitable means to dissuade the people from their plans in the fact that we all begin to act in all seriousness according to God's Word, so that the congregational order is re-established and the congregation is improved. If he and his followers have sinned as members of the congregation, they should be banned from the congregation until they are ashamed, but if they are wrongdoers, transgressors of worldly order, disobedient to the authorities, the congregation should remain silent, for the authorities do not have their sword for nothing. Unfortunately, the resolution of the Ohrloff community of March 29, 1860, passed in Blumstein was not heeded. But what did the

District Office do to dissuade the people from their erroneous intentions? The District Office applied Article 362 of the Criminal Code, which deals with secret societies, to this case and ordered the Mayor's Offices to see to it that no meetings of a religious nature took place in the houses, and when, as was to be expected, nothing was achieved, it was necessary to consult the Inspector of the Molotschna Colonies. Johann Klassen, Abr. Kornelsen, Isaak Kopp were consequently summoned to the District Office. The H. Inspector pointed out to them the disorderliness and unlawfulness of their activities, urged them to seek the recognition of the authorities, but to be quiet until then, and so they signed a letter on February 10, in which they promised not to separate from the Mennonite church congregations without the express permission of the government, or perform any sacerdotal duties that would be forbidden by the Church Aelteste. At the same time, the H. Inspector demanded from all congregation and Church Aelteste a written answer to the following questions: 1) What does this new movement essentially consist of? 2) What harmful consequences can result from it for the Mennonite brotherhood? 3) What measures must be taken to dissolve this society, and is it necessary to deal with its founders as with disturbers of the general peace and order? It cannot be denied that the H. Inspector proceeded very cautiously. The authorities did not proceed according to expectations. The questions show that they did not want to rush, and only after gaining insight into the situation and after receiving answers from the Church Aelteste as well as from the District Office would they take appropriate steps. But which answer was given to the H. Inspector? At the moment I have the declarations of the District Office and Association, as well as of the Church Aelteste. In the declaration of the former, it says, in our opinion, the founders of this society, as well as its most unruly members, must be dealt with according to the law, as disruptors of the general peace and order. However, without excluding them from the colonial state, because the corrective punishments to be imposed on them might make them realize their criminal way of life and repent. The declaration of the Church Aelteste is entitled "By all Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite District", but has only the signatures of five Church Aelteste, thus two are missing, both of which, in contrast to this declaration of the five Aelteste of March 11, 1860, have submitted their opinions, the Ohrloff congregation on March 25 and 29, 1860 and the Kleine Gemeinde on March 24, 1860, to the District Office. Here the fraud is striking that "these documents probably did not come to the knowledge of the authorities at all, I did not find them

at least not in the files, which the Inspector only had the kindness to communicate. Since the declaration of the five Aelteste, as follows below, is quite different in its view and treatment of the sect in question from the view of the other two Aelteste, the District Office is obviously to blame for the fact that the request of the authorities has not been completely fulfilled. If one were to object that the majority of the Church Aelteste must be obeyed in this matter, a principle would be established that would overthrow all our clerical relationships, for in the area of faith, votes are not cast according to heads, but obedience to the Word of God is the determining factor. If subsequently, as the files testify, one was so eager to inform the authorities of everything that made the new society appear as disobedient, disturbers of the peace, etc., why did they not want to allow them a precise insight into the circumstances, because just as little as the separate votes of the two congregations do I find in the files even one explicit mention, relationship or repetition of the declaration of Klassen and consorts of January 6, 1860, which was the first document in this matter. But let us look at the declaration of the five Aelteste in response to the questions posed by the Inspector, what does it offer us? The first question was, in what does this new religious direction essentially consist? Answer, The Scriptures are interpreted, explained and applied unilaterally by them. They claim that their view of individual passages of Scripture is the only correct one, which is why they have so far proved inaccessible to any rebuke and instruction (do these words touch on the question posed?), all these different churches assert the same, they do not respect any existing clerical order, considering such only as human statutes, and as proof the celebration of Holy Communion in private houses is cited. In this version, the words on Klassen give the appearance of extreme arbitrariness, but why did they not have the willingness to add the small fact that the clerical order, judged according to the Scriptures as well as the confessional writings, has become very disorderly, and because they did not want to admit this disorder to Klassen or to change it? Because they did not want to admit this disorder nor to change it, they resorted to such measures for the sake of their conscience that they finally consider themselves alone as true Christians and declare the whole Mennonite brotherhood in sacrilegious presumption and blindness to have fallen into such a state as if it had fallen into the devil's hands. This, then, is the essence of this schism (church separation). The answer to the second question, "What harmful consequences may result from it for the Mennonite Brethren", is given in the following response, A peaceful coexistence with them is not possible, and if they should exist among us as a free and new religious society, only aggravation and disorder could arise from it, as it is to be expected after the experiences made that they would make all the more rapid progress in the enthusiasm, dependent on themselves (this condition is directed by the expelled youth). Also, it is to be feared, it is further said,

that through their restless work for their views several more innocent and well-meaning (!!!) would be drawn into the same fanaticism, because they carry on their business under the appearance of a true Christian attitude. How completely different is the assessment of the Ohrloff congregation, which by no means overlooks the disorder in the Lord's Supper and other misdemeanors. With regard to the measures taken to dissolve this society, the conference states that they have lovingly and earnestly intervened with the erring ones with all means at their disposal from the church's point of view. (Is it true that on January 6, Klassen submitted to the Aelteste the document signed by his comrades, and on January 18, they were already handed over to the District Office, so that the latter, for its part, would try to do what was possible? Is this true if the last resort, the ban, had not yet been practiced against the erring ones?) Regarding their further treatment or punishment by the secular authorities, they do not want to make any suggestions. Admittedly, I have gone into some detail about this piece of paper, but I thought it necessary for a correct understanding of the whole, because with such a view on the part of those who are to judge spiritual things spiritually, the resignation of Klassen and the rest had become a matter of conscience.

On the other hand, it is not to be overlooked that there was obvious error in the Klassen movement, how it had sinned in its rash zeal. Contained the antidote of February 10, 1860, which Johann Klassen, Abr. Kornelsen, Isaak Kopp had signed in the District Office, more than they wanted to admit, could or wanted "that we will not separate from the Mennonite church congregation and will not practice any spiritual acts among ourselves, will not take any step at all in religious regard. They were free to refuse to sign, if in case of violation they rightly present themselves to the authorities as disobedient, as people who, even if they gave their word, could not be trusted. How do they themselves challenge the punishing arm of the authorities, since it is already reported from March 20 that Isaak Kopp, regardless of the given signature, held meetings against the will of the Church Aelteste, not only in his house, but also in the village of Rudnerweide with like-minded Mennonites, when in Gnadenfeld on May 29 in the house of Jakob Reimer, Heinrich Hiebert of Liebenau and Jakob Becker of Rudnerweide were elected as preachers by majority vote from those who had left the church? What responsibility did these men incur when, in open defiance of their authorities, the District Office, reminding them of the writing of February 10 to not perform any sacerdotal acts, in meetings

they were forbidden to speak or preach and answered the same in the Mayor's Office. These men did not obey the order of the District Office. It is strange if the preachers misuse the Scripture to gloss over their disobedience and thus declare: "As we too have been chosen as preachers by our church members who have renounced the decayed churches in the letter of January 6 (Is this already enough proof for the existence of the church? ), so we also feel called by the Spirit of God (our God is a God of order and His Spirit does not drive into disorder) like the Scriptures (here the accusation of one-sided explanation of the Scriptures and distortion applies), like the house of Stephen, which has ordained itself to the service of the saints (1 Cor. 16:15). How challenging is the disobedience when Heinrich Hiebert of Liebenau informs all the Church Aelteste in a letter on July 2 on behalf of his brothers about the election of preachers, encloses the electoral list, and invites them on the next Sunday, July 5, to the house of Jakob Reimer in Gnadenfeld. They want to raise their hearts and hands to bless their preachers before the Lord and God, who came to redeem sinners and is the blessed and eternal rock, thus to consecrate them. Why didn't Klassen, who had the opportunity, not seek the recognition of the authorities immediately after Jan. 6? With what intention did he go to St. Petersburg in November 1860? Was his appeal permissible under the circumstances? But the people are equally wrong in their efforts to promote their movement near and far. That they without hesitation accept anyone who wanted to join them, not only among the Mennonites, but also members of other denominations until the most recent time, for which, however, the ministerial permission must first be obtained. Thus, the Mennonites Benjamin Becker, Heinrich Bartel and the Danish citizen Forchhamer, were emissaries, who were doing their business as far as the Volga, as a result of which the pastor Daenhof at Galalubowka wrote his pastoral letters, and the church Aeltester Lenzmann states that one of those two apostles, after having for a time led an unchaste life secretly for some time and one of his paramours finally became mother of a child, since Easter 1862 married by their bishop, publicly live together as husband and wife. What is the meaning of Becker's statement, if he resists the order of the Guardianship Committee to commit himself in writing that he will not leave the territory of the Molotschna Mennonites, but a very mild measure, with the explanation, because according to the word of the Lord, he believes that he is not doing wrong, because he does not know where God will lead him! We also declare in our confession of faith that we should go into all the world to tell the people the gospel, which would then be forbidden to us, but according to our conscience but we did not, because have not acted contrary to the authorities. It is true that they

in an earlier time burned devotional writings, such as Hofacker's and Brastberger's sermon books, Vesser's Bible commentary, Arndt's True Christianity and Stark's prayer book. Striking is their activity with baptism, in that they baptize all their members, whether they were baptized or not, even those who, according to their testimony, received the earlier baptism in faith, yet they are rebaptizers, (the infant baptism of the church is of course not even recognized) because immersion, rather than sprinkling, is seen by them as the scriptural form of baptism. So, they baptize in rivers or other standing waters of the steppes. What is often said of the immoralities of their baptism, I have not witnessed, but I recently received from a reliable source, who informed me that the baptized is first subjected to a strict examination of his faith, and after the affirmation of the question, whether he also wants to tolerate everything for the sake of his faith and if it must be, leave everything, do not respect property and blood, the baptismal gift received in white clothes. If in the first time their worship meetings also bore a stormy character, if the interpretation of the word was interrupted by the shouting of Glory or Victory, by the clapping of hands of individuals (they sing their melodies in a rapid tempo, often accompanied by a harmonica or violin), there are nevertheless proofs from later times that testify to an orderly course, and in general it must be admitted that after they lost the first feverish heat, more sobriety and prudence asserted themselves among them. Not the aforementioned aberrations, but the already above developed and expressed moment of truth towards and the shaken nature of the community, from which the so-called hoppers emerged, is the cause that still today their number is growing, always new members are being received through baptism.

As deficient as the above draft is in many respects, I have tried to include nothing that has not come to me from a reliable source. My soul, however, is glad if I have been allowed to contribute to the building of our Lord's kingdom on earth through this work, even if it is only a little mortar and stone, then he will also confess himself to what I, his useless servant, have done in weakness.

In July 1864

**Dobbert**, pastor at Prischib

### **From a Diary**

I thought about the condition of the Mennonite churches, and behold, it is even worse than the brethren who have left describe it. There is no more fear of God, no more faithfulness and honesty in the colonies, everyone has to be on guard against his neighbor, against his brother, and whoever still regrets something, regrets that he cannot

deceive his neighbor completely and whoever boasts, boasts of his lechery and gluttony, a heavy drinking, as a brawler and so on. The watchmen of Zion see it, and are silent, or are they unable to see it? Are the watchmen all blind? And the prophet goes on to ask, is that what they are? Do you hate discipline and order? For it is said, why do you take my covenant in your mouth to curse? Then the most terrible threats of Scripture hit them, and it may have occurred to those who have departed. Let us go, they are because we can't follow blind leaders! At the banquets they first talk about temporal things, then according to form about God and Jesus, then again about useless things, and when the wolf comes, they flee like hirelings, namely when the devil comes and the devil's song and the devil's drink begins, then they bring out the fife and go from there as diligently as if they were holier than Jesus, who went after the wretched to save souls from misery. Behold, when the sheep find no pasture, they scatter, for they do not know the stranger and the hireling. Picking up the mangy and adding them to the flock, that is, not shepherding them, but mistreating those who seek better pasture and, with this good intention, miss the way to some extent and are scattered, and setting the dogs on them, that is also not shepherding them. I am curious to see what they will do with those who do not hear the voice of the stranger and stray from the flock, seeking the good shepherd who will give them good pasture and eternal life. I pray to my God that he will not let us sink so low that we, in anger over the truth-twisting received from those who have gone astray, should draw the sword of vengeance against them, put constraint on their conscience, or give them the opportunity to leap and jump over persecution and suffering according to their erroneous conception. Such discipline could be beneficial for them, but we do not want to serve others as a rod, which the disciplining father stuffs into the fire after having achieved his purpose. One could let them, enter into a brotherly relationship with them and say: Yes, dear people', you are quite right, we stand as you say and even worse, but we also do not want to get lost, we also want to take a better path. No one should entrench himself in his own view and opinion, the Word of God alone should apply. You take advice and instruction from us and we from you! Ask your conscience and God's Word, if you can, stay for a while and do not run away, do not leave us in the lurch. We need those who can see the ruin and pray. Couldn't there be an enlightenment in the church through them? That would be working right into the devil's hand, if one wanted to resist these souls and tolerate and strengthen the ungodly! Their errors must not be blamed on anyone, they are indeed reprehensible, but the souls and their good intentions do not make them reprehensible. How many errors Jesus had constantly

among his own and had to correct them, did he throw them away for that? Not at all! The people whose faith brought Menno Simons first to doubt, then to research and finally to knowledge and blessed enjoyment of the truth, also erred in places, but he took care of them with love and wisdom from above and succeeded in many souls. They now praise the slain lamb with him there. O Lord Jesus! Make thee and the angels and thy elect rejoice, that thy lambs, though they err, may not be forsaken, nor persecuted, nor a prey to the wolf, but sought out, fed, and ever remain a possession purchased by thy blood, made free by thy truth. That none of us may be used by Satan as a hireling, a ravening wolf in sheep's clothing, or an agitating dog, so that all of us, filled with your spirit of love and all united with one another in faith, may become your blessed possession. Amen.

Note. The foregoing are thoughts of a Mennonite preacher, long since departed, which he put into words in his diary at that time. Would he have been ashamed of these words when he awoke in paradise? Let the reader reflect on this.

## 5 - Exit of the Olgina Church (Temple Church)

In the fifties, several members of the Gnadenfeld congregation felt the need to do something more for the growing youth than a village or elementary school could provide, and it was decided to found a high school similar to the Ohrloff Central School. When the society that wanted to found the school had organized itself, it was welcomed by the Gnadenfeld Church Council with the following letter:

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! Amen

We, the undersigned, Aelteste and preachers of the Mennonite congregation in Gnadenfeld, welcome with joy the society formed among us, which has set itself the task of founding a higher educational institution among us Mennonites. How saddening for us to realize that in all things, in all circumstances, progress is noticeable, how this spirit of progress is also taking hold of our people, and to have to see how the preaching profession, in particular, is being neglected among the Mennonites.

But on the contrary, how gratifying that in the emergence of this educational institution a star of hope is rising, which promises to illuminate this nightly darkness and to raise the preaching profession once again to a level where it will be able to keep pace with other professions.

For this reason, we warmly welcome the Society and join it in promoting its purposes with advice and action, and we wish that the Lord our God will let it succeed in its purpose, so that a proper educational institution may soon blossom here for the glory of God the Father and for the building of His kingdom among us.

Gnadenfeld  
July 27, 1857

Aeltester: **August Lenzmann**  
Preachers: **Nikolai Schmidt, Bernhard Penner, Andreas Flaming, Abraham Sudermann**

From the above welcoming letter, it is evident that a high but splendid goal had been set and to achieve this goal it was now first necessary to erect the necessary buildings. This was done by voluntary contributions, but for the most part by Rudnerweide merchant Abraham Wiebe who undertook the construction at his own expense; the most important point, however, was to provide adequate teaching staff.

A talented young man, Johannes Lange, after receiving good instruction in German and Russian at the Steinbach school, was sent to Kirschenharthof for further education in Württemberg. He was sent to the Paulus Institute for further education, and after three years of instruction in this institution, shortly before his return home, he had essays about his intended future work among his people published in the magazine "Süddeutsche Warte", which attracted the attention not only of the Molotschna Mennonites, but also of the authorities, and aroused some suspicion. On his journey home, he had given a sermon in front of an assembled congregation in the colony of Hoffnungstal, which probably increased the attention on him, and both this sermon and the above-mentioned articles in the Süddeutsche Warte gave rise to accusations about Lange, that he had left the faith and the Mennonite denomination and was harboring sectarian aspirations.

By order of the H. Inspector of the Colonies, who presumably had instructions from the Guardianship Committee, the District Office, in a letter dated February 17, 1862, demanded a declaration from the Church Aelteste concerning Johannes Lange, and the latter, requested by the Aeltester, gave in writing as follows:

**Declaration  
of the Gnadenfeld Mennonite Johannes Lange concerning the Accusations of  
Apostasy,  
Withdrawal from the Denomination and of Harboring Sectarian Aspirations.**

According to the command of the apostle, 1 Peter 3:15, I take the pen with joy, in order to fulfill the request made of me. I confess from the bottom of my heart and irrevocably to the basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures, as prescribed to us in the Old and New Testaments, to the Apostles Creed and to the Confessions as contained in our Mennonite Catechism.

Far from any association in solidarity with any old or new sect, nor in any solidarity with the Kirscheilharthof, I am a member of the Mennonite congregation. I have testified to this by going to church, participating in communion, and honoring the congregational ordinances. I also want to continue to persevere and become more and more faithful in the faith as I have come to know it through history from our dear reformer Menno Simon and all our fathers. Without any sectarian aspirations, I seek the welfare of my family, my congregation and my fatherland by word and deed and have always kept within the bounds of God's laws and those of my fatherland, to which I refer all slander.

Gnadenfeld  
March 8, 1862

**Johannes Lange**

In a conference of the Aelteste on March 9, 1862, the above declaration of Johannes Lange was assessed and the following letter was drafted and sent to the appropriate place:

**To the District Office, for forwarding to the H. Inspector of the Colonies**

From the letter we received from the District Office dated February 17. I, we see that

the Inspector of the Molotschna Colonies demands a declaration from the Church Aelteste as to whether the teaching of Johannes Lange, as a follower of the theologian Hoffmann, is not harmful to our youth. We declare that we intend to stick to our creed also in the future, and since the written declaration of Johannes Lange, which we will include as an enclosure, does not contain anything that contradicts the Holy Scriptures or our creed. We still lack a sound judgment about the harmfulness of his teaching. But it will not be omitted by that congregation in which he stands as a member to keep a watchful eye over him and his teaching, and as soon as the harmfulness of it is recognized, to see it halted.

Alexanderwohl  
March 9, 1862

With all due respect the Church Aelteste:  
**Peter Wedel, Benjamin Ratzlaff, Dirk Warkentin, August Lenzmann, Franz Goerz, Bernhard Peters, Johann Harder, Heinrich Toews, Johann Friesen**

Now everything seemed to be settled, and Lange was employed in August 1862 in the Gnadenfeld private school as a teacher \*) and was under the supervision of Aeltester Lenzmann in religious matters. Whether the watchful eye mentioned in the above report may have recognized the harmfulness of Lange's teaching after five months of activity, or whether there was still a secret collaborative, could be suspected but not clearly proven, but on January 9, 1863, the Guardianship Committee official, Keller appeared in the Gnadenfeld village office and submitted the following questions to teacher Lange for answering:

When questioned by the Guardianship Committee Official, H. Keller

- 1) Whether I belong to the Jerusalem Friends or to the successors of the theologian Hoffmann.
- 2) Whether I wrote the articles published in the journal "Süddeutsche Warte" in 1861, signed with Johannes Lange.
- 3) What I meant by the expression "New World Order" appearing in one of these articles?
- 4) Which Mennonite churches have been built in Russia from the money collected in Germany?
- 5) What limits of the profession and effectiveness I have set for myself in Russia and in the power of which authority, and

\*) From the opening of this school until the employment of teacher Lange, Heinrich Franz was employed as a teacher.

6) Why I have admitted adults to the Sunday children's sessions. And to certify that I have written down the following truthful answers here in my own hand:

Point 1: I do not belong to the Jerusalem Friends, if by this expression a sect is understood, but I am a member of the Gnadenfeld Mennonite congregation, also I do not belong to the successors of the theologian Hoffmann, but I am a disciple of the Paulus Institute and I look for my models and patterns in the Holy Scriptures.

Point 2: I have written the above-mentioned essays.

Point 3: With the expression "new world order" I mean the Kingdom of God in its fullest extent. I call this order "new" because everyone who lives in the Kingdom of God is born anew, and "world order" because, according to the prophet Isaiah, the Kingdom of God will encompass the whole earth. This Kingdom of God does not resist the existing kingdoms according to Rom. 13.

Point 4: The Mennonite church in Berdyansk, as well as a church on the Volga (if the latter is already finished) have been built with the help of collections in Germany.

Point 5: I consider it my profession to work in a proper way against the damage and moral corruption of our people. To this end I have gladly accepted the call of my honored school board to take over the education of the children entrusted to this board, and as a teacher I strive to comply with the wishes of the Church Aeltester and church preachers, as can be seen from the enclosed copy of a letter \*) from the Gnadenfeld Church Council to my school board.

Point 6: I hold the Sunday religious lessons by order of and under the supervision of the Mayor's Office, and therefore have no opinion for nor against the attendance of adults, since the location is the responsibility of the school board.

**Johannes Lange**

**Councillor Keller  
To the Board of the Gnadenfeld Private School  
A most humble request.**

Your Honor has deemed it good to give the local schoolmaster the verbal order to see to it that the Sunday children's programs in our school are not attended by adults.

\*) The letter of welcome of July 27, 1857

The school board feels compelled to first explain to Your Worship that these children's lessons are nothing else and should be nothing else than a thorough biblical instruction in the truths of our Christian religion. Up to now, these Sunday lessons have mostly been attended only by the blood relatives of our teacher and by the parents and relatives of the children given to us for education, and these cannot be forbidden to attend the school in the future either, since it is entirely in their interest to hear and see how their children are being taught. Furthermore, such a prohibition is also directly against the purpose of the school, which is not only to teach children, but also to raise the people out of the mire of ignorance, and it is therefore our fervent wish that quite a few of our people will take advantage of the opportunity for education and use our religious lessons as much as the local can hold. We, the school board and the founders of the school, also believe that we do not deserve that the authorities should hinder a large part of our effectiveness in such a way. We are aware that we have correctly understood the crying need of our people for education and instruction and that we have taken the right steps to remedy it. The recognition of the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent and the His Excellency Privy Councillor H. v. Hahn, who knows the needs of our people, has not only praised our efforts, but has also asked us to report to him in detail from time to time about the progress of our work and endeavors. The order given to our Mayor by Your Honor now removes a significant part of our effectiveness and beneficial influence on the education of our people and Your Honor will see for himself that we cannot do otherwise than to ask you most humbly to withdraw this verbal order.

Gnadenfeld  
School  
January 10, 1863  
**Schmidt**

The Board of Directors of the Gnadenfeld Private  
**Nikolai Schmidt, Johann**

After H. Keller had given an order to the Gnadenfeld Village Aeltester to see to it that the Sunday children's hours in the private school were not attended by adults, the school board asked H. Keller to withdraw this order and H. Keller asked the Gnadenfeld Aeltester to make a positive declaration as to whether or not the attendance of the children's hours by adults was absolutely necessary. The Aeltester replied:

The [*Gnadenfeld*] Kirchenkonvent has given this school and its teacher Lange no authority to influence adults and considers the

attendance of these children's classes by adults is not only absolutely unnecessary, but also harmful, and that Johannes Lange cannot be allowed to extend his activities to adults, because his activities do not edify the local church congregation, but on the contrary cause fragmentation and agitation, as the saddening experience of these days has shown us.

Gnadenfeld  
January 17, 1863

Aeltester: **August Lenzmann**  
Preacher: **Bernhard Penner**

With the above letter, Lenzmann had initiated the overthrow of the school, and in order to achieve his set goal, he found it necessary to take further appropriate steps, and first he wrote to the school board:

**Nikolai Schmidt and Johann Schmidt**

Our office, which has been entrusted to us by God and the community, now makes it our indispensable duty to request that you instruct the teacher of your school, Johannes Lange, in the most definite manner, to continue his activities purely within the bounds of a school teacher and to completely abandon his teaching of adult persons who are not among his daily students.

Aeltester: **August Lenzmann**

If one looks at the two above writings, one must ask, can Lenzmann himself really believe what he writes? Should he really believe that what he is allowed to teach children is harmful to adults? And should also someone who has his common sense and uses it sincerely be able to come to the opinion that Lange is to be held responsible here, if his children's lessons were also listened to by adults? If Lenzmann himself would have believed what he wrote, then his senses would have to be strongly confused, but this was not the case, things were not that bad, or perhaps even worse, because it was rather a calculation to clip the wings of this young so highly gifted man in time and to bring about his fall without fail, because this was a done deal. Lenzmann speaks of splintering and agitation in the letter of January 17, and in order to come closer to his set goal, he had to use such buzzwords, although in reality there was nothing else going on, except that some in the congregation who listened to the youth lessons, recognized in

Lange an an outstandingly talented man, who could to some extent be equal to his highly placed task of influencing the preaching profession. In his letter of July 27, 1857, with which he greeted the founders of the school so warmly and found the preaching profession so sad, Lenzmann seems not to have included himself in the number of preachers so poorly equipped, and it was an unexpected a blow to him, even if his own supposed light should dim, in contrast to that which now shone so brightly, after the barely ended Barley and Church Disputes.

A few years earlier, shortly before the Barley Dispute, when Lenzmann still maintained active communication with the Württembergers and the District Mayor wanted to stop this communication, but failed with this plan in a conference because of Lenzmann's resistance, the latter was neither held in high esteem by the District Mayor nor by the other Aelteste, because said communication was also disliked by the other Aelteste. His reputation rose only in the years of the attacks on the Orhlöff and Mennonite Brethren congregations, where he faithfully stood by the District Mayor as a loyal fellow fighter. In this matter, H. Keller still applied a law which was intended for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, but which did not concern the Mennonites, but was accepted by Lenzmann, because everything seemed to him to be favorable for the overthrow of the school.

#### **To the Mayor's Office in Gnadenfeld**

The content of the just received declaration concerning Johannes Lange's outrages and their visible consequences by the Church Aeltester August Lenzmann and the Church Preacher Bernhard Penner of the 17th of this month prompted me to seriously consider the laws which have been emanated from the Highest for the confessors of Protestant denominations tolerated in Russia (to which the Mennonite congregations also belong) and which undoubtedly refer to the present case, which read:

Every householder has the right to determine for himself and his family the time for communal prayer, but without thereby in the least hindering anyone in the worship of the congregation. Furthermore, private prayer meetings which exceed the limits of communal domestic or family prayer shall not be permitted otherwise than by decision of the consistory and with the knowledge of the local civil authorities. The following rules shall be observed:

- 1) That in these meetings no one has the right to give free lectures or to administer the sacraments, and that all actions be limited to the reading of the Holy Scriptures without any interpretation (explanation) of them, or to the reading of sermons of spiritual content approved by the consistories, also without additions and explanations, and to the singing of spiritual songs or recitation of prayers, which are likewise examined and approved by the consistories.
- 2) That these meetings shall not be held during church services and shall in no case cause divisions in the Christian community or any violation of clerical or civil order. Finally, according to the basic law of the Russian Empire, no subject of the Russian Empire can excuse himself by claiming ignorance of the Imperial laws.

According to this, the Mayor's Office and the members of the colony of Gnadenfeld must, without exception, be guided and thereby protected from legal responsibility, in that, firstly, they may not allow any spiritual meetings, except for those of the fathers with their household members, without the written permission of the local Church Aeltester. The latter, the members of the congregation, on the other hand, are not to assemble in a private school, but in the church built in Gnadenfeld, for their hours of worship, under the direction of the Church Aelteste and church preachers chosen by the congregation itself, and that this is made known to all the fathers of the household or family, are to sign. I look forward to a special report on the receipt and fulfillment of this.

Prischib near Halbstadt  
Committee  
January 18, 1863

Official of the Guardianship

**A. Keller**

The Honorable Keller intended to confuse teacher Lange by presenting quite a lot of questions and submitted the following to him for answer:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How old are you, where were you born, when and by whom were you baptized, instructed in religious truth and admitted to Holy Communion?</li> </ol> | <p>I was born in Gnadenfeld, I am 25 years and 3 months old. I was taught, baptized and admitted to Holy Communion in 1854 by Church Aeltester Johann Wall from Prussia.</p> |
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- 2) Did you dedicate yourself to the doctrinal state or are you by others and by whom in particular were you chosen for this position?  
I have dedicated myself to the teaching profession with preference, and I was strengthened in this by my parents.
- 3) Did you choose the school in Kirschenharthof yourself or who appointed it?  
I chose this school myself, but in agreement with my parents and my benefactor Nikolai Schmidt.
- 4) Do you belong to the Jerusalem friends if this expression is not understood as a sect?  
I belong to the Jerusalem friends mentioned in Ps. 122:6.
- 5) What prevents a student of the Paulus Institute from being a successor of the theologian Hoffmann, since it is known throughout the world that both men are friends of Jerusalem and equally active in the work of introducing a new world order and building the German temple in Jerusalem?  
As a student of the Paulus Institute, I have been trained especially in modern languages and mathematics and am by no means obliged to be the successor of the theologian Hoffmann.
- 6) Are you still in contact with those Friends of Jerusalem or in general with persons in Kirschenharthof and by what name?  
From Kirschenharthof all connection with them is forbidden to me, I have no connection any more.
- 7) Namely which models and patterns have you chosen to imitate?  
The pattern of John the Baptist, who called his people to repentance and pointed to the Savior.
- 8) Can you give unusual examples of the depressed condition of the Mennonite congregations here, which you have criticized?  
First of all, the many disputes and splintering, then also the fact that one tries to fight against meetings for edification from God's word, which demonstrably already took place in Prussia, in local congregations and are free according to point I of the Most High Letter of Grace, as if they were against the order.
- 9) What do you mean by the words "business of cleaning up" used in your second circular letter?  
By the business of cleaning up, I understand the fight against a low carnal mindset in myself and others. According to Is. 59:2 the partition between God and us lies in our sins, which must therefore be overcome in me and others.

- 10) Who ordered you to do this business and when?
- This business was recommended to me at my holy baptism.
- 11) Explain particularly clearly and concisely whether you, as an Imperial Russian subject in Russia, really do not need either the recognition or the commission or the authorization of people to, as you say, clean up among your co-religionists, the Mennonites, and to remedy the damage in their communities and to snatch them from their perilous situation?
- As an Imperial Russian subject, I need and possess the order and authorization of people for the exercise of an external profession. Nor did I want it to be understood as if I did not need it at all, in order to bear witness by word and example against the broken state and for the purposes of God, so I ask forgiveness for this somewhat careless expression.
- 12) Is the Gnadenfeld private school an ordinary normal school or an institution from which, through the application of the means you state: "development of the spirit, awakening of the mind and keeping the body clean from early on", people must emerge who are capable of the prophetic and apostolic ministry?
- Every school institution, indeed every Christian is called to such a task according to Eph.4:13, 1 Cor. 12:4-11. We confess a community of saints, in which according to 1 Cor. 12:2-8 also apostles and prophets must be.
- 13) Have you been commissioned, and by whom, to help train these school people to become apostles and prophets?
- This commission is not related to that school, but as a Christian I strive for it for myself.
- 14) How close is the end that you have indicated?
- According to 1 John 2:18 the last hour is at the door.
- 15) Since it is a matter record that after your return from Kirschenharthof, you gave a free lecture (sermon) in the Hoffnungstal colony and called yourself an evangelist, you must now state when and who by name recognized you as an evangelist and authorized you to preach before adult assemblies of any Christian congregation in Russia.
- I was invited to the aforementioned address (edification hour) by Pastor Friedrich Schock, who called me an Evangelist when inviting his church members, otherwise neither I nor anyone else, gave me that name.

16) On January 9, of this year you answered to the fifth question addressed to you that you consider it your profession to work in a proper way against the harm and moral corruption of your people and that you seek as a teacher to comply with the wishes of your Church Aeltester and your church preachers. In contradiction with the spirit of your answer, you have for years exceeded the proper limits of a teacher by giving religious instruction with explanation of the Holy Scriptures to children and adults on Sundays in family homes and in the school institution in Gnadenfeld, without having even sought permission from your Church Aeltester, let alone having received it. Therefore, you now have to explain on whose behalf you performed these spiritual acts, which according to the laws are only due to the elected and confirmed church preachers, and what you call a proper way, since, as is known, a private school is not a Sunday school and, according to state laws, no instruction is to be held in private schools on Sundays.

January 22, 1863

A. Keller

A member of the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent, N. Schmidt, commissioned me to teach the children God's Word. At the public introduction into my office were Church preacher Bernhard Penner, preacher Nikolai Schmidt, preacher Bernhard Harder from Halbstadt were present. The first religious lesson in our private school was attended by two Church Aelteste August Lenzmann and Franz Goerz. Very recently, the Church Aeltester August Lenzmann told me, when I asked him about this, that I had witnesses to the fact that the lessons on Sundays were not forbidden. Since I conducted these classes with the commission and partial attendance of various members of our board, and did not see anything spiritually objectionable in them, I believed that I was operating in a completely orderly manner. Even the admission of adults, which was not in the scope of my duties, did not seem to me to be out of order, since in our congregation it has had the custom for many years that non-elected and confirmed persons may hold edification hours, and such private edifications were well approved and attended by our [*Gnadenfeld*] Kirchenkonvent.

Johannes Lange

H. Keller also addressed the following questions to the school principals Nikolai and Johann Schmidt. However, in order to catch them in their answers, if possible, and to be able to hand them over to the authorities, they were separated from each other as if criminals for answering these questions and placed under supervision to prevent a consultation.

Questions by H. Keller:

- 1) Whether according to the program, which is still unknown to me, the Gnadenfeld Private School is a normal school, or an institution for the education of apostles and prophets?
- 2) Since the Gnadenfeld private school is not a Sunday school, but a normal school, you are asked to state whether you, and to what end, and by virtue of which law, regulation or possible permission of secular, or your clerical authorities, have ordered instruction also on Sundays and feast days, regardless of the fact that according to laws, any instruction on the above-mentioned days is inadmissible?
- 3) For what valid reason can the parents of the pupils not just as well convince themselves on weekdays how thoroughly their children are instructed in the truths of our Christian religion, since according to the timetable known to me this very instruction is given often enough every week?
- 4) Are the statutes of this private school, submitted to the Guardianship Committee, clear and definite that the purpose of this school is not only to teach children, but also to raise the people out of the mire of ignorance? That is, that the school will not only be a school for small children, but also an institution for the subsequent education of adults, or is this not stated in those statutes?

Responses from N. Schmidt:

The Gnadenfeld Private School is a school for the education of children.

For no other reason than to hear that the children are being taught. I am not aware of any commandment that children should not be taught on Sunday afternoons after the church service.

Since the parents of the children often come to church on Sundays and have their work at home on other days, we have given them the opportunity to listen.

I understand by a school an education of the youth, and if the youth get a thorough instruction, then the people will be lifted out of the swamp of ignorance.

- 5) Why not? Therefore not, as I have already said in the 4th point.
- 6) Are the statutes in question confirmed or not. If they are confirmed, then the time and number of the regulation made about it is to be indicated exactly? They are in our committee, the permission to start our school we have received from our association on July 19, 1857 No. 519.
- 7) With what do you prove the recognition of the Gnadenfeld Church Convention and the Privy Councillor v. Hahn with regard to the ways correctly taken by you for the satisfaction of the needs of your people through spiritual meeting hours in the school and led by Johannes Lange? We prove the recognition of the Church Convention by the letter \*) which Your Honor has received, and the recognition of the Privy Councillor v. Hahn was verbally expressed to the committee by Johann Neufeld in Halbstadt during his trip to the colonies and he found it very good, knowing the needs of our people. The school does not obligate itself to Johannes Lange, therefore if he is not good, we will quickly find another teacher.
- 8) You are asked to present the evidence that you have been requested by v. Hahn to give him detailed reports from time to time on the progress of your work and striving in this direction, and whether such reports are to be made through the Guardianship Committee or directly? At our verbal meeting, Hahn said we should write to him from time to time, but we have not reported anything yet.
- 9) Who appointed Johannes Lange to the teaching profession and for what reason? The school board has appointed him to do so and later in the Aelteste conference in Alexanderwohl on March 8 this year his essays and his creed were examined and found faultless, therefor, we accepted him as a teacher for our school.

\*) The welcoming letter of July 27, 1857.

- 10) Who made the determination that Johannes Lange was not trained as a teacher in a school of the Russian Empire, but abroad, and who gave him the necessary means for this?
- There we have no actual appointment, but I and my father-in-law Abraham Wiebe agreed to train him and to pay the costs. I also sent him to school in Steinbach for three years.
- 11) Why was the Hoffmann-Paulus School preferred to all foreign teacher training colleges for the training of Johannes Lange?
- I simply have to say that I visited many institutions during my travels in Germany, and I liked Paulus best because it was rural and not urban, and because its goal was not educate masters, but capable teachers who would be useful to the community and loyal to the Emperor.
- 12) Did Lange receive the spiritual direction in the Kirschenharthossche School for which sake you sent him to this institution?
- When I was there with Paulus, I did not think of any particular school of thought in the spiritual realm, but only of one thing, the one necessary thing.
- 13) Did you ask Johannes Lange to issue the two circular letters to the Mennonites printed in No. 14 and 17 of the Süddeutsche Warte for 1661, or not?
- No.
- 14) Does the content and form of said circulars correspond to your convictions and views as an Imperial Russian subject and Mennonite, or not?
- I find in the circulars many truths about my people that hurt me and I consider them to be quite religious. It would be better if Lange had not written them. Yes, I am as a Mennonite and rejoice over my Most Gracious Emperor; Oh God, I pray, keep our Emperor for many more years.

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| <p>15) Do you need the consent and permission of your (<i>Gnadenfeld</i>) Kirchenkonvent to let Johannes Lange hold devotional hours for children and adults on Sundays and Saturdays in the school premises, or do you not need this permission and why not, since you as the head of the school must know that elementary schools with their board are subordinate to the local clerical authorities?</p> | <p>We have no church laws about it, whether to let or not.</p> |
| <p>16) Did you or did you not observe the splintering and agitation caused by Lange's lectures in your congregation, which your board complained about, and why not?</p>  | <p>Lange did not preach any church sermons.</p>                |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Keller</p>   | <p style="text-align: center;">Nikolai Schmidt.</p>            |

Because the same questions were put to the school director Johann Schmidt, only the answers given by him follow here:

- 1) This private school of ours is not an institution whose purpose is the training of apostles and prophets, but is a normal school whose purpose is secondary education and upbringing, as is typically the case in village schools.
- 2) We have no legal reason to give, because the laws are unknown to us as laymen, nor do we have any permission from the secular and spiritual authorities, but rely with this activity on our independent church status, according to which it is a traditional use, especially in our Gnadenfeld community for people to meet in private homes. We also believed that this freedom allowed us to hold religious instruction for children on Sundays outside of the church service time, because at another time, the parents of our children wanted us to hold religious instruction for them on Sundays. This is all the more important because at a different time the wishes of the parents of our children, who would like to attend these classes, would not be met.
- 3) The parents of the children should be convicted that their children are being thoroughly and usefully instructed in the truths of the Christian religion. Sundays are a convenient time for parents, since they are already in church services, to observe this instruction because attendance at other days of the week would be time lost from work. Also, during the weekdays, only biblical history is taught, which, according to our knowledge, is different from religious instruction.

- 4) In the statutes submitted to the Guardianship Committee, it is not stated that the school also intends to educate adults, but this has been our wish, as far as they could and wanted to benefit from the religious education. We also believed that we would not be wrong if we did more for the common good than we promised in the statutes.
- 5) Point 5 has already been answered under point 4, only with the remark that at that time we had no means in our hands, but as soon as we came into possession of them, we believed, they could be supplemented.
- 6) The statutes in question have not yet been confirmed.
- 7) We do not know any other spiritual gatherings other than the Sunday religious classes for our children and the recognition of the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent proves that a teacher from the same is a member of the school board, and the Preacher Bernhard Penner was present at the confirmation of teacher Johannes Lange into his office, where the latter announced plans to hold these religious classes on Sundays and the Preacher Penner did not object. In general, the [Gnadenfeld] Kirchenkonvent, which knew about the religious classes, would have forbidden them if it did not approve of them. By a written letter we can prove the recognition of our efforts to His Excellency the Privy Councillor v. Hahn, but must refer to the fact that in the year 1856, during his visit to our colonies, we, I, Nikolai Schmidt and Johann Klassen from Liebenau, were admitted to the local District Office in Halbstadt, where he advised and urged us not to lose heart, but to continue our good efforts even with limited means and to report to him from time to time. At that time there could be no talk of spiritual meetings under the leadership of Johannes Lange, because Johannes Lange was not yet in our service, nor was he scheduled to be.
- 8) Since according to point 7 we do not have written proofs, we cannot present such evidence. We did not receive any instruction about whether we should send the interim reports to him indirectly through the Guardianship Committee, or directly to him.
- 9) Johannes Lange was appointed Preacher by Nikolai Schmidt from Steinbach, Johann Schmidt Gnadenfeld, Johann Klassen Liebenau and Jakob Reimer Gnadenfeld, both of whom were also members of the board, but later left the board because of different views on teaching. The reason for his appointment as a teacher was his excellent training.

- 10) The school board decided to send him abroad for further training and the necessary means were provided by the board member Abraham Wiebe from Rudnerweide.
- 11) Because we believed that we could see in them their great seriousness about the fear of God, and we also believed that they deserved preference over other schools that wrongly give thorough instruction in the sciences.
- 12) Johannes Lange was not sent abroad by the school board. He was sent away to be trained as a thorough and God-fearing school teacher, which we have achieved in him.
- 13) I have not made any request for the circulars in question.
- 14) The circulars in question contain, apart from the description of the morbid church conditions at home and abroad, which I do not know myself and therefore cannot judge, are several statements he made which have drawn the suspicion of the authorities, as if he had political activities in mind. I disapprove of these statements, but am satisfied by the fact that he has not interfered in any civic affairs during his stay of almost 1 ½ years. In the clerical sphere, I do not see him as having acted against any public prohibition either, and if he had done so, he would be subordinate to a congregation with its board, which then has the authority to punish disobedient members. In general, these circulars bear the stamp of his youth and inexperience, but he has a willingness to be instructed in this regard.
- 15) I did not believe that I needed the permission of our Council, because I believed that I would have their approval, if they did not take place at an unauthorized time, nor was any instruction presented to me in my request for permission to start our school from the authorities. I believed that this permission was quite natural in our independent church structure, which not only allows a more free church form, a liberal movement, but almost makes it necessary. Since, according to our constitution, the [Gnadenfeld] Kirchenkonvent includes laymen as well as ordained clergy. While the level of knowledge of laymen is often below that of the clergy, the latter is strongly reliant on rapid developments within Christianity.

- 16) I am not aware of any fragmentation or division as a result of complains from within the congregation. I am aware of agitation and discontent, but I believe that our dear members have no legitimate reason for it, because publicly we have always behaved calmly and obediently. We do not know of any prohibition in Mennonite practice, that denies us the freedom to edify using the Word of God in our sermons, which is advised and approved by the Council. If, however, our members do not want to calm down, we will prove to them that we are not dissuaded by the discord since we are leaving to form another congregation where edification in the Word does not cause offense. We hope that this unrest can be eliminated by other means.

**Johann Schmidt**

From all the correspondence it is evident that Lange had aroused the suspicion of the government by his circular in the "Warte", but one also sees that this suspicion could easily have been dispelled by the Aeltester Lenzmann. Instead of doing this, however, as is evident from everything, that this suspicion was convenient for the execution of his plan. Lange had to be found guilty, because when the last questions of H. Keller were handed over to Lange and the two members of the school board for answering, Lange had already been removed from the school the day before, on January 21, 1863. He was assigned to perform clerical work in the District Office. On January 26, Johann Schmidt asked H. Keller to release teacher Lange from his imprisonment, because it was not only a great disadvantage for the school, but also detrimental to his health, since he could not endure the constant sitting due to his physical constitution, but to no avail.

Now the school board and several other school friends turned to the Guardianship Committee in February 1863, submitted to it the whole course of events of this matter and asked for consideration of this distress and for release of teacher Lange.

**To the Guardianship Committee of the Foreign Colonists**

**From the Board and Supporters  
of the Gnadenfeld Private School  
of the Molotschna Mennonite District,**

**our most obedient request.**

In 1857 a society was formed in Gnadenfeld for the formation of a private school, which was approved in writing by the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent on July 27, 1857. The opening of this school was approved by the Agricultural Association in the regulation of June 19, No. 519, and the school was taken under its supervision. On this basis, the school board, which was originally elected and then supplemented itself according to the regulations. A talented young Mennonite from Gnadenfeld, Johannes Lange, was sent to Kirschenharthof in Württemberg to complete his education. After his return and the eventual elimination of accusations that he held erroneous doctrines by the Kirchenkonvent at the conference on March 9, 1862, he was publicly appointed, as a teacher in this private school, in August 1862 by the church preachers and he was to be under the supervision of the Church Aeltester August Lenzmann with regard to his religious doctrine.

After about half a year of uneventful teaching by the teacher, he was called before the Guardianship Committee official Keller as a result of a report from the Mayor's Office in Gnadenfeld denouncing him as a Friend of Jerusalem. This despite the fact that his religious essays published in 1861 by the Süddeutsche Warte concerning the condition of the Mennonite church, as well as his written responses to the questions asked of him, were discussed at the above-mentioned conference, and no danger from his teaching could be found. Now an unfounded, distorted, dishonest and false declaration of the Church Aeltester Lenzmann and Church Preacher Penner in the name of the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent, which however is composed of seven members, thus not the full Council, of suspicious of seditious activities, caused Lange to be taken from the school, his papers seized, and since January 21 he has been detained at the expense of the school board in the District Office in Halbstadt and sentenced to involuntary labor.

The school superintendents Johann Schmidt from Gnadenfeld and Nikolai Schmidt from Steinbach, were also called before H. Keller, had to answer a series of questions, were unexpectedly separated and put under supervision. Such, rapid and surprising coercive measures, whose end and extent we cannot foresee, seem to us to have

the aim of the destruction of our work and severe condemnation of the school board as well as of the teacher. The mere listening, by adults, to the Sunday school children's lessons by teacher Lange, was not only presented as unauthorized, but also as having harmful splintering and agitation generating effect on adults, as if he had usurped the position of a preacher, as if principles and teachings to be implanted in children were dangerous for adults to listen to and so the admission of adults was forbidden by H. Keller. Furthermore, both the school superintendents Nikolai Schmidt and Johann Schmidt as well as the teacher Lange were pointed out to having allegedly violated state laws, while we believed we were in complete compliance with the state laws. We have obeyed the school administration appointed over us by the High Government, namely the Agricultural Association and our entire Mennonite Kirchenkonvent in its orders to the school system, because no other requirements were known to us that would further define our limits and boundaries within which we could develop and contribute to the spiritual welfare of our communities.

For these reasons, we take the liberty of urgently and obediently requesting the Guardianship Committee, in consideration of our distress, to order the release of the teacher Johannes Lange, and not to have him, as well as the leaders Nikolai Schmidt and Johann Schmidt, be found guilty by unfounded accusations. They acted with good intentions, having the welfare of their brothers in mind, without violating the rules of our school administration. Also, order the Agricultural Association and the Church Council, so that the latter may investigate the conduct of the Aeltester Lenzmann, in order to provide us with a truthful justification of his accusations, since political activities, which do not concern the Council but are subject to the jurisdiction of the secular authorities prevent us from investigating ourselves. Their three hundred years of existence without political ambitions and the sacrificial loyalty of our congregations to throne and fatherland show our love for our humane fatherly government. But we can't see this reflected in the actions of the committee official Keller, who seems to want to interpret religious opinions politically on the basis of inadequate understanding.

About the success we await a prompt favorable resolution.

February 1863

**Nikolai Schmidt, Abraham Wiebe, Johann Schmidt, Abr. Schmidt, Hermann Friesen, Joseph Dueck, Jacob Dueck, Rudolf Riesen, Kornelius Klassen, Peter Dueck, Johann Dueck, Friedrich Lange, Joseph Fast**

In a letter dated February 14, the two superintendents addressed the Privy Councillor v. Hahn, also explained the entire course of the matter to him and asked Hahn for the honor of a few words of advice:

**To His Excellency H. Privy Councillor and Knight v. Hahn  
in St. Petersburg**

Your Excellency! We still have fresh memories of your words of farewell, addressed to the colonists when you left the Guardianship Committee, and it fills us with joy and strengthens our courage to know that there is, close to the throne of Russia, a heart full of fatherly love for us. This joy is mixed with sadness because only a time of need brings us close to your fatherly heart. We have failed to submit a report on our school to Your Excellency, but we console ourselves with the hope that you will not deny forgiveness and unchanging benevolence to your pleading children.

Since we heard that Your Excellency wished to receive information from time to time about the progress of our school, we have been able to build, with great effort, a beautiful spacious school building in Gnadenfeld, even with the limited means at our disposal, but in the firm trust of God, and the work has had blessed progress so far. At first, the teacher Heinrich Franz, who used to teach in Chortitza, served our school with his talents, and we already have several capable school teachers from among his pupils. However, since this institution was founded to meet more comprehensive needs, we considered it our duty to provide a more highly educated teacher. Therefore, we sent a talented young man, named Johannes Lange, to complete his education in the institute of Christoph Paulus at Kirschenharthof in Würtemberg, whose directors were known as God-fearing men and were among the best Mennonite theologians. When Lange returned in the fall of 1861, we intended to have him work alongside Franz, but the latter, who did not like what he saw as a rebuke of his teaching abilities, resigned and founded another school.

In August 1862 Lange was hired as a teacher, teaching religion, modern languages, mathematics, elementary and real sciences. The results so far justified our most optimistic projections. But now, unexpectedly, larger obstacles are threatening this work. The following external circumstances must underlie these problems. Lange visited the Mennonite congregations in Germany and

was prompted to publish his observations of the congregations in Russia in two letters to the editors and Mennonite readers of the magazine "Süddeutsche Warte". On his homeward journey he delivered a sermon to a meeting organized by Pastor Schock in the colony of Hoffnungstal near Odessa, which attracted the attention of the authorities. Once at home, at the request of his parents, he held a weekly devotional hour, which was also attended by others, as such hours are now and then customary among us. When Lange took up his teaching position, he gave up these devotional hours, and those who attended them began to attend the Sunday children's religious hour after the service. Now, on January 9, after visiting the school and expressing his satisfaction with the religious instruction heard, the official assigned by the Guardianship Committee to Molotschna summoned the teacher Lange to the Mayor's Office, presented him with the \*) enclosed questions to be answered and forbade the admission of adults to the religious lessons. This was followed by the correspondence and the prohibition of adults on the part of the Aeltester and a church preacher without the involvement of the other five members of the Council. On January 21, Lange was taken to the District Office, had to answer the questions, and since then has been sentenced to involuntary labor there. The school officials, also separated under supervision, were compelled to answer the same questions. Furthermore, the papers of the Lange were seized. The Mayor's Office and the church received the regulation. We don't know the purpose of this regulation; on whose authority this regulation was issued and how far these actions may go. The School Board and those supporting the school were prompted by this to submit the enclosed request to the Guardianship Committee and we now look forward to a favorable resolution.

Your Excellency knows too well the dark night, as it is called in the letter of the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent to the school board, in which our pastoral care committee finds itself. We would like to explain in more detail here and show the resulting effects and misunderstanding. No wonder that a large part of the congregation members, and all the preachers are working to understand this regulation in a proper scriptural context. But everyone is depending on the grace of God and our humane government, since our free church constitution is based on the whole of God's Word. So, Bible study and teaching of the brethren,

\*) Written question pages from the Honorable Keller to Johann Lange on Jan. 9, 1863.

protects them from the ungodly. We hope to God that the noble and generous men whom we honor as pillars of the throne and the fatherland will not overlook our humble people and will not permit Christian freedom to be interpreted and punished as worldly arbitrariness and degeneracy, and that even our own pastors, lapsing into imperiousness and intolerance, should try this.

O Excellency! Do not be angry if we, as inexperienced children, come to the revered father and seek advice and assistance. It is true that we don't deserve this, but we gratefully want to follow your advice and ask the Lord of all lords that the light of His Spirit may shine brightly and ever brighter for you on your way to the blessing of all millions, whose welfare your life and work are meant for. If the good fortune of a few instructive words from your hand would serve us as a guiding star for the right direction of our conduct in the present distress, how much great would hopefully be gained for us and for the good of our brethren!

Many, we can say with truth, many righteous men, scattered in small numbers in all congregations, mourn silently but all the more deeply over the decay of our people, but would joyfully offer their hands to the strong brotherly alliance and unite in a new purified congregation, if so many misguided attempts, so many stray movements in our midst did not cast a suspicious glow on every such movement, and therefore protection and assistance of the authorities, misjudgment, revolt of the great crowd and condemnation were to be expected.

Gnadenfeld  
February 14, 1863

The School Board  
**Nikolai and Johann Schmidt**

In a letter of March 11, 1863, Benjamin Lange, the aged blind father of the teacher, sent to the H. Minister of Crown Lands with the most humble request that His Highness may kindly decree that his son, the mainstay in his old age, may be returned to him.

**His Highness, the Minister of Crown Lands.**

**The Mennonite of Gnadenfeld Colony, Molotschna Mennonite  
District, Benjamin Lange's  
most humble request.**

My son Johannes Lange, was for the completion of his education in the years 1859, 1860 and 1861 in the Paulusschen Knabeninstitut at Kirschenharthof in Württemberg and served after

his return since August 1862 here in Gnadenfeld as a teacher in a private school. In January of this year, he was taken from his post to the District Office in Halbstadt into custody because of accusations against him as a Friend of Jerusalem and disciple of the theologian Hoffmann, on the order of the committee official, Keller, and was ordered to do clerical work.

I have firm confidence in God and in the clemency of our High Government that this issue will be favorably resolved, because political intentions or even revolutionary activities have never entered his mind. I am an old man who has been blind for years. I am so anxious to have time with my son, the joyfully hoped for support in my last years, may soon have his freedom and ease my heavy dark days with simple labors of love. I cannot resist the urge, with my bowed heart to appear in grief at the feet of Your Majesty's feet and to humbly ask him to look away from the mistakes he made in his youthful inexperience and carelessness, perhaps in the eyes of the authorities and in word and writing, let him return to me.

With supplication to the Lord God for blessing of your affectionate passion, hoping for a gracious hearing and forgiveness of my boldness, I remain in humility.

Gnadenfeld  
March 11, 1863

Your Highness most humble servant  
**Benjamin Lange**

And His Excellency Privy Councillor v. Hahn was again asked to put in a good word in high philanthropy, especially for Lange in a suitable place. Lange himself had enough leisure during his clerical work in the District Office to formally study the entire Russian Imperial Code and to copy the necessary excerpts from it. On the basis of the knowledge gained from the aforementioned study, he also submitted the whole matter to the Minister and asked for his release.

His Excellency the Privy Councillor v. Hahn.

Excellency! The matter of our school and our teacher Johann Lange, about which we reported in detail to Your Excellency on February 14, it seems, if not to have taken an unfavorable turn, at least to be becoming very prolonged, which has urged the old blind father of Lange to send a request for mercy to the Minister of Crown Lands.

I dare once again to approach Your Excellency in this matter, which is of the utmost importance for us, and to submit the contents of the said petition, if you would perhaps be moved and have the opportunity to

in high philanthropy, to put in a good word, especially for Lange, in a suitable place.

Gnadenfeld  
March 11, 1863

In due reverence have the good fortune to be  
Your Excellency's most subservient servant  
**Nikolai Schmidt**

While one now had to wait for the effect of the aforementioned requests, neither the school board nor the teacher Lange were idle. The former had already written to the brotherhood of the Gnadenfeld congregation on March 2, in which they explained to them the unjust actions and excesses of the Aeltester and if he does not recognize these excesses as such and improve what is thereby spoiled, they ask the community for dismissal, since they cannot help but depart from it.

**To the Brotherhood in the Church at Gnadenfeld  
on March 2, 1863**

The Church Aeltester Lenzmann and the Church Preacher Penner, in a letter dated January 17, of this year, to the authorities that the teacher Johannes Lange had caused the congregation to fragment and become agitated because of his children's religious lessons held on Sundays in the school, which were also attended by adults, and in another document they also referred to the devotional lessons held by Johannes Lange in the house of his brother-in-law, as if they were inconsistent with our practices.

As a result of the report worded in this way, which portrayed the actions of teacher Lange as outrageous, the Committee official Keller saw himself compelled to apply the law of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, concerning prayer and devotional hours, for the guidance of the congregation in Gnadenfeld, without taking into account our privileged freedom of religion, which is guaranteed to us by a Russian Imperial law, which absolutely renounces any direct or indirect interference in the exercise of our worship of God. The Church Aeltester Lenzmann has therefore, by the information he provided, instead of preserving our privileged rights based on the holy gospel and the teachings of Menno Simons, took the administration and arbitration of the matters in question

Into his own hands rather than rejecting the interference of the police authorities in our community affairs.

We, the undersigned, maintain that no offenses have been committed by the teacher Johannes Lange, because:

- 1) Our Mennonite constitution, in matters of faith, is grounded in the Holy Scripture and the teachings of Menno Simons, and our church order is based primarily on the principle of "freedom of conscience and conviction". The edification hours have never been forbidden since the existence of the Mennonite congregations, but rather on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and the example of the early church according to Acts 12:12, Col. 3:16 and Heb. 10:23-25 and the level of education of our preachers. We are therefore astonished, according to which law or according to which agreement of the congregation an Aeltester or preacher has the right to deal with individual members arbitrarily and even to expose them to the authorities with the report of excesses and disturbing the peace, without having talked to them before, let alone having convicted them of their offense, which was the existing order in our congregation previously.

The Church Aeltester Lenzmann says that he wrote the truth to the Honorable Keller, but did he also write to him that edification hours, without being called disturbances, had already been held by others, e.g., by Klassen in Liebenau, and by Leonhard Sudermann in Berdjansk (while the latter was still a church preacher), by Abraham Matties in Rudnerweide, and by many others, so that the practice of edification hours were general? What <sup>a)</sup>

- 2) Concerning the Sunday religious lessons for children in school and the attendance of adults, it should be remembered that no one, and least of all our Aeltester and our church preachers, should find immoral behavior in them, but should rather see in them the expression of a fear and reverence for God, which is not to be dampened, but to be supported from the Holy Scriptures. They are not unique in our denomination. We can prove that adults from the Mennonites have made use of such school lessons already in earlier times. That the children's lessons of our teacher Lange do not deserve to be called disturbances and thus to take him away from his school, so that he has to spend his time in prison.

a.) This single word stands alone at the end of this paragraph in the original.

The congregation and its Aelteste now also understand this. The Aeltester Lenzmann can be proven to have committed significant excesses in this matter. Assuming that Johannes Lange had committed a real injustice through his edification and teaching lessons, the Savior clearly prescribed in Matt. 18:15-17 how the Aeltester should act in such a case. The report to the authorities is completely excluded by this commandment. And yet, Lenzmann reported Lange to the authorities and disregarded the Savior's prescription. This is not the first transgression of Aeltester Lenzmann from the straight path of our Mennonite Bible-based church order. If the writing of the Committee official H. Keller of January 18, 1863 had come to the Mayor's Office without any action on our part, it would have been the duty of the Aeltester to immediately send it back to H. Keller with reference to our privilege and with the request not to interfere in our denominational affairs. Now, however, the publication of this order has even been caused by the Aeltester through his unconstitutional denunciation. This is the second transgression of the Aeltester Lenzmann with regard to our religious liberties. According to 1 Peter 5:3, a bishop is to feed his flock, not as one who rules over the people. But by opposing the edification hours and forbidding the school to exert its direct influence even on adults, as well as by accepting the published Evangelical Lutheran Church law, the Aeltester has marked himself as a ruler over souls. This is the third transgression of Aeltester Lenzmann from the correct path prescribed by God's Word.

If the Aeltester Lenzmann acknowledges this transgression and the damage it has caused, will correct his behavior, and avoid such transgressions in the future, then we are ready to remain in the congregation and help to build it. But if the Aeltester does not want to or cannot do this, our only option is to leave the congregation and ask the congregation to dismiss us in peace.

Gnadenfeld  
March 2, 1863

**Johann Schmidt, Benjamin Lange Sr., Isaak  
Fast, Diedrich Dueck, Johann Lange,  
Friedrich Lange, Benjamin Lange Jr.**

Since the Aeltester did not think in the least about recognizing and repairing what had been corrupted, some asked for certificates to transfer to another congregation, but these were also refused, which prompted the school friends to address this matter in a letter of April 6, 1863 to all the Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite District and to explain the course of events to them in detail. They also reported to them that at the same time they declared their resignation from the congregation and that from now on they wanted to hold their Sunday services in the Gnadenfeld private school under the direction of the Church Preacher Nikolai Schmidt.

### **To the Molotschna Mennonite Kirchenkonvent**

**To Johann Friesen in Neukirch, Johann Harder in Blumstein,  
Dirk Warkentin in Petershagen, Peter Wedel in Alexanderwohl, Bernhard Peters  
in Gnadenheim, Franz Goerz in Gnadenfeld, Benjamin Ratzlaff in Rudnerweide  
and Heinrich Toews in Pordenau**

Grace be with you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Due to the recent distressing events in the Gnadenfeld congregation, we, the undersigned, feel that our conscience is so troubled and our religious liberties so endangered that we are forced to separate ourselves from this congregation, and we take the liberty to notify the honorable Kirchenkonvent of this separation and its cause.

- 1) It is a general rule among us Mennonites that an erring member of our congregations is dealt with according to the rules of the Savior, Matt. 18:15-17. Should it not be highly distressing for us if the Aeltester Lenzmann does not act according to this rule with Johannes Lange, who is erring in his opinion, but delivers him into the hands of the worldly authorities through unnecessary, false and skewed reports? And if we confront the Aeltester about this and he now claims to have done right and almost the entire congregation agrees with him and also considers his actions to be good, must this not drive us in conscience to leave such a congregation in order to be able to remain our rules consistent with the teaching of the Savior and to protect us and our children from similar arbitrariness?
- 2) In our privileges, graciously bestowed upon us by the blessed Emperor Paul and graciously reaffirmed to us by all his successors, point 1 reads: "We affirm the religious freedom promised to their descendants, by virtue of which they may maintain their doctrines of faith and clerical customs without hindrance."

And in the power of this Imperial Decree, the High Government has so far refrained from any direct or indirect interference in our church order and practice. Due to the unnecessary false and oblique reports mentioned above, Aeltester Lenzmann caused the Committee official Keller to send the following enclosed document to the Gnadenfeld Mayor's Office, in which the consistory law of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia, concerning prayer and devotional hours, is published for the congregation to observe. If this law had come into the Mayor's Office without any action on our part, Lenzmann, as the spiritual leader of the congregation, would have been obligated to return it to H. Keller with reference to our privilege and with the request that he not interfere in our church affairs. However, the Aeltester himself has arranged for the publication of this law, says it is good, and the largest part of the congregation accepts it without hesitation. Doesn't the love for the rights acquired for us by our fathers through blood, urge us through our consciences to separate ourselves from this congregation, which so carelessly gives away its wonderful freedoms in collaboration with the Aeltester, in order to preserve freedom of faith and conscience for us and our children?

- 3) The whole history of the Christian church proves that the Lord gave the true life of God to His Church, mostly through private teaching. According to the example of the first Christians Acts 1:14, chapter 2:1, 42, 46 and 47 and according to the exhortation of the apostles Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19, Heb. 10:23-25, even in early Mennonite congregations private edification hours have never been forbidden, everyone who had the ability and was called upon to do so, was allowed to speak for the edification of others, everyone was free to seek edification wherever he wanted, even the Aeltester Lenzmann and the Preacher Penner, often and frequently from the pulpit, exhorted the congregation to private edification. And now, all of a sudden, it occurs to the Aeltester to call private worship hours a deviation from our order, he thinks it is good to publish a law against them and even commands the Gnadenfeld private school not to extend its effectiveness beyond the boundaries of the school, with which commandment he fights the worship sought by several members of the congregation in the Sunday worship hours of the school. If we compare this activity of the Aeltester Lenzmann with the point of his instruction, which is found in 1 Peter 5:3, it is difficult for us to recognize in him the required example of a shepherd. On the other hand, however, a desire to rule over the people and their consciences is so clearly evident that we, who appreciate the good fortune of having happily escaped the compulsion of the conscience of the papacy through Luther and Menno Simons, cannot help but separate ourselves from the congregation.

Which, in this way, allows a new rule of conscience can be established among us with tranquility and pleasure.

Esteemed Aelteste! We ask you to understand us clearly! We do not want to leave the Mennonites; let that be far away! We do not want to change our Mennonite principles and customs, as far as they are based on the Word of God. By our separation we only want to protect ourselves from foreign influences dangerous to Mennonite principles. We want to remain firmly grounded on the Word of God and united in love and harmony with all other Mennonite brethren who still adhere to Menno Simons' teachings and live and walk accordingly. But at the same time, we will never voluntarily allow ourselves to be caught up in the statutes of men, but will speak out against them wherever they appear, whether in pulpits, in schools, or wherever else, as long as we live. That under the protection of our blessed Emperor and under the privileges preserved to us by his grace, we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and respectability.

Because our congregation refuses some of us the necessary and required certificates for joining another congregation, we have at the same time taken our leave in writing and connected with it the announcement that from now on we want to hold our Sunday services in the private school in Gnadenfeld under the leadership of the Church Preacher Nikolai Schmidt.

Gnadenfeld Church  
April 6, 1863  
**Abr. Dueck, Isaak**

Preacher: **Nikolai Schmidt**  
Members: **Jakob Dueck, Abr. Wiebe, Abr. Braun,**

**Dueck, Abr. Schmidt, Hermann Friesen,  
Johann Dueck, Nikolai Schmidt, Joseph  
Hiebert, David Hausknecht, Johann  
Lange, Diedrich Dueck, Benjamin Lange  
Sr., Johann Schmidt, Friedrich Lange,  
Benjamin Lange Jr., Joseph Matties Jr.  
Joseph Fast, Peter Dueck**

**To the [Gnadenfeld] Kirchenkonvent,  
as well as to the Congregation itself  
Declaration**

In your letter to the congregation of March 2, some of the undersigned have asked for attestations to leave the congregation, in case the Aeltester cannot and will not recognize his excesses, and make good what is spoiled thereby. Since now in the course of a month neither the one nor the other happened and since also an attempt proposed in the brotherhood and offered by us to the Aelteste to address our differences was rejected by the Aelteste, so we are

forced to assume that they do not intend to give us any certificates or to make good what has been done badly. Therefore, we hereby declare to the community:

That from now on we no longer belong to it, but formally separate ourselves from it for the reasons which we presented to the aforementioned brotherhood on March 2. We combine this with the announcement that from now on we intend to hold our Sunday services in the local private school under the leadership of the Church Preacher Nikolai Schmidt, and also that with this we have at the same time announced our separation and its saddening cause to the entire Molotschna Mennonite Kirchenkonvent.

April 6, 1863. (The previous signatures.)

After the Aeltester Lenzmann had received the mentioned resignation and presented it to the assembled brethren, he wrote to the Church Preacher Nikolai Schmidt:

Dear Brother in Christ!

The written declaration handed to me on the 6th of this month, which you also signed, made it my duty to present it to the brothers of the congregation present in the church yesterday. The result of the brotherly consultation that took place is that the congregation rejects the aforementioned declaration or renunciation of the congregation as inadmissible and has instructed me to forbid you, as well as the other 20 signed members, to perform any sacerdotal acts until further notice.

O my dear brother, how you grieve me, how you grieve the congregation, through which the Lord once called you to the precious office that preaches reconciliation.

With the deepest sorrow your sincerely loving brother

April 8, 1863  
Aeltester

**August Lenzmann,**

The resigned members replied to the above letter of the Aeltester:

**To the Church Aeltester August Lenzmann  
and the Congregation in Gnadenfeld**

We, the undersigned, find ourselves compelled to reply to the letter of the Church Aeltester Lenzmann to the Church Preacher Nikolai Schmidt of the 8th of this month as follows:

We have perfect reasons for our separation, both historical and denominational, and can therefore do not accept the declaration of the

statement that our separation is inadmissible, as well as the prohibition of all sacerdotal acts by the Preacher Nikolai Schmidt and those who have left the congregation with him, until the congregation proves the inadmissibility of the separation and its prohibition of official acts with reasons that invalidate our reasons.

Gnadenfeld  
April 14, 1863  
**Lange**

**Nikolai Schmidt, Johann Schmidt, Isaak Fast  
Benjamin Lange Sr., David Hausknecht, Franz**

**Abr. Braun, Diedrich Dueck, Benjamin Lange Jr.**

Because of this matter, a general conference of the Aelteste was held on April 26, and those who had left the congregation sent a detailed letter to the conference, in which they reminded the Aelteste of earlier departures and wished them the spirit of Gamaliel. Acts 5:38-39.

**To the Conference of the Aelteste in Gnadenfeld on April 26, 1863**

Venerable assembly!

The congregation of Gnadenfeld, in a letter from the Aeltester Lenzmann to the local Church Preacher Nikolai Schmidt, has described our separation as unlawful, and for this reason has taken the liberty of forbidding him and we who have left the congregation all sacerdotal acts. We consider it necessary to report this to the Honorable Conference of Aelteste and at the same time to give them the reasons which require us not to heed the insolence of the Gnadenfeld congregation.

- 1) If the departure from a so-called Christian congregation is to be inadmissible in general, then at the same time Luther, Menno Simons and others, who left the Roman church, are pronounced a disapproving judgment and at the same time the testimony is given that the Roman church did right when it persecuted those who left it with banishment, burning at the stake and the like. And if such judgments and testimony are correct, we are of course forced to follow if the Gnadenfeld congregation presumes to give us any more regulations after our already completed separation. However, we believe, and the entire Protestant Church believes it with us that God has shown the Christian church a great blessing through the outcome of these truth trials, and the papacy would be acting most unjustly if it sought to bring these men back into the fold of the Catholic Church with all the means at its disposal, and with this belief, which the honorable congregation shares with us, the presumption of the Gnadenfeld congregation to still want to give us directives after our exit, is inappropriate and does not deserve to be heeded.

- 2) If an exit from the community here in Russia was not permitted, neither the Lichtenau nor the Kleine Gemeinde would have received the right to form their own communities, but would have been forced to return to the community from which they left. The Imperial Letter of Grace guarantees us the same right, and we are not obligated to observe the regulations of the Gnadenfeld congregation, which it presumes to give us after our departure.
- 3) We also remind the Honorable Conference of the Church Preachers Heinrich Balzer and Aron Rempel, the former from the Rudnerweide and the latter from the Schönsee community, as well as of the recent departure of the Church Preacher Johann Dueck and those associated with him from the Ohrloff community. Without wishing to judge the legitimacy of these departures, they nevertheless provide us with the proof that until now such procedures were not unlawful, but that in this respect complete freedom of conscience prevailed among us, and we do not want to allow this to be diminished by the Gnadenfeld congregation, and have therefore rejected their presumption of forbidding us to perform sacerdotal acts. We still take the liberty to acquaint the Honorable Church Aelteste with the first part of a document, which was presented to His Majesty, our most gracious Emperor, last year, and in which it says very correctly and literally about the Mennonites:

"The Mennonites at the Molotschna in the governorate of Dannen, base their internal administration in matters of faith and church discipline on the Holy Gospel and the teachings of Menno Simon. The entire Mennonite church order is based primarily on the principle of freedom of conscience and personal conviction. The Russian Imperial law simply guarantees the Mennonites complete religious freedom and absolutely renounces any direct or indirect interference in their internal church administration and church discipline. Likewise, the Mennonite Kirchenvorstand, in accordance with the teachings of the Gospel and Menno Simon, for its part, is required to remain alien to all matters falling to the secular authorities and to give to God what is God's and to your Emperor what is the Emperor's. On the basis of these main principles, the Molotschna Mennonites, irrespective of their division in civil relationship in which sense each colony at the same time also forms an independent congregation, also in respect of church order divide themselves into special congregations or communities, each with its special preachers and Aelteste at the head. The actual difference of the latter from the civil congregation, whose organization is determined by the specific law, consists in the fact that the church communities are not determined by the law, but by free decision and according to personal conviction of the

believers themselves, without regard to geographical, administrative and other circumstances determining the organization of each civil community. As a result, each church community may include a more or less significant number (of families) of administrative congregations, but in contrast to this, it is completely up to each individual Mennonite both in individual civil congregations and even in the family, to count himself as belonging to one or the other church congregation, as the Molotschna Mennonite congregations also demonstrate. Consequently, the personal right of every Mennonite to freely leave a congregation that does not correspond to his convictions and to join another one, or, as the case may be, to help form a new congregation cannot be subject to any doubt, all the more so since the Civil Law leaves this circumstance completely unconsidered, but the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of Menno Simons make such a separation an indispensable duty for every true believer in the given case. From this also follows the right or the duty of the church to exclude and even to banish its corrupt members.

On the basis of the same teachings, the Lichtenau congregation and the so-called Kleine Gemeinde church came into being at the Molotschna before 1822, the former, which separated from the Ohrloff congregation, and, although the injustice was on its side, nevertheless counted the majority, the latter, which came together from the remaining brotherhoods, \*) and although hard-pressed, nevertheless both were recognized and continue to exist to the present day.

We wish the honorable assembly the spirit of Gamaliel to act according to his principle: If the counsel or work is of men, it will perish; but if it is of God, you cannot restrain it, lest you be found contending against God. Acts 5, 38-39.

Gnadenfeld

Church Preachers: **Nikolai Schmidt,**

April 26, 1863

Members: **Johann Schmidt, Benjamin Lange Sr., Isaak Fast, Diedrich Dueck, Franz Lange, Benjamin Lange Jr., Johann Lange, David Hausknecht, Abr. Braun**

After this letter of those who had left was read publicly, the majority of the Aelteste declared, as was to be expected, that the formation of a new congregation could not be permitted.

\*) Until the withdrawal of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812 there existed only one congregation in Molotschna.

When a longer debate had taken place about this matter, the Aeltester of the Berdjansk congregation, Leonhard Sudermann, also appeared in this conference, somewhat belatedly, and since he was not involved in all the disputes that had taken place at the Molotschna (Barley and Church Building Disputes and formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church) and had preserved a clear view, he sought to steer this matter in a different direction, if possible, after some hearing of the views, and succeeded in having a letter drawn up about the matter in question, which read:

**Conference Resolution from the gathering of the Molotschna  
Mennonite Council, held on April 26, 1863 in Gnadenfeld**

As far as the members of the congregation in Gnadenfeld, which broke away from the congregation in writing on April 6, 1863, are concerned, the general wish of the Aelteste and preachers present is that a unification of the members with the congregation should take place, but if this cannot happen, the [Gnadenfeld] Kirchenkonvent will tolerate this matter for the time being and make it dependent on the further behavior of the members whether their organization will be approved of or not.

**The Church Aelteste**

**Peter Wedel, Heinrich Toews, Dirk Warkentin, Johann Harder, Franz Goerz, Bernhard Peters, August Lenzmann**

The majority of the Aelteste did not really want to say this. It was not in the spirit of Lenzmann that those who had left should not have suffered obstacles that would stand in the way of their organization, because if the organization was only dependent on their future behavior, then this justified their separation. But the Aelteste did not see this right away and signed without refusal. The wish of those who had left was that the Aelteste would be guided by the spirit of Gamaliel in judging their matter and be accompanied by blessings, and even if not all of the Aelteste were guided by this spirit, the author of such a tolerant resolution was not entirely alone in his forbearance. In silence, several of those present were quite heartily grateful to him and to the One who had guided him in making this resolution.

What a blessing for those who left that the Aeltester, without actually wanting it, issued such a letter to them.

In short, those who had resigned had not yet done anything that could stand in the way of a new congregation, a testimony that justified their resignation. Even if the Aeltester Lenzmann did not immediately see through what he was actually signing, he must have convinced himself afterwards that the separation would continue despite his refusal and that the formation of the new congregation would continue. Therefore, he wrote on May 23 to the Association about the school system that the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent which now considered itself completely relieved of the supervision of the Gnadenfeld private school, due to its independent status in religious terms, and that it was renouncing this supervision for the future in the most determined manner. However, he probably did not think about the fact that the school did not lose anything, but rather was glad to be relieved of such supervision. While such a separation was going on, Lange was not idle in his imprisonment. On May 23, he sent a remarkable letter to Aeltester Lenzmann, in which he discusses the whole course of action against him. Lange, in detail and finally explains that, for conscience' sake, he could not help but agree with those who had separated from him [Lenzmann] and the congregation.

### **To Aeltester August Lenzmann in Gnadenfeld.**

Venerable Aeltester!

A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep and "Christ also laid down his life for us, while we were still his enemies. In this self-sacrificing love, in this concern for the welfare of each one, lies the main task of a faithful pastor. Imbued with this ardent love, that shepherd left the ninety-nine in the wilderness and vainly pursued the "One", his lost and strayed sheep. Imbued with this love, the emissaries of the eternal gospel went to their deaths with joy, and their blood became the "seed" of Christianity. In this love, Paul desired to be banished from his brethren and commanded that one should lay down one's life for the brethren. Do you, as my pastor, have such love for me? And have you ever displayed the same?

You know that I am accused of political activities, that certain expressions of my circular letters have received such an interpretation as if I were trying to overthrow the present social conditions in a violent way. I am a member of your congregation, God has entrusted me to you, since my return from Germany I have spent a year and a half in your congregation and I have received Holy Communion from your hand on various occasions. Have you perceived political activities in me? And if

not, have you placed yourself in my place? Did you care for my fate and for the fate of my school? To which, in a letter of July 27, 1857, you gave your support in word and deed in the name of the Triune God? Did you reveal that the expressions I used in my circular also occur in many a sermon? Have you stated that Christ himself, when he exclaims: "I have not come to bring peace, but the sword", uses an expression which, if it is not understood spiritually, sounds rather revolutionary? Have you explained that our denomination is 300 years old and that the Mennonites have stayed away from politics and the sword during all this time up to the present day? No. Rather, you have forgotten that on March 7, 1862, in a meeting of the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent, I asked whether there was any ordinance, rule, or congregational decision in the law according to which I do not have the right to hold an hour of edification if I am asked to do so. And that the Gnadenfeld Kirchenkonvent did not give any such prohibition to me, because there is none. You have also disregarded the fact that on March 9, 1862, at the Aelteste conference in Alexanderwohl, there was talk about whether or not we were allowed to hold a devotional hour, and that all the Church Aelteste agreed with the statement of the Honorable Church Aeltester Peter Wedel that if we gathered in order to edify ourselves together from the Word of God, we could not be forbidden to do so, indeed, that you yourself, as the local Aeltester, were obliged to attend these hours and to instruct us if we had erroneous views. You have not taken into account the fact that the devotional hour in our brotherhood is older than all of us. That it has probably not occurred to anyone to ask for permission beforehand, since you yourself and our honorable church preachers have already informed us of the law. You yourself and our honorable church preachers, as ambassadors in Christ's stead, have urged us loudly enough from the pulpit to let the Word of God dwell among us in abundance, and to gather together to contemplate it. I will make an effort to prove this to you from their sermon books. Furthermore, it is expressly taught in our confessional writings, in our Bible, in our Creed, in our hymnal, in the fundamental teachings of Menno Simons, that not only our preachers may teach, reprove and admonish, but that every member of the congregation is obligated to do so, according to his gifts and abilities and according to the measure of faith that God offers 1 Cor. 12:4-11 hymnal 264 v. 6, 9, 10 and 11. Up to now it has always been like this, why should it now become different after 300 years of existence of our brotherhood? Why do we want to go back three centuries? Shall we put ourselves on a par with those in whose church fellowship our fathers could not remain because of conscience, because they bound and suppressed the Word of God and the Light of the Gospel?

Our fathers have sacrificed goods and blood in order to gain the freedom of conscience which we have enjoyed up to now and which we will continue to enjoy under our gracious and wise government, if we do not make ourselves unworthy of it and lose it in such a way.

We speak to our children and in our schools of those people with regret who, in order to maintain their honor, their prestige and their authority, knew no other means than, alas! to lead whole families of our ancestors to the stake, while we admire the steadfastness, patience and courage of those heroes who, even in the flames, sang praises to the one for whom they lived, suffered and died. The precious purchase price with which our fathers paid for freedom of conscience for themselves and for us shows us how much it is worth and how carefully we have to protect this noble treasure.

As far as your proceedings against me are concerned, I still have to emphasize that Matt. 18:15-17 states the laws according to which the servants of God act in such cases, where it is necessary to stand up against a harmful thing. If I had somehow acted incorrectly, it would have been up to you to try these means of improvement on me. Now, however, it can be proven that you have not crossed my threshold more than twice in the 1 ½ years, the first time to my brother's engagement, the second time after repeated requests and invitations, on lessons in my school, or did you ever tell me I should not hold children's lessons, or that I should not hold edification lessons? Have you ever shown me any mistake or error? No, never once! You have, as I said, visited my school only once, have been in religious education only once for the sake of the engagement, so you have not investigated or examined the whole matter, but you judge and judge only by hearsay, and indeed according to hearsay of my enemies. You will have noticed, I believe, that I not only found pleasure in my school, but also so much work that I found little or no time to worry about other things. I am all the more surprised when you say that I made errors. You did not assist me, did not intercede, but sought to cast such a false light on me that, if our High Government wanted to act on that, it would no longer be surprising if I were crippled of all my training and gifts. But can you prove that I have been disobedient, that I have without authorization transgressed the bounds of a preacher to whom you yourself have set the goal in that letter of July 27, 1857? Can you prove that I have introduced or wanted to hijack divisions in your congregation?

Can you prove that I have been doing harmful things and spreading harmful doctrines? Your greatest reproach against me is, as far as I know, that I did not attend the afternoon hour, but I must point out to you that only very few people attended this devotion at all and of these few some also spend their time sleeping. At least that was the case every time I attended the afternoon devotion.

Since this accusation of yours does not correspond to the rules and orders of our most holy faith, on which I was baptized and which I intend to adhere to until the end of my life, I cannot, for the sake of my conscience, do otherwise than agree with those who separated from you for this very reason. In reporting this to you most humbly, I entrust this matter to him who judges rightly and who alone is wise, alone holy, almighty, and rules until he puts all his enemies to the footstool of his feet.

Halbstadt  
melancholy signed:  
May 13, 1863

in deepest

**Johannes Lange**

Lange also wrote to all the Aelteste and asked for one of them to be sent to give him Holy Communion, but this request was not granted. Sometime later, a preacher of the Kleine Gemeinde came to his prison on his own initiative to check on him and confessed to him that he was heartily ashamed that none of the Aelteste wanted to visit him.

### **To all the Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite Congregations**

Venerable Aelteste!

I have been deprived of all spiritual care and service for four months now, and although I asked the H. Inspector of the Molotschna colonies on March 27 to send me a Mennonite clergyman to prepare me for Holy Communion and to administer it, I have received neither an answer nor the granting of my request. However, since I can by no means be denied the enjoyment of this care, I turn to Your Honor with the urgent request that I be assigned an Aeltester for this purpose. At the same time, I take the honor of presenting you with this copy of a letter to Aeltester August Lenzmann, which contains the reasons why I can no longer, for conscience's sake, receive Holy Communion from the hands of my former Aeltester August Lenzmann. In addition to the reasons mentioned therein, there is the new one in that Aeltester Lenzmann did not attend to my spiritual needs during these four months and has thus given perfect expression to his coldness towards me.

While I regret to the bottom of my heart that such circumstances and conditions have become possible in a Mennonite brotherhood, I place my trust, along with God, in the love and justice of our honorable Aelteste and look forward to the granting of my fervent request, while I remain your obedient

Halbstadt

**Johannes**

**Lange**

At the beginning of May 1863

([Lange] remained without relief)

The above-mentioned requests sent to St. Petersburg had not missed their purpose, because finally, after five months of imprisonment, the hour of liberation also struck for Lange, as the following letter proves:

I, the undersigned, Mennonite of the Gnadenfeld Colony, receive from the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, my personal freedom again and permission to return to the function of a schoolmaster, if I promise that, in addition to the duties incumbent upon me as a schoolmaster, which include giving religious instruction to children, I will not preach any sermons to or before adults, and that I will strictly adhere to the dogmas of the Mennonite denomination in my teaching and will not spread any new dogmas of the Friends of Jerusalem and others. I therefore hereby commit myself by signature of name to fulfill these conditions completely.

Molotschna  
June 21, 1863

**Johannes Lange**

Everything that Lange promised here not to do, he had not done so far, and what he promised to do, he had done so far; therefore, nothing new was demanded of him. But the Aeltester Lenzmann with his accomplices were able to cool their little hats on him. But as we will see as time progressed, that this was only temporarily. He was allowed to re-enter as a preacher after all, they were far from being satisfied, they just had to have some time to create new intrigues. For the time being, neither Lange nor the newly organized congregation was exposed to further attacks, and through the marriage of Johannes Lange to a Würtemberger woman named Emma Jauss, who was of the Lutheran denomination, this congregation found itself prompted to issue a memorandum in which they explained their reasons that if they incorporated this person into their congregation, they would still remain Mennonites.

## Our Statement for the Record

Gnadenfeld, September 1863

The education of our children, especially of the female sex, still suffers from significant deficiencies. As a result of this deficiency, we, the directors and supporters of the educational institution in Gnadenfeld, have been striving for years to bring the education of our youth up to a level that corresponds to the Word of God and our confession. For the same reasons, the teacher of our school, Johannes Lange, with the approval of her parents, has entered into contact \*) with an assistant, from whom we believe we may expect that she will work with blessing on the education of our female youth. Since we consider the living faith in Christ as the Son of God and obedience to His Word as the main objective, we do not object to the fact that this person, of whom we assume and hope that she will lead a life of godliness and sanctification among us, did not receive her baptism according to the same outward form. And, since the person in question fully accepts our confession of faith and our congregational ordinances, even with regard to baptism, has the same attitude as we do, but only disapproves of a repetition of the same, we have no objection to accepting her into our midst as a member of our congregation. In Christ neither circumcision nor foreskin counts for anything, likewise neither infant baptism nor baptism of adults, if the new creature is missing, and the fact that this is missing in the majority of our people worries us more than that we henceforth have a church member among us, in whom the form of baptism is different from ours, but in the main we see ourselves justified.

At the same time, we hereby declare that we are in no way departing from our rules. We base this assertion on the multiple examples of foreign, German and Dutch Mennonite congregations, as well as on the principle that has long prevailed in the Gnadenfeld congregation not to require any re-baptisms. For this reason, the Gnadenfeld Aeltester Lenzmann, in recognition of infant baptism, frequently admitted members of the Lutheran denomination to Holy Communion in and outside the congregation, and twice already rejected such people who sought acceptance in our congregation by repeating their baptism, with the explanation that rebaptism was against his conscience.

(The signatures.)

\*) Johannes Lange and Emma Jauss entered into marriage on October 10, 1863.

This young congregation knew that if on such occasions, as was the custom with the Mennonite clergy, the whole matter was brought before the authorities, as had recently happened with the separation of the Mennonite Brethren congregation, that it could not be indifferent to what the high authority would think of it, and therefore used the opportunity, when the Procurator was present in Ekaterinoslav in 1864, to present this gentleman, State Councillor v. Brunn, Chairman of the St. Petersburg Consistory, a letter which does not cast the best light on our people in general, but on the clergy of the same in particular.

### **His Excellency von Brunn!**

Our Mennonite people, like all Protestants, pay homage to the principle of freedom of conscience and recognize the written Word of God as their highest authority in matters of faith and conscience. But a complete lack of education, resulting in ignorance, has corrupted our clergy to such an extent that, contrary to this principle, they submit themselves to the direction of scheming men and develop in their congregations an imperiousness that threatens to inhibit and stifle the growth of all noble learning in the congregations. In the process, worship has sunk to an empty dead form, and our people, with their glorious freedom of conscience, are in danger of becoming the victims of a new priestly rule.

Through reading the Word of God and through contact with faithful preachers of other denominations, a noble seed has remained in our people, which, holding fast to the above-mentioned principle of freedom of conscience and the authority of the Divine Word, has not allowed itself to be captured by men and human statutes under a new papacy, but has preserved its spiritual independence and Protestant principles. Out of the struggle of the domineering clergy against this noble seed, the so-called hoppers have emerged, preferring to suffer persecution, beatings and imprisonment than to sacrifice their freedom of conscience, privileged to them in the Russian Empire, to an aspiring hierarchy. It is true that in their ignorance and the tendency to enthusiasm connected with it, they have gone astray through a one-sided conception of the doctrine of the free grace of God, from which, however, since God allows the sincere to succeed, they are becoming more moderate. The legitimate parent congregation in Gnadenfeld, which remained on the old ground of the Mennonite constitution and doctrine, also emerged from this hierarchy, after the Aeltester Lenzmann and the majority of the congregation joined the hierarchical efforts of the other Aelteste and began to follow this regiment in this spirit and sense.

He was not able to hold down the opposing efforts of his members by the power of the Word of God given to him, but by the arm of the secular authorities. The files concerning this fight, which are partly in the papal-minded clergy, partly in the District Office, give clear testimony about all these events.

Gnadenfeld  
July 18, 1861

**Isaak Fast, Isaak Matthies  
Johann Schmidt**

The fact that teacher Lange was back in his former position and that a new congregation existed, was seen as a defeat that could not be easily overcome but new attacks were in the works. In 1866, these attacks were launched, and the brothers Johannes and Friedrich Lange were specifically targeted. (The latter had been elected preacher by the new congregation.) They traveled to St. Petersburg to seek help and protection in the Ministry there. There they were presented with various letters of complaint received about them from the committee, from Lenzmann and from the chairman of the Agricultural Association, Peter Schmidt. The latter, for example, had filed that Lange and his brothers, Friedrich and Benjamin, had gone around the villages disturbing the population from their quiet occupations. They had assumed the titles of Apostles and Evangelists, and had invited young and old to renounce their faith and follow their banner. They had taught that the status quo, both clerical and civil, must be changed, and had openly opposed the government, so that they were rebellious not only in clerical but also in civil terms, and had finally proposed to expel them abroad across the borders. Fortunately for them, the gentlemen in the Ministry were not so hot-tempered as to send them across Russia's borders in response to such accusations, but demanded, among other things, their confession of faith.

**Creed  
of the Evangelical Mennonite Congregation founded in 1863  
in Gnadenfeld on the Molotschna, Taurida Governorate**

- 1) We base our faith and our congregational institutions directly on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which we regard as the revealed Word of the holy and almighty God and as the source of all knowledge of salvation;
- 2) The views of faith that we hold on the most important subjects.

of the Christian doctrines of salvation are best expressed in brief in the Apostles' Creed of the Nicaean Council;

- 3) We have to consider especially the word of prophecy 2 Peter 1:19, which points out to us both the danger of antichristianity in the last times and the tasks we have to perform in the face of the coming destruction. These tasks include: vigilance, prayer, adherence to Jesus Christ and His commandments and teachings;
- 4) For the organization of our church we take as a model the first Christian church, whose condition and institutions are described in the 1st letter to the Corinthians in the 12th, 13th and 14th chapters;
- 5) According to the example of this church, our church chooses its Aelteste and preachers from the most spiritual and virtuous members of the church itself, as well as these in turn can appoint other preachers and Aelteste according to Acts 23;
- 6) Our worship consists in imitating the example of Jesus Christ, namely, that we, like Him, offer up our bodies and all our strength for the accomplishment of God's will on earth (Rom. 12:1). James teaches which points are to be kept foremost in mind, a pure and undefiled service before God the Father is that of visiting orphans and widows in their affliction and keeping oneself unspotted from the world (chap. 1:27);
- 7) To encourage and unite us in this worship, we hold regular public meetings in the church. For the regular leading of the word in these congregational meetings, the congregation chooses a man, or even some men, in whom they recognize the necessary equipping of the spirit. However, according to 1 Corinthians 14:29, 30, we hold that anyone who has the impulse of the Spirit to speak is authorized to do so;
- 8) The celebration of marriages takes place in the assembly of the church before God. According to 1 Cor. 7:14, the children belong to the church by their birth and are presented in the congregation and blessed. In view of the many disputes about baptism, whether it is to be given to children or adults, and in view of the fact that in no passage of the Holy Scriptures is one decisively commanded and the other decisively forbidden, we leave it up to the conscience of the fathers of families to have their children baptized, or to postpone the baptism of the same until their later age. We hold, however, that the attainment of the full measure of the Spirit of Christ must follow, and that as long as this is not the case, both modes of baptism are defective. The administration of Holy Communion in the assembly of the church is incumbent upon the appointed preacher. However, according to Acts 2:46, Holy Communion may also be distributed and enjoyed in smaller circles by the members of the congregation who feel the need to do so;

- 9) The care of the sick in the church is a special duty of the Aelteste according to James 5:14-18;
- 10) Of the secular authorities we believe that all authority is from God, and where there is authority, it is ordained by God (Rom. 13:2), therefore we owe obedience to the authorities in all things that do not conflict with God's clear and manifest word;
- 11) According to Matt. 5:34-37 we consider swearing an oath to be forbidden, but all the more we consider ourselves obligated to speak the truth in all cases according to a pure conscience and to confess freely;
- 12) We consider the proper education of children to be one of the most important concerns of a Christian congregation. Therefore, it is part of the existence of our congregation that an educational institution be maintained in which the children are equipped with all the necessary knowledge and skills for life, but in which they are also raised primarily to be well-mannered, God-fearing and understanding people who have a pure soul in a healthy body. Through their education, the children must receive the basis for leading a sanctified, God-pleasing and useful life for their fellow human beings in their later years.

Gnadenfeld  
1866

on behalf of the community  
Preacher **Johannes Lange**  
Preacher **Friedrich Lange**

Since the Lange brothers were now interested in being able to present an independent evaluation of their confession of faith in the ministry from Molotschna, they asked the Ohrloff Church Council from St. Petersburg, which had never participated in the attacks made on them, for such an independent evaluation, which was also given to them:

#### **Independent Evaluation of the above Confession of Faith**

The newly founded congregation, which left the Gnadenfeld Mennonite congregation in 1863, presented its confession of faith, composed of 12 points and signed by Johannes and Friedrich Lange, to the Ohrloff Mennonite Council with the request to give its independent evaluation of it. The Council's findings are these: According to the eighth point of this confession, this congregation permits, in addition to the baptism of adults, also the baptism of infants, by which it expresses at the same time that it also admits to communion those who have been baptized as infants.

On this point, this congregation deviates from the general creed of the Mennonites; but since the same thing (i.e., the admission of members of other denominations to communion) has occurred several times in its mother congregation in Gnadenfeld, the Ohrloff Council finds no reason to interfere with this newly founded congregation or to prevent it from existing, just as the existence of its mother congregation has never been endangered because of this principle.

Tiege  
Sept. 26, 1866  
(Seal)

Church Aeltester: **Johann Harder**  
Church Preachers: **Jakob Martens**  
**Fr. Is. [Franz Isaac], Abr. Regier**

After His Excellency Privy Councillor v. Hahn had personally endorsed their requests in the Ministry, this matter was handed over by the H. Minister to Governor General v. Kotzebue for investigation, and because this gentleman was at this time in St. Petersburg, Friedrich Lange (Johannes Lange had already departed) used this opportunity to speak with H. Chairman v. Chr. Kotzebue and also to hand him a petition right there in St. Petersburg. During the verbal conversation, His High Excellency said that he would never tolerate a persecution of the faith.

**His Excellency the Governor General of New Russia  
and Bessarabia, Adjutant General H. v. Kotzebue**

**On the Actions of Friedrich Lange  
in the Village of Gnadenfeld**

**Our most humble request**

The highest and noblest possession of man is his religion. Many thousands have subjected themselves to the greatest tortures for the sake of their religion. Others, for the sake of their faith, have rather endured the axe and the stake than abandon their religion. Others have left their homeland for the sake of their faith and sought new homes where they could serve God according to the conviction of their conscience. We have a high respect for men who, like the apostles, prophets, and reformers, held their faith more precious than anything else in the world, and history also denounces those who subjected innocent people to misery, banishment, or even death only because of their faith. At the same time, history proves that violence is useless against religion, because, "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church".

Also, our ancestors, the Mennonites, have suffered death by the hundreds for the sake of their faith and have emigrated by the thousands to foreign lands because they were persecuted in their homeland for their religion.

The high Russian government, guided by an estimable and just forbearance, has often offered a free place to such oppressed people and has usually been rewarded by a number of capable and active citizens, for usually the people who faithfully and strictly adhere to their religion are also the most loyal and useful subjects. And on April 16, 1702, His Imperial Majesty Peter the Great issued a manifesto in Germany announcing that the Russian government had renounced all compulsion over consciences and that every immigrant was free to worship God in his own way, not only with his family, but with all those who would gather in his house. It is precisely this assurance of the most complete religious freedom that we Mennonites received, in particular, through the first point of the Letter of Grace granted to us by the Most High. Thus, the high Russian government has renounced all direct and indirect interference in matters of our faith, and we, under the protection of the laws, like the other Christian denominations, have hitherto been allowed to perform our special religious customs and services undisturbed. At the present time, however, the Guardianship Committee in Odessa, prompted by unreasonable complaints and obvious slandering by the Agricultural Association of the Molotschna District and others; despite the stated assurances of religious freedom, has interfered in the religious affairs of the Mennonites, and has also, without interrogating us, believing the one-sided complaints of our opponents, forbidden me and my two brothers, Johannes Lange and Benjamin Lange, for the sake of our religion, to be teachers of the Gnadenfeld School and any other schools in the colonies, or to preach public sermons or speeches before adults. Since I have been appointed preacher of the congregation in the proper way and according to our creed everyone who has to speak to the congregation on the impulse of the spirit is entitled to do so, not only I and my two aforementioned brothers have been impaired in our professional rights and that without interrogation, but our whole congregation has been restricted in its religious liberties and its conscience has been weighed down.

High Excellency, it cannot be indifferent to us whether for us and our descendants in a country that has become our true fatherland the same religious freedom prevails as it is enjoyed by Jews, Muhamedans and pagans, or whether we, as soon as we depart in religion in any way from the territory of a sect that has already fallen into decay, expose ourselves to arrest and religious persecutions that are recorded in history as weaknesses of past centuries.

Since religion is also our highest and most precious good, and the investigation of this matter, which is so important for us, has been entrusted to Your High Excellency, I dare to ask most humbly:

- 1) That the investigation be carried out impartially and as quickly as possible, since we have been rendered breadless by the prohibition of the Guardianship Committee and our school will be completely ruined without an early conclusion of this matter, and what is even more, our congregation has been deprived of spiritual care.
- 2) During the investigation, we should be allowed to have a proper insight into the complaints made against us and be given the opportunity to defend ourselves.
- 3) In deciding on this matter, that the above-mentioned manifesto of Peter the Great and the complete religious freedom assured to the Mennonites in particular by the Most High, as well as the enclosed testimony of the Ohrloff congregation, may be kindly taken into consideration. Since we are convinced that we have not violated the laws of the land in any way but have behaved in all things as loyal subjects of the Russian Empire, we also hope that Your High Excellency will do us justice. We also hope that Your High Excellency will grant us the justice and protection which we expected in vain from the Guardianship Committee, so that under the protection of the laws and the wise government of our Most Gracious Lord and Emperor it will be possible for us and our families to lead a godly life in peace, to serve God in a way that corresponds to our conscience, and to pray with faithful hearts for the welfare of our Most Gracious Lord and Emperor, as well as for the welfare of the entire Empire.

St. Petersburg  
**Lange**

November 25, 1866

Church Preacher: **Friedrich**

With the arrival of the H. Governor General in the Molotschna colonies soon after, he was received by the local Mennonite authorities in front of Pastwa at the boundary stone, where two Mennonite brothers' hands clasped together are supposed to indicate the Kingdom of Peace, and escorted to Gnadenfeld. The Lange brothers were also invited to the village office and were present when His High Excellency arrived. Here, however, the matter turned out quite differently, and how could it not, when the entire secular and clerical board stood up against the Lange brothers, because on the way from said boundary stone to Gnadenfeld, H. v. Kotzebue had come to a different opinion, which is why the Langes were not given a friendly reception. From a thorough

Investigation of the whole matter, which they had asked for so urgently, was not spoken here, but H. v. Kotzebue said to the Lange brothers in the presence of the clerical and secular colonial board: "I have convinced myself that your presence in the colonies is harmful and dangerous, and I will make a presentation to the Emperor about the necessity of your expulsion from the country." The attempt to say something else was in vain, the Langes were not allowed to speak, and when they realized the uselessness of their attempt to justify themselves, Johannes Lange said: "High Excellency! because I see that only judgments are pronounced here and that we are not listened to, I declare that above the high and highest of the earth there is still a higher one, if he orders it, I, we will leave our fatherland". After that, the Lange brothers bowed and left. The accusers, or more correctly, the slanderers, had succeeded and now Lenzmann could say in a later conference with a gleeful and mocking expression: "Na de hebben eren Lohn dahin" (Well, they got what they deserved)!

However, it did not come to an expulsion, because even his H. Excellency had come to a softer view before his departure from the colonies. The expulsion had not yet been decided in the Supreme Council. They were allowed to settle in the Caucasus, a lenient conclusion. They were determined to be free of all these evils and accepted this permission of the High Ministry with the greatest gratitude.

The school in Gnadenfeld, in the short time of its existence (1860-1868), had, of course, been able to contribute little to raising the level of education, but as an educational institution it did have successes. A powerful impulse was planted in the hearts of the students, which later found expression in the fact that several of them sought to acquire the highest contemporary education at secondary schools and at Russian and foreign universities. And this educational spark soon spread to other colonies and counties. While in the past there was hardly a colonist in the whole of South Russia who had attended a few classes of a gymnasium, now there are several who have graduated from universities and other institutions of higher learning and are brilliantly working as doctors, etc. In the autumn of 1867 deputies traveled to the Caucasus and took over a piece of land belonging to Prince Georgy Dmitrievich Orbeliani for 30 years at 25 R per Dess. in Arende. The common aspiration and the prospect of being able to live their faith in peace resulted in the deputies' agreements being willingly accepted

and in the spring of 1866 colonization began. The Molotschna people founded Tempelhof, and colonists, coming from Bessarabia, founded the colony of Orbelianovka.

It was a difficult beginning, for fever prevailed generally, so that some soon found their final rest in the cemetery. The wild state of the Caucasus at that time favored horse thieves, so that in the course of a year 60 horses were stolen from the settlers. The herds of cattle were thinned out by cattle plague and the flocks of sheep by wolves and mange, but believing in Him, who had rescued them from the hand of their oppressors, they bravely carried on.

The purpose envisaged at the time of their settlement, to do more for the upbringing and education of the younger generation, could not be carried out in the first years, but one had to be content with good elementary schools. When finally, a source of income began to open up in fruit and wine growing and four young men with university education declared themselves willing to dedicate their services to the community, the colonies founded a Progymnasium (preparatory school), for which they gladly received permission from the higher authorities. When repeated hailstorms devastated vineyards and orchards, and thus their main source of income dried up, the colonies found themselves in the position of having to provisionally close the Progymnasium. (1892).

The pleasant appearance of the two colonies, situated in the midst of their gardens and vineyards, attracted many visitors from the Caucasian mineral spas, and the lively intellectual life and striving in the colonies drew the attention of wider circles. In June of 1886 Tempelhof had the honor of the visit of Prince - Дондуковъ Корсаковъ (Dondukov Korsakov), the then Chief Conductor of the Caucasus and the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod К. П. Побѣдоноевъ, [К. P. Pobedonov] both of whom took a very lively interest in the colonies, in their Progymnasium and social institutions, music club, etc., and also considered the question of how to secure the future of the colonies when the lease term would have expired.

When Their Majesties, the now in God resting, Emperor Alexander III, his wife and the Grand Duke Successor to the Throne, our present Emperor, Nicholas II visited the Caucasus in September 1888, the colonies of Tempelhof and Orbelianovka to the station Минердъныя воды, [Mineral Waters] to which they sent a deputation with bread and salt.

Teachers and students of the Progymnasium and the Misik Chapel, were honored by the Sovereigns. His Majesty Emperor Alexander III and Her Majesty Empress Maria Feodorovna inquired in detail about the situation of the colonies, about the lease, about the means of the Progymnasium's maintenance, etc. After the Prince and the delegates of the colonies had answered all the questions, Дондуковъ Корсаковъ, [Dondukov Korsakov] and by the delegates of the colonies, the head of these colonies, taking in his hand the silver plate with bread and salt prepared for this purpose, was allowed to approach the imperial couple with the following address/speech, "The colonies of Tempelhof and Orbelianovka have the good fortune to greet their Lord and Emperor and their Sovereign and Empress, and to request that the same accept bread and salt from them as a small token of their devotion." His Majesty, placing His hand on the bread and salt offered to Him, deigned to proclaim loudly and solemnly: "отъ нихъ принимаю," (I accept from them) which made a tremendous impression on hundreds and thousands of spectators, and filled the hearts of the deputies and the inhabitants of the colonies Tempelhof and Orbelianowka with comfort and confidence.

The concern for the continued existence of the community, which was manifested by all parts of the population and by all government institutions up to the throne, kept up the courage of the colonists when it turned out that no agreement could be reached with the owner of the land for the continued existence of the colonies on his land.

In the autumn of 1889, when the H. Minister of Crown Lands, Ostrovskii, went to Tbilisi for the opening of the exhibition, the colonists decided to take advantage of this opportunity and to send a deputation to him to describe their situation and to ask for his cooperation in remedying it. The result of the negotiations was the permission granted by the H. Minister to allow the colonies to choose a suitable place of settlement on the free Crown lands in the entire Northern Caucasus and then to apply directly to him for the allocation of the same. The administrators of the Ministry of Crown Lands were required to assist the plenipotentiaries of the colonies in everything, if they came to inspect the Crown lands under their control.

In May 1890, after a lengthy process of searching, the Kronssteppe lands known as the Ssuchopadin and Herkobalkov Kronssteppes were designated for settlement.

The Ministry recognized the suitability of the colonies and requested the allocation of this land.

A commission, which had to examine this whole question quickly, gave its verdict that it was absolutely necessary to allocate crown land to the colonies. The Agricultural Authority, under the chairmanship of the governor of Stavropol, which was also instructed by the Ministry to send its opinion, came to the same conclusion, and not only approved the petition of the colonies, but added on its own initiative to the proposal to allocate to the colonies for the maintenance of the Progymnasium 600 Dessiantine for the maintenance of the Progymnasium, for which no obrokstener [Obrok tax] should be paid. In the Ministry of Crown Lands, where this matter now reached, it was examined by the Council of the Ministry on the order of the H. Minister and found possible to allocate the colonists from the desired Crown land, namely at 65 Dessiantine to each family. The vote of the Council was confirmed by the H. Minister and the representative of the colonists, who was present, was informed. Now only the consent of the H. Minister of the Interior was required, and then the matter could be realized. However, the negotiations dragged on and only after the Chief Director of the Caucasus, Count Sheremetyev, had given his opinion that the colonies' request should be considered, and after His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Michael Nikolaevich had strongly supported them, the matter was finally decided by the Committee of Ministers on June 28, 1894, which was confirmed by the Supreme Soviet on July 9.

The colonies of Tempelhof and Orbelianovka were granted 4500 Dessiantine Crown land for perpetual usufruct under the condition that 1) within 10 years from the day of the land's allocation, the colonies should plant an area of 150 Dessiantine of forest, and for each farm they should plant one Dessiantine of orchard and two Dessiantine of vineyard and 2) pay the same price for the land as the crown peasants settled in the surrounding area, but the payment quota (Obrok) determined for the purchase of the land is to be brought into account.

(Seal)

**Declaration <sup>a)</sup>**

February 8, 1897

To the representatives of the owners of the Kirk village, Taurida Governorate, Simferopol District: Johannes Johannes Knaur, Johann Johann Johannovich Neg, Theodore Friarich Hermann, Johannes Isaakovich Fast, Friedrich Friedrichovich Weingart, Johann Heinrichovich Martins and the colonist Abraham Johannovich Schmidt are hereby certified that they with their families, according to their petition of January 26 of this year, were accepted into the Tempelhof Mennonite community of the Stavropol Territory, Alexandrovsk District, as members of this community, and that their personal registration lists will be entered into the record books of the Tempelhof Mennonite community, from which they will be given the appropriate membership certificates, if needed, which is confirmed by their signature and the mark of the church seal.

No. 11 (Seal)

Bishop J. Lange

**M. V. D.**

**Bailiff of the 1st district of Tabudinskoye District Executive Committee.  
Simferopol Governor's Office District Tavrichesky Gubernia**

June 25, 1897. No. 1760 Zug

I let the church administration know that according to the directive of the Taurida Governor's Office of June 9, 1897, No. 1760 article 2, 1897, the church administration of the Taurida Governor's Office is not authorized to make decisions about the future of the church. Governor's Management Board on June 9th of this year # 2988 the inhabitants of Kirkpatsk village are not allowed to live in Kirkpatsk. Residents of the Kirk village Johannes Knaur, Johann Neg, Toedor Hermann, Johannes Fast, Friedrich Weingart, Johann Martins and Abraham Schmidt and their families were renamed from Separatists to Mennonites and were assigned to the Mennonite church of the Tempelhof Colony, Stavropol Province, Alexandrovsk District.

This document was signed by the Bailiff of the 1st camp, Mr. Medyaov.

June 3, 1897 No. 313

It is suggested that the Declaration for Alexeevsky Village Aeltester should be given to the people listed in the corresponding correspondence for a receipt, returning the census of June 27, 1897 No. 3346. The original was signed by township foreman G. Jerry, countersigned by township clerk G. Yekhtle with the original signature:

Village Aeltester  
Secretary (Seal)

a.) The 3 documents on this page were in written in Russian in the original.

Several hundred versts away from the Molotschna, this "community had now lived its faith for almost three decades, its main supporters, who had once so shamefully slandered it to the government, had long since departed the scene. They were not only in good standing with the government, but had been exceptionally favored by it, and after all this one could not have thought that these people could ever be exposed to attacks from the Molotschna, and yet one was mistaken, for no sooner had His Majesty, Emperor Alexander III, favored these people by land allotment and had expressly recognized them as a Mennonite community in the land allotment document, the Mennonite Aelteste took the liberty in September 1895 to declare this community excluded from the Mennonite fellowship.

The letter of exclusion reads:

Since in the course of time some sects have formed in our Mennonite community, some of which refuse to fulfill the regulations of the authorities, even though these in no way violate our confession, others believe only in a physical Christ and completely refrain from administering the sacraments, and the third desecrate Sunday by profane work on Sundays, the conference hereby declares such sects to be excluded from our Mennonite fellowship. This applies especially to the Breadbreakers who call themselves the Apostolic Brethren, the Jerusalem or Temple Friends, and the Adventists.

If perhaps the Aelteste were still unaware of the Supreme Recognition of these people as Mennonites, their declaration of exclusion was proof that the same spirit of domination was still alive and well. The fact that the Aelteste, through this declaration of exclusion, consider themselves to have taken a very important step for the purification of Mennonism from harmful elements, was proven by the fact that they made it their business to bring this decision to the general knowledge by submitting it to the "Badener Gemeindeblatt" in 1895.

When, however, it was pointed out to the Aelteste from various sides how they were running against the Supreme Recognition of these people as a Mennonite congregation by their decision, they saw that they were going dangerously astray with the method they had used to eliminate the alleged heretics, and they

were thoroughly deceived by the spirit to which they had thereby submitted themselves, and in the next conference on September 12 and 13, 1896, the Conference says in the third point of its resolutions:

The wording of the fifth point of the resolutions of last year does not correspond to the meaning intended by the Conference, and it is therefore to be amended to the effect that the Conference does not exclude the denominations mentioned therein, but only regards them as those which have excluded themselves, even if, which they themselves deny, not from the Mennonite Association in general, but at least from the association of the congregations represented by the Conference, for which there is some original written evidence coming from them. In bringing this voluntary exclusion to the general attention of its members and the congregations they represent, the Conference feels impelled by a longing desire, as called for in a Conference address given today, to heal the sick, to bind up the wounded, to fetch the lost, to seek the lost, etc., etc. - to add the declaration that it would welcome with joy the departed returning from their errors and rejoining the members of their mother congregations and thus these congregations themselves.

With the foregoing, the conference wants to free itself from the strait into which it got by "the 6th point of 1895". But everything it says here is not suitable for this purpose, for if that point should not have the meaning that is expressed in such clear words, namely, that the conference declares said communities excluded from the Mennonite Union, then this declaration of exclusion would not have been made known as far as possible through a widely distributed journal, and if now the conference only has to bring to general notice that these people do not participate in the conferences, then it did this only in order to have said something, for this non-participation was quite generally known beforehand. If the conference really wants to be driven by the desire, according to the call of the conference speech, "to heal the sick, to bind up the wounded, to fetch the lost, and to search for the lost", then it has probably postponed the fulfillment of its ardent wish for the future, because the recent past as well as the present have, and whether these communities will still give the conference the pleasure of rejoining the orders of the mother churches, as well as these themselves, is hardly to be expected.

Thus, far to the east, on the above-mentioned new settlement site, there exists a Mennonite congregation consisting of separatists and Mennonites, which has its branch on the Kuban and in the Crimea, and which is protected from attacks by its oppressors because of the regulations of the relevant authorities.

The early Templar group founded on the new settlement plan the colony Olgino, where the governor of Stavropol immediately established a Volost, and the early Orbitianower the colony Romanwka. These two village communities, Olgino consisting of 30 and Romanowka of 50 families, form at present (1898) under the leadership of the Aelteste Johannes Lange and Karl Roth, the main part of this Mennonite community, which was founded on October 6, 1897 in a meeting in Olgino, which was attended by representatives of the branch Ведикокняжескъ [Vedikoknyazhesk] and Адекеандродаръ [Adekeandrodar], and on the Kuban and from the settlement Киркъ [Kirk], in the Crimea, gave themselves a community order.

### **Congregational Regulations of the Templar Church before its resettlement to the the Crown land granted to it**

After the communities of Tempelhof and Orbelianovka have been living on the land leased by them jointly for 30 years for such a long time that the expiration of the lease contract is approaching, and the communities are beginning to move to the land granted to them by the government, they have agreed to summarize the orders and community rules prevailing in these communities and to write them down for everyone's knowledge.

- 1) Our settlement here in the Caucasus has had and still has the purpose of establishing and striving for a congregational life among us, in which the attitude of Jesus Christ and His apostles will be brought to bear. Therefore, we want to be guided by the teachings of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament in our church institutions and in our private lives;
- 2) In accordance with this, we seek to establish such institutions in our churches that curb all malice, envy, avarice, overreaching, etc., and on the other hand help to promote love, truth, justice, peace and a loving nature. Gal. 5:22, Eph. 5:9), Phil. 4:2;
- 3) Since we further follow the command of the apostles, let every man be subject to the authority that has power over him; for there is no authority without authority from God (Rom. 13), from the laws and authorities of our homeland.

We owe obedience to these laws, so we seek to bring all our institutions into harmony with them;

- 4) Since we have had the experience in the course of the past years that we are well situated in these communities and recognize that we and our children will be all the happier the more we realize the principles which prompted us to resettle here, we unite ourselves anew by the declaration that we only want to persist in the way we have recognized and become ever more faithful in it;
- 5) Because we do not all have Mennonites roots, our plenipotentiary, Johannes Lange, in all his submissions to the Ministry, where it was mentioned, stated that we are Mennonites and Separatists. Only in the Imperial Decree we are called "Mennonite colonists", a name we want to keep, accept and carry out, as it is attached to us by the Highest Authority;
- 6) The communities of Tempelhof and Orbelianowka are locally and civilly settled in two separate colonies and, according to the community decree of January 30, 1895, will also be settled in two different colonies when they move to the Kronsland, but in religious terms they form one whole;
- 7) In civil matters, we follow the laws that govern the colonies in South Russia in our parent communities. According to these laws we elect our Aelteste, guardians for underage orphans and our school boards;
- 8) The division of inheritance is also carried out according to the laws of inheritance in force in our former homeland (South Russia) and state recognized inheritance laws. However, since the laws of division are different in the South Russian colonies, we note that before each marriage the parties must conclude an official agreement on the law of division to be applied later;
- 9) In spiritual matters, we follow the institutions of the early church and do not make the right to exercise the priesthood conditional on the completion of theological studies, although we highly value theological education, but emphasize the ability to teach and judge, which can be achieved through a right attitude and serious spiritual striving, and on election by the congregation itself. We therefore elect from our midst, for an indefinite period of time, the Aelteste who will exercise in our congregation all the duties connected with the preaching and teaching office, including, the leadership of the worship service, the solemnization of marriages, the spiritual care, the instruction of the youth, the care of the poor and the sick, and the spiritual court for the upholding of the order of life against transgressions.

- 10) In case of a necessary strengthening of the Aelteste' office by the election of a new Aeltester, the election itself is done in the following way, the existing Aeltester proposes to the congregation some candidates who have the qualities required to exercise the office of Aeltester according to 1 Tim. 3:2-7. From these candidates the congregation elects an Aeltester by majority vote;
- 11) One of the Aelteste is entrusted by the office of Aelteste with the management of the necessary day-to-day business, convening the consultations, supervising the keeping of the church books, examining marriages to see whether they are legally permissible or not, for which he always makes out a reverse (counter-script), issuing official certificates, administering the church seal, etc.
- 12) Since there are and may be other persons and families in our colonies, who are not our fellow-members, i.e., who do not belong to our congregation, we stipulate the following for the sake of order and clarity in all relationships. Only those are considered members of our congregations who have united on the same ground in striving for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth and for the building of the spiritual temple, and who have confirmed their agreement with our congregational institutions by signing this document with their own hand. The children of such members are already members of the church by birth. They can become members of the congregation only after they have reached the age of twenty. In the future, the admission of relatives to the congregation will be done in the same way, by signing this document;
- 13) The admission of foreigners as members is done with the consent of the congregation.

December 1896

(The signatures follow)

After resettlement to the crown land allotted to them, the following was drawn up by representatives from all sides:

**Minutes  
of the General Meeting of the Aelteste in Olgino**

October 6, 1896

- 1) How do we relate to the different religious communities according to the national laws?

After lengthy discussions on this point, it was made clear that we are striving for the same goal, the establishment of a people of God, as the congregation abroad, that we will continue, as before, in brotherly contact with them, and in particular

the leading Aelteste of the individual congregations are to mediate between them and the Palestinian congregations;

- 2) How do we protect our congregations from forgetting and losing sight of the goal of "gathering the people of God" in the independent and autonomous position that is absolutely necessary for us?

Instead of "gathering God's people", we find it more appropriate to say "producing God's people", because if God's people are to be gathered, they must first be produced by us. By working on this process, we secure ourselves from forgetting and losing sight of the goal;

- 3) In what way can we adequately carry out and ensure teaching activities for our youth and for the congregations in general?

It was found necessary to provide for the establishment of training schools or training opportunities and to make arrangements for the youth to become acquainted with the church teachings and to be imbued with the ideas of the church;

- 4) What is the relationship of the local congregations? Do they form a common whole, or does each congregation go its own way?

The congregations of Olgino and Romanovka together form a common whole on the basis of the congregational bylaws of December 1896. The representatives of the Kuban congregation declare that they are also inclined to form a common whole with the above-mentioned congregations, but that for the Kuban congregation they want to adopt the constitution of 1880 with some amendments, discuss it with their congregation and report on the result.

The original signed:

**Johannes Lange, Isaak Fast,  
Heinrich Gengenbach, Abraham  
Schmidt, Johann Schmidt, Johannes  
Knauer**

Whether the Mennonite Aelteste of Molotschna will silently ignore the existence of a Mennonite congregation, which partly consists of members who are subject to military service according to § 157 of the military law, or whether they will still see themselves induced to make a declaration to that effect, remains to be seen; perhaps a look back into the recent past will teach them that it might be more advantageous for the whole Mennonite people to let this congregation quietly exist.

## 6 - The Church Groups, their Aelteste and Churches

### a) The Ohrloff-Halbstadt-Neukirch Church.

In 1805, the settlers elected their first Aeltester, Jakob Enns in Tiegenhagen, and he was confirmed to his office by the Chortitza Aeltester Johann Wiebe. In 1809 the community built a church in Ohrloff and another in 1810 in Petershagen. In 1817 the Aeltester Jakob Enns, because he was in poor health, confirmed a second Aeltester, Jakob Fast from Halbstadt. Enns died on April 23, 1818. The Aeltester Jakob Fast died on November 9, 1820 and on January 14, 1821, Bernhard Fast was elected Aeltester in Halbstadt and confirmed on January 30 by the Aeltester Franz Goerz from Rudnerweide. In 1852 the church in Petershagen was demolished and in 1858 a new one was built in Neuhalbstadt. On March 17, 1860 the Aeltester Bernhard Fast confirmed the Preacher Johann Harder from Blumstein as Aeltester and Fast died on April 25, 1861. In 1863 the congregation also built a church in Neukirch and since the first Ohrloff church had already been demolished in 1839 and a new one was built, the congregation now had 3 nice churches. The Aeltester Harder died on September 10, 1875 and the community elected the Preacher Abraham Goerz as Aeltester, who was confirmed to his office on January 30, 1876 by the Aeltester Jakob Toews from Lichtenau. In 1896 the Halbstadt church organized itself into an independent church and in 1896 elected Church Preacher Heinrich Unruh from Muntau as its Aeltester, who was confirmed to his office by the Gnadenfeld Aeltester Heinrich Dirks.

### b) The Lichtenau-Petershagen Congregation.

This congregation separated from the Ohrloff-Petershagen congregation at the beginning of the twenties and on August 3, 1824 the Chortitza Aeltester Jakob Dueck confirmed the Preacher Jakob Warkentin from Altona as Aeltester. In 1826 this congregation built a church in Lichtenau and in 1831 another in Petershagen. In place of these mentioned congregations, new churches were built in Lichtenau and in Petershagen. According to Jakob Warkentin, this church divided into 3 churches; Margenau-Schönsee, Pordenau-Alexanderkron church and Lichtenau-Petershagen.

Jakob Warkentin was followed by Dirk Warkentin, who was confirmed to his office on October 18, 1842 by the Margenau Aeltester Heinrich Wiens. He was followed in 1869 by Aeltester Jakob Toews, who was confirmed to his office by Aeltester Bernhard Peters.

### **c) The Margenau-Schönese Church**

In 1832, when the churches separated from the Lichtenau-Petershagen church, they were served by Aeltester Jakob Warkentin. A church was built in Margenau in 1832 and when this congregation organized itself into an independent church, the Aeltester Peter Schmidt from Waldheim confirmed the Church Preacher Heinrich Wiens from Gnadenheim as Aeltester on July 5, 1842. Wiens was followed in 1861 by Bernhard Peters as Aeltester.

### **d) The Pordenau Church**

In Pordenau, while Jakob Warkentin was still serving this group, a church was built in 1828, and when this group organized itself into a congregation, the Church Preacher Heinrich Toews from Pordenau was confirmed as Aeltester on October 25, 1842, by the Margenau Aeltester Heinrich Wiens. Heinrich Toews followed Diedrich Baerg, who was confirmed to the office in 1878 by the Aeltester Bernhard Peters.

### **e) The Alexanderkron Church**

This is also a division of the Lichtenau-Petershagen Church. Its Aeltester Heinrich Koop was confirmed to his office in 1887 by the Aeltester Bernhard Peters and in 1890 this congregation built a church in Alexanderkron.

### **f) The Rudnerweide Church**

This congregation came from Prussia in 1819 with its Aeltester Franz Goerz and built a church in Rudnerweide in 1822. After the death of Aeltester Goerz, the Aeltester of the Ohrloff-Petershagen congregation Bernhard Fast confirmed the Church Preacher Benjamin Ratzlaff, of the Rudnerweide congregation, as Aeltester on April 30, 1835, and after the death of Aeltester Ratzlaff, Franz Goerz from Gnadenfeld was confirmed as Aeltester in 1861 and after him David Nikkel from Rudnerweide in 1891.

**g) The Alexanderwohl congregation.**

This congregation came from Prussia in 1820 with its Aeltester Peter Wedel, held its meetings in the schoolhouse for some years and built a church in 1827. They elected Jakob Buller as their Aeltester, who was confirmed in office by Aeltester Peter Wedel. At the beginning of the seventies the two Aelteste went to America with the largest part of the community and since 1877 the remaining part of the community has Johann Schartner from Waldheim as its Aeltester.

**h) The Gnadenfeld congregation.**

This congregation came to Prussia with its Aeltester Wilhelm Lange in 1834 and built its church in 1854. Wilhelm Lange was followed by Friedrich Lange as Aeltester, who was confirmed to his office on November 30, 1841 by the Aeltester Peter Wedel from Alexanderwohl. August Lenzmann followed at the beginning of the fifties and in 1881 the missionary Heinrich Dirks joined the congregation as Aeltester.

**i) The Waldheim congregation.**

This congregation immigrated from Poland in 1835. Its first Aeltester, Peter Schmidt, was confirmed to his office in 1841 by the Aeltester Benjamin Dirks from Ostrogau. Since 1877 Kornelius Dirks has been the Aeltester.

**k) The Ruckenau or Mennonite Brethren congregation.**

Its first Aeltester was Heinrich Hiebert, who was confirmed to his office by the congregation itself, as was the first Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde, Klaas Reimer, who was confirmed by his congregation. After Hiebert, Abraham Schellenberg followed in the office of Aeltester and when he emigrated with a part of the community to America, his brother David Schellenberg was confirmed as Aeltester in 1861 by the Aeltester Aron Lepp.

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**Section 3**

**Schools,  
Compulsory Military Service  
and the  
Forest Service**

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## **Section 3**

# **The Schools, Compulsory Military Service and the Forest Service**

### **1 - The School System in General**

In the first years of the settlement of the Molotschna Mennonites, there was no discussion of schools, because it was not possible under the circumstances at that time to establish an orderly school system. However, as soon as circumstances permitted, a small school house was built in a few villages. Rarely such a school house can still be found in the poorest villages of Molotschna. But where to find teachers? One had to make do with existing resources. There were people who were willing to teach, even if they had no knowledge of the subject in today's terms. If there was an old invalid somewhere, no matter what denomination, who had become unfit for work, but still needed to earn a living, he became a schoolmaster even if he could only read a little and also write, even if quite illegibly. At that time, a completely different standard was used than today to evaluate the qualifications of a man to become a teacher, which was not only due to the fact that this occupation was held in low esteem, but also because qualified men, could not be found. If one found such a man, who could read somewhat comprehensibly, write quite legibly and even calculate the first 4 modes of arithmetic, then one was very satisfied with him. That a schoolmaster still needed to be fit of mind and body, was not understood at that time, at least not in general. Old craftsmen who worked at their craft not only during the vacations or after hours, but during the school hours, or more correctly, during the lessons, because there was not much real teaching, were schoolmasters.

The woodworker's workbench stood next to the school desk at which the pupils sat, and for the tailor's craft the pupils had to give up some space at the upper end of the school desk, because from here the schoolmaster could also observe the children easily during his work, whether they focused their gaze on their assigned reading. And why shouldn't the schoolmasters continue their trade? They had to have something to do to pass the time, because they didn't interact with the children except to supervise them. The students were to look at their books and remain quiet. If the children were not compliant with this, the cane, kneeling on peas, hanging the long-eared dog around the neck, etc., provided the necessary guidance. If it happened that such a schoolmaster could not be found, an old mother would take over this business and the children would be sent to her house so that they would at least know the letters and, if possible, learn a little more. Not only in the very first years, but in the course of a quarter of a century, the students were provided with various books, that could be found by the parents, e.g., one pupil had the Mennonite, the other the Lutheran catechism, and a third one had a so-called Gospel book, etc. As for the desks, there was usually only one table about two feet wide, of such length as the schoolroom permitted. The boys sat at one side of the table, the girls at the other, and at the upper end the schoolmaster. Each child, when he had learned his task or had sat for a while, had to come to the schoolmaster to recite what he had learned. If the performance was too bad, and how could it generally be otherwise than, because no suitable instruction took place, and because there was usually only one exit, the stick played a large role and some students dreaded the walk to the teacher.

Gradually, teachers were hired, as they began to be called, who no longer belonged to the above-mentioned invalids, and who became teachers because they had a desire to educate, and also had more insight into how to keep order without a cane and long-ears. Many teachers started to paint pictures for the children and especially Christmas and New Year wishes were richly decorated to make school and learning more pleasant for the children. This approach to education lasted for a number of years and was the usual model for education.

When the inadequacies of this system were generally recognized, less skilled teachers were motivated to improve their skills as quickly as possible. This may seem absurd and inefficient at the present time. In that earlier time a teacher's goal was to support his family by teaching even if his students showed little achievement, but still there was stepwise progress, with all the painting of flowers, etc. Teaching and student performance improved compared to the time of craftsmen and invalids.

But there were also men who realized that even more had to be done for the schools, and in 1820 school friends, among whom the then young Johann Cornies in Ohrloff were at the forefront, decided to found a Christian school. The buildings necessary for this school were constructed in Tiege, very close to the Ohrloff border, and in 1822 classes began in it. The first teacher was Tobias Voth (who came from Prussia). He gave very good Christian lessons, had good knowledge in all necessary subjects, which he taught but only in German. After seven years of Voth's work, because the school board found it absolutely necessary to start teaching the national language, Heinrich Heese was employed as a teacher in this school, who could also teach in Russian.

Through the activities of the two teachers, Voth and Heese, several teachers were trained in this school, or perhaps today it is more correct to say that they came from this school, and in general, the need for improvement of the school system was awakened in the colonies, the school system was improved and intellectual life was stimulated. Teacher Heese was appointed to the Chortitza Central School as a teacher in 1841 and his son-in-law Martin Riediger took his place as a teacher.

The founding of this school was simultaneous with the founding of the Bible Society and, like the latter, aroused the hatred that led to the communal separation. Gradually, however, even among the opponents, who were only misguided, there were those who recognized the benefit of a better school education and especially the necessity of the national language, and sent their sons, sometimes even daughters, to this school. After Heese, Martin Riediger presided over this school as a teacher for a few years.

At the end of the forties, the school was temporarily closed and the buildings were sold to private owners. The intention of the school friends, however, was to bring it back to life.

Already at the end of the thirties the district or Central School was founded in small beginnings by the District Mayor Johann Regier, and since teachers soon emerged from this school as well, it was a source for further growth of the school system.

Regarding the schools, the Molotschna Mennonites were left to themselves for a period of 40 years. According to their name, they were under the supervision of the clergy, but what was done for the upliftment of the school system was not done by the clergy, even though some of them were involved, but by private persons, as was the case with the founding of the Central School and the school founded in Steinbach by Peter Schmidt (son-in-law of the founder of Steinbach and father of the later chairman. Since this school also achieved more than the village schools by employing good teachers, teachers were also trained for the latter and in general contributed to the uplift of the school system.

It was not until the beginning of the forties that the government began to turn its attention to the schools and handed over the supervision and management of the entire school system (1843) to the chairman of the Agricultural Association, Johann Cornies. Cornies received this assignment not because he was the Chairman of the Association, but because the government (at that time, v. Hahn, Chairman of the Guardianship Committee) recognized in him the man who would also achieve something in this field. In assuming this important duty, Cornies, like everything else under his control, also took up the task of improving the schools with energy. Without his approval, no teacher was to be hired and no change of teacher was to take place. It was his principle that a change of teachers was only allowed to take place if some kind of improvement could be foreseen. In order to make the low state of the schools quite clear to the village communities as well as to the teachers, Cornies sent a description of a bad school to the Mayor's Office on March 5, 1846, in which the description may seem somewhat exaggerated to the reader who is only familiar with today's school system, but whoever still knows something about this initial state of the schools from his own experience will also know that this description is a completely appropriate depiction and may not be called exaggerated at all.

### In School X

The schoolmaster sits at a table in the same room of a miserable house in which he lives with his wife and children, in a white linen nightshirt, his head covered with a nightcap, often a tobacco pipe in his mouth, surrounded by soiled books, paper and punishment instruments of all kinds. Around him are the pupils in various positions, without any division into classes, according to ability and progress. On the walls of the narrow, gloomy room hang the saws, planes, straps and other handicraft and household tools. On the stove hangs miscellaneous laundry. The diapered child cries in the cradle, which a pupil was called by the schoolmaster to set in motion; a hen with her young and several pigeons walk between the feet of the schoolchildren, who are very distracted by all these objects. There is actually no order at all in the lessons in this school. As it occurs to the schoolmaster, he soon introduces this or that topic. He knows nothing about lesson preparation. He does not have any supplemental books for his self-education; a house postilla from the 17th century, some storybooks, and an odd arithmetic book are his entire library. And because the schoolmaster is in no way able to gain the attention of the children, much less to hold it, the pupils find little pleasure in learning and naturally fall into a thousand dalliances. The schoolmaster makes noise, swears, curses and screams, makes them kneel on wood and peas, hangs the long-eared dog from their necks, hands out smacks, head butts, muzzles, etc. and calls his method necessary discipline. The teaching conditions are carried out in the following way. The earliest instruction is with letter writing and spelling, both extremely dry and tiring for the children, for whom it usually takes 2-3 years. The little ones learn nothing else besides mechanically saying the Lord's Prayer and some prayers, saying the 10 Commandments without understanding and reciting the prayers before and after school. Then follows reading which requires extreme effort on the part of the children, monotonously plodding, without proper pronunciation, without fruit and benefit. Since almost everyone is provided with a different book, this makes the reading lessons doubly difficult. One child after the other must go to the schoolmaster and recite what he has been given to read. In such individual lessons, each student receives 2-3 minutes of instruction, and the rest of the day's school time is completely lost to him. Writing here means painting, arithmetic means mechanically imitating the example, as the schoolmaster has demonstrated. Only the boys learn both, the girls do not, but even those have forgotten it very quickly, because they learned without reason, without application. When learning by heart, it is seen in particular who has completed his task and who has

can memorize well. An explanation of what is to be learned, to the schoolmaster is [as foreign as] a Spanish village.

March 5, 1846

The chairman: **Johann Cornies**

Probably many fathers of families were quite satisfied with the condition of the schools and one heard in this time, when the work of the Cornies in the school system was exposed to so much, even if impotent resistance, say: "My son must not learn more than I have learned". An Aeltester said in quite a sad tone: "Everything is being taken out of our hands". In reality, the Aelteste could have had control over the schools until now, and should have had it, but they never took ownership. Not only had they not assumed responsibility for the schools, but all private effort to improve the schools was counteracted and opposed. Even if some clergymen wanted to make improvements, they could, as mentioned above, join the school friends in their work, but they could not do much for the whole system, but had to limit themselves to supporting the Chairman Cornies in his endeavors. In order to give the village communities an idea of what a good school would look like, Cornies sent a detailed description of the school to the Mayor's Offices, so that they would consider the difference between a bad and a good school and try to help bring the latter into being.

### **In School A**

The schoolroom is clean, light and spacious. The exterior of the building attracts the attention of passers-by and shows its high purpose. The classroom is completely separated from the teacher's apartment, so that the students, divided according to class by gender and ability, sit in good order on functional benches, all facing the teacher's chair. Cleanly dressed (as he wants the children to be), with decorum and friendly seriousness, the teacher stands before them, supervising and observing them, sometimes wandering between the rows of benches, rarely sitting in the chair. He is always involved to keep his youth involved as well. This is not disturbed by external objects, except for a schedule, in which the division of the subjects is listed, a blackboard, for writing down sentences to be corrected and the like, the white walls are completely free of clutter. During the lessons, the subjects are properly alternated so that there is a rotation between the more difficult and the easier. For each lesson

the teacher prepares himself and consults the necessary reference books, for the acquisition of which he uses from time to time from his not large income what many others give to the beer tankard. Thus, he becomes more skillful and insightful, his circle of knowledge expands more; he works better every day, and also increases his teaching skills in the process.

When a child makes a mistake, the teacher first corrects him gently, tenderly, shows him his error. He only threatens and warns him if the correction is of no avail, and finally punishes him gradually for repeated offenses. He very seldom uses an instrument of punishment and never in a way that is harmful to the health or morals of the children. By this discipline, or even more by his own good behavior, by his accuracy in everything and by his attractive teaching, he wins all the affection and love of his schoolchildren. The teacher talks to his children as a friend, at their level, about the subjects they are to learn. Above all, he tries to make them pay attention to the things that are around them, to stretch them and to expand their knowledge.

The teacher asks them questions as if he wanted to be taught by them, but knows how to give them so skillfully that by continuing them the children are led from the known to the unknown; that they believe that they had invented everything themselves, that they convince themselves of the good and bad qualities of things, that they thus think, judge and conclude, learn to distinguish the true from the false, certainty from superstition. This not only forms their memory but their intellect. They convince themselves of the truths of religion and of the duties of a church member, which will apply to them in their future life.

Aids to this are the instruction in comprehensible and natural reading, the practice of the German language as a main subject on which all instruction by reading and listening depends. The use of natural or vividly designed moral representation of a visible object and other visible objects to make the lecture more meaningful; stories woven into the lessons, instructive, easy to grasp spiritual songs in heartwarming melodies and to all this the teaching of whole classes at once at the same time and with the same books. What is said here to one child is at the same time said to all pupils, all hear the same thing. This arouses competition and the feeling of noble honesty in them, two qualities by which everything is gained in this kind of teaching. According to this way of teaching, the greatest benefit that comes from knowledge of writing and arithmetic is demonstrated to the youth until they are convinced that they can make use of it throughout their lives. According to this way of teaching

the students are led to the knowledge of God from the natural religion or by rightly used human reason. This is followed by the story of the Savior and a story from the Gospels. Everything is discussed, made understandable, and the education of the head and heart of the youth is worked on, so that they can grasp, understand, and retain everything forever. Through this, Christian attitudes and principles are planted in their souls, reverence and adoration of the all-powerful, benevolent God, gratitude for His grace, love for Him, earnest determination to fulfill His will through obedience arise in the children. Through such teachings, as prevail in the school of A, each child is educated to the state and concept to which it belongs, the powers of each are perfected and then put in a position to establish its and the community's good ever more firmly.

NB. One cannot talk a child into fearing God; therefore, all extensive, dissecting and dividing catechisms does not awaken the fear of God.

From April 6, 1840. The chairman: **Johann Cornies**

Also, Cornies gave general rules for teachers about teaching and treatment of children:

**General Rules  
on Instruction and Treatment of School Children, for School Teachers  
of the Molotschna Mennonite District**

- 1) The first education, which the student receives, will have a great influence in the future. Therefore, nature, in its proper and undisturbed environment, is supported in such a way that it will prosper visibly and joyfully (purposeful occupation, exercise the power of thinking, communication of new knowledge).
- 2) The earliest education consists of nurturing in an environment of security, i.e., one surrounds the child with love, so that its inner self quietly develops, but one does not get ahead of nature, but waits for the time when the child's awareness awakens and launches a lifelong path of growth and learning.
- 3) The pleasure of exploring their environment through their senses of feeling, hearing, smell and taste is very important for childhood development. Things that hinder the development of the physical senses not only harm children physically but in general the formation of their souls.
- 4) Children's bad habits should be strictly corrected. To suffer in this way would be to sin grievously against the children.

The degeneration of the child's mind is an almost insurmountable obstacle in education, an evil preponderance of sinfulness arises if the will of the obstinate child is not broken at the right time. Therefore, the more energy the child has, the more it must be kept busy and guided. Children by nature want a variety of activities to keep them busy and entertained.

- 5) In children up to the age of six, teaching moral rules is not only futile, but also harmful.
- 6) Harsh punishments dull and at the same time arouse dislike, so children who are treated harshly become callous, sluggish, cold, stubborn, withdrawn, spiteful and treacherous. To bring up children well, one should flee harshness! When you wish to correct a child, use words, never a blow.
- 7) Children must be guided by boundaries, never by punishment, and they must be freed from the fetters they do not have the strength to break.
- 8) The younger a man is, the more he is influenced by his feelings; the older he is, the more he is influenced by his intellect, but in such a way that reason wins with both. Therefore, everything should be banished from its sphere of action that could excite and provoke its nerves in an unnatural way.
- 9) So far, education has failed because of too much admonishing and rebuking. In the end indifference arises. Only foolish and unjust impulses should be prevented and made impossible for children.
- 10) What can be done by a hint should not be done by a word, and what can be done by a word should not be done by an exhortation.
- 11) Try to simplify and meet the child's needs as much as possible.
- 12) Let the children gradually become accustomed to every change of weather, and let them enjoy the free invigorating open air, dressed lightly and without constraint.
- 13) The physical and mental well-being of the children should be dear to every educator and teacher; therefore, one should be careful not to discourage them in any way.
- 14) To tease children, to make them impatient, or even to deliberately provoke them to anger would be to train them to become evil.
- 15) Children up to their seventh year should be spared, as long as possible, the teaching of images and copperplate, so that their imagination is not stimulated and exercised too early and too strongly, to their detriment. The children's sensual attention and the ability to observe, which otherwise loses its sharpness and strength to the same degree.

- 16) Make the children understand the subject matter as much as possible, because the senses are the key to learning and helps even the weakest children so that they remember and learn everything more easily.
- 17) The pupil's interests should not be exercised either too early or too much and should always be based on reason and reality. Callousness is the death of all enjoyment of life and of all joyful feelings.
- 18) Children should always gain in spontaneity and self-awareness, so that they learn to control natural impulses on the one hand and disorderly impulses on the other.
- 19) When children try their hand at something on their own, do not reprimand or criticize. This applies to physical and mental strength.
- 20) If the children's activity tends toward a particular skill, do not force them to do what does not suit their nature, their mind and their disposition. Only what truly belongs to the person is that which arises from within him. Where there are no plants, make do with less. If you can't plant oaks, then plant small modest fruit trees.
- 21) It is not advisable to protect children with too much care and anxiety from all perception and knowledge of human vices and faults, because parents and school teachers who do so make themselves slaves and do not achieve their purpose.
- 22) With regard to social interaction between children, a reasonable restriction of freedom might be necessary and salutary. The freedom of speech and opinion of lively children should also be limited.
- 23) The time spent with other children and their interactions must never be too limited and should be in the measure and of the kind, as such is useful for them. In particular, contact with other children, especially those of approximately the same age, is immensely beneficial and necessary for them.
- 24) Habituation to order and activity are the simple and effective means of education which, when applied at the right time, do not fail to serve their purpose. Through spontaneity the children will greatly increase in inner education and thus save and gain much time.
- 25) The student must be accustomed early on to work, not arbitrarily, but according to type, amount, and time. If you see that he is taking a completely wrong direction, his energies are fragmented, you should intervene.

- 26) Children can become accustomed to industriousness if they can be made to do what they are assigned to do with care, with effort, and with pleasure.
- 27) When children see order, cleanliness, diligence and activity, simplicity and purity of morals wherever they are, when they hear only just, prudent and fair judgments, only words of peace and love, then morality and cleanliness arise of their own accord.
- 28) Children are taught order when their impetuosity is governed by boundaries and their carnal nature is restrained, so that spiritual freedom has room to express itself.
- 29) Do not be too hasty in creating universal concepts in the child's mind, and do not demand that children think of them in their broadest and most universal terms right from the start.
- 30) In order to illustrate general concepts to children, they must be preceded by observations and awareness of the individual.
- 31) The mind's power is paralyzed and spoiled by dull words or untimely abstractions, if it is not exercised and strengthened by appealing concepts.
- 32) It is very advantageous to use the advanced students as auxiliary teachers of those are behind, or to let such give lessons in school under the immediate supervision of the teacher.
- 33) In education and teaching, the schoolteacher has to see who a person is, what he should become, and how he can best become that.
- 34) The more one knows how to instill in the children a love of learning, the better the relationship between the teacher and the learner, the more beneficial will be the effect on the mind and emotions.
- 35) Everything learned and taught should be used as nourishment for the mind and emotions, and in such a way that everything leads to the enlightenment of the mind, the ennoblement of the heart, and the warming of morality.
- 36) A standstill or regression in education will be unavoidable where there a rush and excess in the development and training of good habits. (Fixed agenda, education according to rigid principles).
- 37) The teachings and inspirations of faith must give strength and effectiveness to all other teachings and influences, for man will never attain true morality unless he feels reverence, love and trust toward an invisible being whom he regards as the master of his destiny, therefore let everything in education be done with a religious spirit.

- 38) The first religious education is to make the children receptive to the principles of religion through love and seriousness, using the beauties of nature and its awe-inspiring phenomena to raise the children's stirred or awakened souls to the idea of God and the divine.
- 39) Show the children the blessings of virtue and the terrible consequences of vice, and leave it to them to apply them to themselves.
- 40) Praise Jesus, the most loving friend of children, whenever it is convenient, according to all the aspects of His lovingkindness and, by this form them into friends of Christ. This is their greatest ennoblement for this and that world.
- 41) If the teacher wants learning to be a joy for his students, he should show by his whole demeanor that teaching is a joy for him.
- 42) Reading by the pupil is not only a skill, but an expression of the feeling, which should stimulate and animate the interior. Writing is also a means of education for the sense of beauty and arithmetic stimulates the sense of order, care and diligence. Singing stimulates pious feelings.
- 43) The direction of true education is not merely that man be educated for this earth, for his status and profession, but also for a higher purpose, for the highest possible likeness to God. This includes not only early religious instruction, which the Mennonites receive as youths before baptism, but the instilling into the child's heart of sayings learned by heart from the Holy Scriptures, which the teacher explains to the children briefly but comprehensively.
- 44) Since it is not possible to protect children completely from the corrupting influence of evil examples, education must and should try to guide the heart of the children so that it can resist the influence of evil and does not take on immorality.
- 45) There must be no arbitrariness in education, for it stifles the noblest feelings, deprives trust and love, and produces a closed nature.
- 46) Everything that flourishes grows gradually and without noise. Therefore, if the teacher wants to make something flourish, he should work gradually, gently and quietly, but with all his strength, when teaching children.

- 47) Girls must learn social manners and the language of social interaction earlier, they must acquire a certain audacity earlier, so that they do not sink into childish stupidity.
- 48) What makes young girls monosyllabic, stupid and embarrassed in society is the awareness of their ignorance and lack of thought and knowledge. Their education must therefore allow them to be able to take part in a social conversation.
- 49) Every slavish obedience must be banished, so that the child becomes aware of its human dignity. Learning and obeying should never appear to him as hard work, but as the only way to reach the goal.
- 50) Encourage the boy to think for himself, to examine and judge, and let the mature youth learn phrases by heart, i.e., to sleep by day and work by night, to sow in winter and reap in spring.
- 51) The children will become agreeable if the quarrelsome are separated, if they are deprived of the pleasures of social interaction, and if he who deliberately offends others is not left unpunished.
- 52) If the children are treated with love and accustomed to examine all their actions according to the same, if they do not tolerate mistreatment among themselves, if their complaints are given reasonable consideration, if the first germs of envy and gloating are eradicated and they are encouraged to perform acts of charity, then they will gain in philanthropy.
- 53) Open love of the truth can be promoted by treating the children's openly confessed faults more gently; by being more of a doctor than an avenger in the case of children's transgressions. In order to form children into men, the teacher must become a child himself. Was not Jesus himself a child with children?
- 54) The body must be cared for as well and at the same time as the spirit, for both make up the whole man. A body that remains unstimulated is like a lake that has no outlet and becomes foul water.
- 55) A wise teacher must do to his children just as a wise prince does to his courtiers. He must know how to give great value to a silken bond, a kind look and word, and distribute the graces to all in such a way that each one believes that they are his favorite.
- 56) Affectionate and friendly treatment should prevail in education, but strictness and punishment should not be lacking, for often the young person does not know what is appropriate to do. Often the searching and loving mind is guided through these. He who does not hear shall feel.

- 57) Expressions of love work better than expressions of applause and expressions of disapproval and disappointment work better than reprimands and punishment. In the case of the above, punishment and instruction are necessary.
- 58) Note the exact relationship between merit and demerit. Therefore, if a child excels in memorization or is quiet and obedient in of his work, he is not entitled to any reward. If a child of poor ability does not make progress, he should not be punished or blamed.
- 59) Rewards and punishments must be applied carefully and sparingly. As the spice of education, so to speak, so that there is no selfishness on the one hand, and fear on the other, and the student loathes unrewarded good and unpunished evil.
- 60) The more the teacher wavers and passes from the softest kindness to the harshest severity, the more he feeds sensuality and tolerates whim, the more difficult it will be for him to keep his students in order and to raise them to self-rule.
- 61) If natural shame manifests itself adequately following the missteps of the pupil, do not reinforce it. If shame is necessary as a correction and punishment, one should proceed with the greatest possible gentleness. Love threatens in order not to be allowed to punish and punishes in order to be able to reward.
- 62) Never expose the child being punished to the ridicule of others, never call him a dishonorable name.
- 63) Where no teaching and no defense will help, where evil disregards, and abuses the rights and powers of others, the school must act as judge.
- 64) Too much leniency with children brings up weaklings who disdain seriousness, order and rule; too harsh severity, on the other hand, makes stubborn people who do not act according to principles but want to be ruled only by force.
- 65) But to prevent punishment is wiser and better than to punish. The rod of the schoolteacher is not a magic wand and fruits of order do not sprout from its branches, evil can only be restrained if it is used in an emergency and with wisdom.
- 66) Punishment at the right time and in the right way soon makes all punishment unnecessary. Punishments are not followed too quickly by proofs of love. He has used the rod badly, must thicken it afterwards into a stick.

- 67) Every teacher should work to make all rewards and punishments unnecessary for the children; he should rule not by the power of his office but by the superpower of the Spirit. Rewards should give the sweet feeling of value, but punishments should give the feeling of being unworthy.
- 68) Rebuke should never be unfounded, never exaggerated, never spiteful, never insulting. Rebuke and punishment must appear to the children equally well as demonstrations of love. (Vain children especially need reprimands as medicine).
- 69) Less severe means than censure and punishment are, deprivation of comfort, stern face, threat, rebuke. If the repeated and intensified rebuke is ineffective, punishment must follow immediately. A friendly joke, which points to uncertainty, lack of understanding, etc., stimulates immensely the effort and the learning of what the child still lacks.
- 70) Punishment cannot spoil as much as praise and permissiveness; therefore, praise should always be more sparing than punishment. However, one may be lenient with children of delicate and sensitive feelings.
- 71) In particular, beware of making promises to children (especially rewards) and then not keeping them. It robs the teacher of trust and love.
- 72) Dangerous rewards are those that feed vanity and love of pleasure, or those that encourage self-interest and lead the unrewarded to jealousy and mistrust.
- 73) A correct scientific method has a visible effect; much depends on the mental diet; the true method does not depart from nature and prevents all sham knowledge and a delusion of much and quick knowledge, which corrupts the inner being. For what blooms too early also fades too quickly. He who snatches the bud before its time sins against the flower, for he destroys it.
- 74) All teaching, if it is to be consequential, must follow this pattern; the mind acquires all of its learning through the contemplation of creation. The product of contemplation is a thought, the thought forms itself to an idea, ideas combine and create knowledge.

- 75) In everything that is called teaching, never forget to alternate entertainment with seriousness, recreation with effort, easier with harder, listening with reading, reading with writing, writing with memorization, memorization with tasks that require one's own reflection, work with testing, and so on. It always remains true that variety is the spice of teaching.
- 76) Only then does the teacher arrive at a good understanding of what he has to accomplish as a teacher, when he has a clear understanding of his position, his relationship to the schoolchildren, if he above all enters into the spirit which inspires and enlivens every good school.
- 77) Religiosity is the goal toward which all education must strive, and to which all its individual branches must unite. It is the sacred root from which all life springs and which pours out blessings over the growth and development of knowledge.
- 78) Only a truly religious mind is capable of true enthusiasm for the business of teaching, upbringing and education, for only this can kindle the sacred flame that sparks in the innermost souls of children. Therefore, if teaching and education are to be the foundation of the happiness of each person, as well as the well-being of entire families and communities, the most important goal of school teachers is to instill in children the fear of the Lord and love for His Holy Word as revealed to man.
- 79) Our age is the age of coarseness. The circle of knowledge and skills is so broad for the student that it is impossible for him to be able to focus on his interests, and the budding interest is crushed and suffocated under the quantity of the given material.
- 80) Where too strict and too hard discipline forces the naturally happy children to an unnatural lifelessness, to a lame brooding, there a good spirit slumbers. Where a small punishment is sufficient, do not apply a greater one; any intentional disturbance of the child's cheerfulness, aimed at correcting faults, is educational punishment.
- 81) If a strong explicit reprimand is necessary, it must not be given during the lesson; it must be given only at the end of the lesson.
- 82) Only then does the foundation of the children's education become well rounded, and what is learned become the firm property of the soul, when the spirited powers of independent thinking are kept in motion the mind is captured and enlivened in its innermost being. How the children are taught in the first school year, so they must be taught in the following years.

- 83) The teacher of the youth must not show any indecency in his moral conduct, neither in nor out of school. He must be a model of morality and religion. The heart of the child must be able to wrap itself around the teacher's heart like the vine around the elm tree if it is to grow up without danger of going wild. The teacher should see to the preservation of this childlike sense, so that it always knows how to find the way to the child's heart, and since nothing captivates children so much as a lively activity. The teacher should model healthy activity in his teaching.
- 84) The important purposes to be attained in school call for a holy seriousness in the children's social interactions and demand a thoughtful environment in which the children are placed for the purpose of instruction. Any structure is useless in which the children merely suffer, in which they can't express themselves.
- 85) It cannot be denied that the skillful children are themselves in school to contribute. It cannot be denied that the clever children themselves can be used very well in the school to help in the mechanical part of the lessons and they themselves gain thereby.
- 86) If the teacher himself is the first in the school, his pupils will also come to school at the right time. If he himself begins the lesson with the ringing of the bell and does not end the lesson too soon, his pupils will get used to punctuality in everything they do. If he himself is clean and at all times decently dressed, then his pupils will also become accustomed to cleanliness. If he himself is composed, exact, orderly in giving his lessons and gives himself completely and undividedly to his children, then they will also work with effort and learn with composure and orderly activity. The teacher shows in his school conduct that his office is a serious and sacred office, then the necessary seriousness will also prevail in his school and he will be regarded with dignity and esteem.
- 87) The grading system must enable the teacher to judge correctly the behavior of the children, with possible savings of time, and to bring them gradually to the point of being persistently good without any artificial reward.
- 88) If the teachers of this district act according to these rules, then the schools will become educators of the body, heart and mind, true educators for man, a blessing for the present, a bliss for the coming brothers.

In 1845 Cornies divided the Molotschna Mennonite colonies into 6 school districts, and in January 1846 he formed a committee comprised of two teachers elected from each of these districts. The committee was to help regulate the entire school system and, in particular, to introduce better teaching methods by drawing up appropriate lesson plans and school year schedules. According to the prescriptions of the chairman, the teaching subjects were as follows:

- 1) A-B-C on the blackboard,
- 2) Pronunciation and spelling,
- 3) Reading, Bible reading with correct emphasis,
- 4) Spelling and handwriting,
- 5) Arithmetic. The first 4 modes and rule metrics with fractions,
- 6) Mental arithmetic,
- 7) Singing by numbers from the hymnal,
- 8) German language,
- 9) Memorizing, sayings from the Holy Scripture, prayers and hymn verses,
- 10) Epistles,
- 11) Beginning principles of geography and the primer of countries,
- 12) Biblical history, geography, natural and church history, writing from dictation.

From Juschanlee given on January 26, 1816

The school buildings, too, were only allowed to be built as ordered by Cornies, and according to such a plan as is seen today, that already the exterior of the building indicates its high purpose, as the school at A. The foundation of the school system was mainly laid by Cornies, and not only at that time, when he was entrusted with the supervision of the schools by the government, but he was already the actual founder of the Ohrloff Central School, as well as collaborator in the foundation of the Central School, from which both teachers emerged, who were at his disposal during the school reform.

As we have seen from the first section, Philipp Wiebe had become chairman of the Agricultural Association after the death of his father-in-law Cornies and had, as was the official regulation at that time, at the same time the obligation to take over the improvement of the school system on the basis laid down by Cornies. He had the committee teachers inspect all schools once a year

and submit detailed reports on the condition of each school, where the inspecting teachers then traveled to a different district every year. Wiebe also worked to ensure that the village communities paid their teachers a salary that could sustain them. The fathers were obliged to send their children to school regularly, and they were only allowed to use the older boys for two weeks during the sowing season. The school term for children was from 6-14 years, and if someone wanted to make an exception to this, this could only be done for special reasons and after obtaining permission from the chairman. By regulation of April 19, 1850, the chairman ordered the general teachers' conferences for the purpose of sharing the experiences of the teachers, for strengthening in their important profession, for consultation about the course of instruction and school discipline, as well as for completely free and friendly conversations.

When Wiebe resigned from his position as Chairman due to illness, he worked, as can be seen from the first section, in his seclusion in the civic and economic fields for the good of the community, but he also did not forget the schools. The Ohrloff Central School, which had been opened in 1822 and had been temporarily discontinued at the end of the 1840's, was to be re-established, as had always been the intention of the school's supporters, and here Wiebe was in the forefront of efforts to bring this school back to life. In 1859, a beautiful new schoolhouse was built in Ohrloff, and on September 12, 1860, it was dedicated, and the school opened. The teacher was Hermann Janzen, who gave lessons in German and Russian. After Janzen, the school was taken over by Isaak Fast, who initially also taught in both languages, but was later joined by a Russian teacher. After Isaak Fast, Kornelius Unruh took over this school as a German teacher and Johannes Braeul was employed as a teacher of the Russian language, both of whom are currently (1898) still working in this school with good success.

When in 1869 the Chairman of the Association (Peter Schmidt, Steinbach) was relieved of the management of the school system by the President of the Guardianship Committee, the Honorable Ettinger, and at the same time His Excellency confirmed a school council, Wiebe was again confirmed as the chairman of this school council by the Honorable President, and thus he was once again given the management of the school.

Since he died in 1870, however, there can be no further discussion of his effectiveness for the schools.

After Wiebe's death, Andreas Voth was elected chairman of the school council in Halbstadt and confirmed by the higher authority. Under his leadership at the end of the seventies, departmental school councils were elected for the Sagradovs [Sagradovka], for those settled in the Ekaterinoslav Governorate (Schönfelder Volost) and also for the Krim Mennonites, for each region in particular, and confirmed by the government, and in a set of rules of procedure worked out by the entire school council it was determined that schools would no longer be inspected by a committee of teachers, but the school council members would perform the inspections.

A special presentation describing the school system in the Molotschna Mennonite colonies was created by the Church Aeltester Abraham Goerz and published by the Mennonite Kirchenkonvent in a brochure in 1882. It should be mentioned here that in the last years, the chairmen of the school council worked with tenacity for continued independent administration, especially Klatt and Heese, but their efforts seem to have remained fruitless. A Mennonite School Council still exists today, but what its powers may be or will be in the future, or whether the Mennonite School Council will perhaps soon be dissolved altogether, remains to be seen.

## 2 - The Marien School for the Deaf and Dumb

Since there are several deaf-mutes among the Mennonites, the desire to do something for these unfortunate children arose in the seventies. After the work of some individuals had awakened interest in this very important matter, and plans were made for the establishment and maintenance of an institution to be founded for this purpose. A school for the deaf-mute was founded in 1880 in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the reign of the now in God resting Emperor Alexander II. After a suitable presentation, the school was named the Marienstummenschule [Marien School for the Deaf and Dumb] with the approval of the Highest Authorities. The opening of this school took place on January 28, 1885, but initially in a rented house in the Blumenort colony.

The following conditions were established for this school:

**Conditions for Admission of Deaf-Mute Children to  
the School for the Deaf and Dumb**

The duration of the teaching course in the institution is six years.

Classes begin annually on August 15 and last until June 15.

- 1) Deaf-mute children between the ages of 8 and 12 are not admitted to the school.  
(Exceptions may be made in special cases).
- 2) Applications by the parents or guardians of the children must be made by June 1 of the current year and addressed to the Molotschna Mennonite School Board in Ohrloff, Halbstadt postal station, Taurien Governorate.
- 3) The child must be physically and mentally healthy.
- 4) The child must be provided with a complete wardrobe, marked with the child's name, consisting of six shirts, six pairs of stockings, a dozen handkerchiefs and towels, also footwear and sufficient summer and winter clothing for one year.
- 5) The annual payment for school and board fees, including laundry, amounts to 160 Rubles and must be paid semi-annually in advance to the treasurer of the institution. For children of Mennonite parents, the annual school and board fee is 130 Rubles and children of completely impoverished parents are admitted free of charge.
- 6) The bed with all accessories, as well as all necessary writing materials and books, are supplied by the institution, for which 8 Rubles to be paid annually for each child.
- 7) The costs incurred by the institution due to illness of the children will be reimbursed by the parents or guardians when the children are collected from the institution.

When registering deaf-mute children, it is requested that the exact address be given and that it be reported whether the child was born deaf-mute or became deaf-mute through illness or other causes.

Deputy President  
of the Molotschna Mennonite School Board:  
**Johann Klatt**

The first teacher in this school was Hambarzumow, and his wife as a housemother, taught the girls various handicrafts. Hambarzumow left the institution in 1890 to found one in Saratov. In the school year 1887/88 a second teacher was appointed.

H. Esenwein from Germany and later as the third teacher Doerksen from Berdyansk. After the resignation of the teacher Hambarzumow, H. Rau from Frankfurt was employed, but after he left this position in 1893, in the autumn of the same year the son of the house parents Janzens (had served 2 years as house parents in the school) was employed as the third teacher, who had received his education in the famous deaf-mute institute of H. Vetter in Frankfurt am Main.

The number of pupils has so far (1895) fluctuated between 11 and 21 and the maintenance costs of the school are covered by the interest on an endowment of 12,000 Rubles collected for this purpose through collections, by the school and board, fees received, by voluntary contributions from all churches and from the pupils of the village schools, by contributions from missionary hours and voluntary contributions from private persons.

The maintenance costs amount to about 3000 Rubles per year.

Right from the beginning, the founders of this institution intended to build a suitable building for it, and when the village community of Tiege offered to provide a suitable building site for such an institution free of charge. Construction was started in the fall of 1887 and in the course of two years this construction was completed. The cost of the construction, which was covered by collections and contributions, amounted to 40,138 Rubles, i.e., that is how much was spent by the builders. The Bohemian window glass, the staining and the iron stairs, were sponsored by individual benefactors and is not included in the above amount.

In December 1889, teachers, students and everything that belonged to the school were transferred to the new building, to this first and only charity institution of its kind, and on January 3, 1890, this beautiful building was solemnly inaugurated with numerous participants, and it perfectly meets its purpose. Teachers and students feel completely at home in it and exceeds the example of the school in A. Already the exterior of the building attracts the attention of passers-by and shows its high purpose.

This institution is under the supervision and direction of the Molotschna Mennonite School Board, while for the administration of the economic part of it there is a special administrative committee, as President Peter

Heese, head Johannes Wiebe, at the same time cashier, head Johann Klatt, clergyman Abraham Goerz, Deacon Quiering.

Established in 1895

### 3 - Compulsory Military Service

When the news reached us through the newspapers at the end of 1870 that general conscription was to be made a law, and the Molotschna Mennonites were also notified by a private letter from Senator H. v. Hahn to proceed in this matter to appeal to the High Government in St. Petersburg. It was decided after several special meetings at a general conference held on January 22, 1871 in Alexanderwohl by the Molotschna, Chortitza and Bergtal Mennonite clergymen to send a deputation to St. Petersburg on this important matter. The following were appointed as deputies: from the Molotschna Mennonites the Church Aeltester Leonhard Sudermann, the Church Preachers Peter Goerz and Franz Isaac and the community member (at present Secretary in the District Office) Hermann Janzen. From the Chortitza Mennonites the Church Aeltester Gerhard Dueck and the Church Preacher Heinrich Epp. (The Bergtal colony did not participate in the appeal to the government, but rather emigrated to America).

The following authority was given to the deputies:

#### **To the Mennonites**

**Aelteste Leonhard Sudermann and Gerhard Dueck, Preachers Heinrich Epp,  
Peter Goerz and Franz Isaac and Church Member Hermann Janzen**

In several patriotic journals there are announcements about the introduction of general compulsory military service, to which also the so far privileged classes have been included, namely the colonists, are to be called. We and our local brothers in the faith, belong to this category of colonists, and are in deep distress and concern about the threatened loss of freedom of faith as Mennonites. We hereby instruct and authorize you, beloved brethren, to inquire about the state of this matter in the appropriate places and to take suitable steps to protect the plea of our people to secure further benevolent toleration and legal establishment of our freedom of defense also for the future

to bring the High Government, even if necessary to lay down at the feet of His Majesty, our most gracious Emperor.

At the same time, do not forget that we must acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude the benefits and favors we have enjoyed up to now and that we are unworthy of them before God and man, and that we therefore wish to be willing to prove our feelings of attachment and gratitude to the throne and fatherland in deed at any time.

We do not demand anything, but only ask for mercy and make the prophet Daniel's words of prayer: We lie before you with our prayer, not for our righteousness, but for your great mercy, chap. 9:18 as ours, in order to express our confession and our request before God and the great people of the kingdom.

So go in peace accompanied by our prayers and blessings. May Almighty God grant you, grant us and our children mercy before the men by whose word and decision our future shall be decided. May the will of the Lord be done, for he is gracious and merciful.

Given at the Aelteste Conference of the Molotschna, Chortitza and Bergtal Mennonites in the village Alexanderwohl on

January 22, 1871

(The signatures.)

About the effectiveness of the deputies the following travel report:

The Church Aelteste of the two Molotschna, Chortitza and Bergtal districts met on January 22, 1871, in the church at Alexanderwohl and authorized the Aeltester Leonhard Sudermann, Preacher Peter Goerz and us, the undersigned, to inquire about the state of this all-important matter at the appropriate place and to take suitable steps to bring the plea of our people for further benevolent toleration and legal establishment of our freedom of military service also for the future before the High Government, and, if necessary, to lay it at the feet of His Majesty our most gracious Emperor.

Accompanied by the prayers and blessings of our procurators and all those to whom this important matter was close to their hearts, we left our homeland and our dear relatives on February 1, in order to conscientiously accomplish our task under the assistance of God. Our

next destination was Odessa, in order to discuss this matter, as was generally considered advantageous in the conference, first of all with the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee and the Governor General, Adjutant General H. v. Kotzebue.

Since such a long journey of 500 versts by coach after unusually heavy snowfall from the still unpaved road is burdensome for us, we preferred to travel about half the distance to the railroad station at Losowaja, which is convenient for us, in order to travel from there to Kharkov. In Kharkov, however, we learned that this railroad was partially closed, because it has not yet been cleared of snow. This circumstance forced us to travel from Kharkov to Kursk and then via Kiev and Balta to Odessa. After reaching Losovaya at sunset on the 5th, we arrived by rail from there in Odessa on the 1st. However, not only the 200-verst long sleigh ride to Losovaya was boring because of all the snow, but also that railroad was not yet cleared of snow, so that even the mighty steam engine got stuck in it and caused the train to make many stops. This detour from our main destination (St. Petersburg), which was 1055 versts from Kursk to Odessa and back to Kursk, was unfortunately in vain, because not only did we not meet the aforementioned gentlemen, who had left for St. Petersburg two days before our arrival, but we also looked in vain for the Chortitza deputies, with whom we had arranged to meet there and make common accommodations in all the inns. In the committee we learned through H. Kareisha that Chortitza deputies had been there, but that the H. President had told them that in order to travel to St. Petersburg as deputies, permission from the H. Minister had to be obtained beforehand, and since he was traveling there, he would inform them through the committee which decision they should wait for here in Odessa, or if they preferred to travel home, it could be sent to them. We interpreted H. Kareisha's comments as meaning that we could travel to St. Petersburg as private persons, and if we were allowed to appear there as plenipotentiaries, we could also make use of our power of attorney.

Through Jakob Toews in Odessa, we learned that the H. President had received the message that a deputation would come from the Molotschna, which he, Toews, should give greetings from the H. President and tell us that our journey to St. Petersburg was superfluous, since he and the H. General Governor would represent us there.

Whether the Chortitzers would decide to wait for the decision to St. Petersburg or even to leave the work for military freedom to distant high patrons, we could not know, but already on the 12th we asked them by telegraph whether their deputation had left via Odessa or directly to St. Petersburg. Since we still did not receive an answer on the 15th, we left on the evening train for the Residence, but beforehand we asked our principals by telegraphic dispatch to send us another power of attorney issued in our four names (the first one was also issued in the name of the Chortitzers) to St. Petersburg, so that we would be able to act without the Chortitzers if necessary.

Saturday, February 20, 5 o'clock in the evening, we arrived safely in St. Petersburg, and after attending the Sunday service of the Brethren congregation, we went immediately on Monday to see H. Ettinger, the Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, who received us in a friendly manner, proved very sympathetic in our matter, and promised to present us to the Governor General. On Tuesday, the 23rd, we first went to H. Ettinger, who told us that he was willing to arrange an audience for us with the Minister but could not yet tell us when this could happen but hoped to speak with the H. Minister the same day and would inform us at 5 o'clock in the evening. Further, His Excellency said, you must not expect a very friendly reception from His Excellency the Minister, but even though His Excellency is not completely averse to us, you must not bypass him. Further, go to the H. Governor General, and if His High Excellency lets you pass, thank him highly for his cooperation, then he will perhaps also tell you more. We immediately went to H. v. Kotzebue. His Excellency said, "You have come too early, I also said to wait, there were already two men with me in Odessa". When we replied that these were Chortitzers, with whom we had not met and therefore did not know what information they had received. His Excellency continued, "I have already spoken with Count v. Heydn, the President of the Commission that is to prepare the new 'military law,' who does not believe that the Mennonites will be released without military service and tending the wounded, which will not be against their conscience. We replied that tending the wounded was not against our conscience, but rather our duty, but that it would be quite different if we were militarily obligated to do so, or if we fed the sick in our midst.

To which His Excellency replied that the need was not always close geographically and added, "But such service will be quite different from that in Prussia, where only servicemen are taken for medical service, but here no musket or other weapon is necessary, but only the Red Cross. Furthermore, I have asked Count v. Heydn whether he could not find another obligation to replace conscription, such as monetary payments, not recruitment tax, but other duties. "For now, I can't tell you anything definite, but as soon as something definite turns up, you can learn of it from me." We expressed our gratitude for the cooperation that His Excellency had shown us.

From the Governor General we immediately went to Senator H. v. General Governor Hahn. "You are here? When did you come?" said the Senator. "We have already worked a lot on your behalf in this matter. At that time, when I wrote the letter to the blessed Wiebe in response to your dispatch, I did not yet know that my colleague, Senator v. Gerngross, aide to the Minister, who also lives in this house, would be appointed a member of the Commission, for the drafting of the new military law. I am glad that you understood my letter so well and came yourself. Although I have spoken with Gerngross, go to him yourself tomorrow, because it is already too late today. Come at 10 o'clock in the morning, before he goes to the Senate, and explain to him your concerns, which you will be able to do better than I can. I hope that your present generation will still remain free of defense, for it is in the principle of government that privileges given for a certain time are to be kept until the expiration of this time, but privileges given for an indefinite time, the so-called eternal privileges, like yours, reach their end with the death of the present generation when the laws change. But this cannot be enough for you yet. You personally would be free in any case, but you must also try to achieve what is possible for your descendants, but to free them from sanitary service will hardly be possible." When the Senator asked whether we had already appealed anywhere, we said that we had been to the Governor General, who had told us that we had come too early, to which H. v. Hahn replied, "You have not come too early, but just at the right time. They are already working on the draft, and it is easier to achieve something in your favor now than later, when the draft is submitted for review and the higher authority, as usual, does not expand and supplement it, but restricts it." Finally, H. v. Hahn said,

"I am pleased that you have visited me, come again, it will be pleasant for me, Saturday morning I am free."

Wednesday the 24th we went to see the Honorable v. Gerngross. He said, "To leave the Mennonites completely without obligation in the military service in exchange for a monetary compensation is impossible, and even if I wanted to, I would not get away with it, I would be beaten; for the noblemen, who are also deprived of their privileges and must perform personal military service, would not allow such an exception for the Mennonites. They will be called in for medical service, which will not be against their religious principles, because they do not have to take part in the battle, but only have to feed the wounded and sick after the battle." That we are not allowed to carry weapons during this medical service, he did not say freely, but only that we would not be allowed to make use of them, but that we would wear a uniform, he said, which their law cannot forbid them to do, because the wearing of a uniform is only the clothing that characterizes a certain rank, and if the Emperor should order every subject to wear a blue skirt, they would not be able to refuse. When it was objected on our part that we consider it a duty to care for the sick and wounded, but that it is quite another thing if we can do it voluntarily, as in the Crimean War, or if we are forced to do it and are completely enrolled in the military service, in which service our young people come into some relationships where they could be harmed from a religious point of view. The Senator said: "I do not believe that people are spoiled in soldiering, but rather that it is a good school for them." Thursday, the 25th, the Chortitza deputies, Aeltester Dueck and Preacher Epp also arrived in St. Petersburg and a petition was drafted that very day to the H. Minister of Crown Lands.

**To His Excellency <sup>a)</sup>  
Lord Minister of Crown Lands.**

**From the Mennonites of Southern Russia, Gerhard Dick,  
Leonhard Sudermann, Franz Isaac,  
Peter Goertz, Heinrich Epp and Hermann Jansen**

**PETITION**

Called by the Government from the Kingdom of Prussia to settle in the southern part of Russia, our fathers gladly went to Russia,

a.) The first document was translated from Russian into English and the second from German into English. Hence the slightly different wording.

The Emperor's Order for Peace was not only because it not only offered complete religious freedom in accordance with our religious beliefs, which do not allow us to enter into the military sphere, in accordance with the divine commandment of our Savior, to love our neighbors as ourselves, was approved by a Decree of the Highest Order of September 6, 1800 and was subsequently approved by His Majesty in the Kingdom of God, Grand Duke Nicholas Pavlovich, on November 9th of the year 1838.

We are alarmed at the imminent military reform throughout the entire State. May we also be deprived of the immunity of our religious denomination for military service, and therefore we dare, in view of this spiritual need, to address Your Excellency with the most humble request that He not leave us without Your gracious patronage Our Most Gracious Imperial Majesty, our Most Gracious Lord Alexander Nikolayevich, whose parental heart is always kind enough to look on his younger children and accept their prayers.

February 27, 1871

**G. Dick, L. Sudermann, F. Isaac, P. Gertz,  
H. Epp, H. Janzen**

**To Your Excellency the Minister of Crown Lands.**

**The Mennonites of South Russia,  
Sudermann, Isaac, Goerz, Epp, Janzen**

**Request**

Summoned by the High Government from the Kingdom of Prussia to settle in Southern Russia, our fathers left their fatherland and settled with joy in Russia, because complete religious freedom according of our principles of faith, which, according to the divine commandment of our Savior, to love our neighbor as ourselves, does not permit us to enter military service. This was not only assured to them, but also confirmed by a Most High Letter of Grace of September 6, 1800, and as a result of which it was approved by His Majesty, the Emperor Nikolai Pavlovich, resting in God, on November 9, 1838.

Due to the forthcoming military reform in the whole Empire, however, we fear whether we might also lose the inviolability of our faith concerning military service, and therefore dare to turn to Your Excellency in this spiritual distress with the most humble request not to leave us without your protection and representation before the throne of His Imperial Majesty.

of our Most Gracious Lord Alexander Nikolaevich, whose fatherly heart is ready to look with mercy even to the least of His children and to listen to their pleas.

(Date.)

(Signatures.)

Friday, the 26th, since it was the birthday of His Imperial Highness the heir to the throne, we had no audience. On Saturday, the 27th, H. Ettinger had granted us an audience with the H. Minister Selenoi. At 11 o'clock we went to his palace, a magnificent building. We climbed the steps covered with beautiful carpets into the reception room, where gradually several people joined us who, like us, had petitions for His Excellency. Among several distinguished gentlemen who gathered here in the hall, we were anxious to become acquainted with one, whose attention had been drawn to us by our President, the Honorable Ettinger, as the Honorable Baron v. Medem, who directly assisted the H. Minister and had his position in the Ministry as Director of General Affairs. He said that it was good that we had come, and that if we wished to be taken into account in the military reform, we would have to accept corresponding payments, but that he had learned from H. Klaus that, as Peter Schmidt had written to him, our people would not understand themselves to pay money. We replied that we would gladly accept the replacement of compulsory military service by a total payment, if only this would release us from our personal compulsory military service, which we could not assume, either directly or indirectly, for reasons of conscience. This gentleman made a very good impression on us, proved to be quite sympathetic, and we took the opportunity to call his attention to our difficult situation, to describe to him how we had relied on our eternal privilege, had immigrated here on it, but now, to our great pain, had to learn that precisely the eternal privileges were to be disregarded, that this rejoinder would never have taken place if we had not been offered such a secure basis for our confession and conscience. He gave us some comfort in saying that he did not believe that the government would let go of our co-religionists, knowing well what it owed to the Mennonites. After 11 o'clock a servant opened the door and His High Excellency entered and began to receive the petitions from the end of the hall opposite to us. He read each and also spoke to each about his petition. Finally, he came to us, the H. Baron introduced our matter with a few words

and introduced us. The H. Minister read our petition and explained himself in Russian, but in an extremely friendly manner. After he had given us his explanation, and was asked by us most humbly to take up our cause to the best of his ability, he bowed and went into his room. Now the H. Baron came to us again and said: "You have great cause to be satisfied with the answer of the H. Minister. He said, in fact, that he would accept your request and submit it to the Ministry of War, from where it would be handed over to the commission that was preparing the new military regulations. He remembered how the Mennonites had rendered their services here, and he would do what he could in our cause. \*)" The H. Baron took leave of us in a friendly manner. We thanked him for his benevolence and he asked for documentation of our confession concerning defenselessness. After we were dismissed, we went to our old friend, Senator H. v. Hahn, because he had wished to see us just as guests today. He received us with great warmth, made us come into his room and take a seat. First, we told him what we had done regarding our matter, how we had gone home rather dejected and without hope from Senator Gerngross, who had taken away the hope he (Hahn) had recently given us, namely that the present generation would still remain free, with the words that such years of freedom could at most have a value for those who wanted to emigrate. Von Hahn did not let himself be put off, but assured us that the present generation would remain free in any case, and that H. v. Gerngross had only not wanted to say this. He also assured us of the goodwill of Senator v. Gerngross and was extremely pleased that the Minister had been friendly to us and said, "I will also meet with the Minister and will make an effort to influence him favorably for you, because a lot depends on the H. Minister with regard to your matter. Then he reminisced at length about the time he had spent with us (while on the Committee) and spoke some more of his experiences during this time, dismissed us with a warm handshake and with the words, "We want to work in your matter and hope that it will all turn out well, and the good Lord will also help."

\*) The H. Minister said that we had been in Russia for 70 years and could not speak Russian yet, and that it was a sin (это грѣшно), to which Epp replied that we were now trying to improve or make good what our fathers had failed to do in this respect. "But it is always a little late" (елишкомъ ноздно) said the H. Minister.

Monday, March 1, we wrote for Count v. Haydn, Baron v. Medem and Senator v. Gerngross, at their request, our confession concerning the conscientious objection, which was presented to the first two on the following day, Tuesday, on which occasion Count v. Haydn told the two Aelteste, who presented it to him, that the new conscription law would probably not come into force before 1874 and that 'the present generation would still be completely spared, so that the conscription of the colonists would begin about 1895. In the course of some time the Mennonites would, as Count v. Haydn had meant, make friends with the medical service, from which they could not well be exempted, because otherwise everyone would want to become Mennonites.

**Memorandum  
on the Question of the Defenselessness of the Mennonites**

Our highly praised Savior Jesus Christ is our great King of Peace. As such he is already announced to us in the old covenant through the prophets Isa. 9:6. Likewise, by the holy angels at his birth Luke 2:14. His kingdom that he came to earth to establish is a kingdom of peace Isa. 9:7, Ps. 72:7, John 18:36, Isa. 26:3-4. His messengers are peace messengers Isa. 52:7, Nah. 2:1, Rom. 10:15 and have the important task to proclaim the gospel of peace. All those who are successfully recruited by the messengers of peace for the glorious kingdom of peace are children of peace. In them the important and radical change of heart and life takes place, of which the word of truth tells us that they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, to receive forgiveness of sins and the inheritance together with those who are sanctified. Acts 26:18.

The children of peace, after the former walk, put off the old man Eph. 4:22 with its dark works of the flesh to which the apostle Paul calls our attention Gal. 5:19-21, because they know that our old man is crucified together with Christ, so that the sinful body may cease, that we may not serve sin from now on Rom. 6:6. they put on the new man, who is renewed to knowledge in the image of Him who created him Col. 3:10, the new man, who is created according to God in righteousness and holiness Eph. 4:24, and who has the fruits of the Spirit in his wake, which are: Love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, faith, gentleness, chastity, Gal. 5:22. Love is the first and greatest of the fruits of the living faith, through which the important heart and soul are made whole, life change is brought about.

Love urges the children of peace to obey their glorious king and prince of peace, who gave them this new commandment of love John 13:34, and explained the divine law of the old covenant in Matt. 5, made them aware of the character of the Old Testament covenant and made the children of peace aware of their task in the Kingdom of God, which consists solely in the practice of love, Mark. 12:31.

The true divine destiny of man in time and eternity is the fellowship with God, his first priority in life is to do the will of God; to make him aware of this and to prepare him for it. God has revealed his will to the same in His Holy Word. He is pointed to the great kingdom of peace, which Jesus forms with his disciples, and which consists in righteousness peace and joy in your Holy Spirit Rom. 14:17, of which, as the great Prince of Peace Luke 17:21 himself says, one will not say; Behold, it is here or there; but, behold, it is within you. God has chosen the poor of this world, who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him, although warfare in the old covenant was sometimes done by express divine command, as for example Sam. 15, but our Savior Jesus Christ has expressly declared the new covenant constitution as we believe and confess with the early fathers.

"Ye have heard that it is said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45). And again, "But I say unto you, that ye resist not the evil person." (Matt. 5:39), which words clearly teach that one should not take vengeance on his enemies, but love, suffer, and endure for the whole teaching of Jesus is full of love toward friend and foe. So, Paul also taught: "Do not repay evil with evil and be careful to be respectable to everyone. If it is possible, as much as is in you, be at peace with all men. Do not avenge yourselves, my beloved, but give place to wrath, for it is written; Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink. If you do this, you will gather fiery coals on his head. Do not let evil overcome you but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:17-21). "We should follow our Savior, who did not reproach when he was reproached, nor oppress when he suffered, but confronted him who judges aright (1 Peter 3:23). From these words we see that all revenge is forbidden to us, therefore we must not use sword, weapons and gun against our enemies.

Paul says in 2 Cor. 10 & 14, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not fight in the flesh, for the weapons of our knighthood are not carnal, but mighty in the sight of God". And since the Lord Jesus commanded Peter to put the sword into its sheath, we must not draw it out to defend ourselves against our enemies, or to drive out violence with violence, but rather to suffer and endure. But we not only avoid the sword of war, but our heart and mouth shall also not take vengeance. We are to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, not repaying evil with evil, or reproach with reproach, but blessing in silence, if we would inherit the blessing (1 Peter 3:9).

In accordance with this conviction, which is based on the Word of God, our fathers have always avoided any military service and any participation in it. They have always stood up for the lowly in the country and, for the sake of their freedom of conscience, have not only put many earthly advantages behind them, but have also often left home, farm and fatherland in order not to become unfaithful to their creed, in firm belief in the promise of their Savior. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God, or, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5,9). And the Lord has pledged himself to this promise, although after heavy sifting and many sufferings of our ancestors. Without their help, and even to their surprise, he opened an asylum for them in Russia, whose exalted rulers he always filled with grace and favor toward us, and crowned the faithfulness of our fathers in their faith in us, their children, by blessing us in our beloved fatherland, even in the flesh. We have also at present the confidence that, if the Lord does not intend to subject us to a new sifting and purification, he will direct the heart of our beloved father of the country, Emperor and Lord and of his High Government, that we will in no way be pressed or impaired in our freedom of faith and conscience. His holy will be done! Amen.

St. Petersburg  
**Sudermann**  
 March 2, 1871  
**Heinrich Epp**

The Church Aelteste: **Gerhard Dueck, Leonhard**  
 Preachers: **Franz Isaac, Peter Goerz,**  
 Parishioner: **Hermann Janzen**

Wednesday, March 3, a petition was also presented to H. v. Gerngross and also went to H. v. Hahn again, who,

after he had spoken a few more things about our matter, he also expressed the hope that we would later be able to replace conscription by a monetary tax. On Thursday, March 4, the entire deputation had to come to the President of the Commission, Count v. Haydn, after he had repeated what had already been said to the Aeltester people (on the 2nd of March) and had still demanded some documentation regarding our confession, finally told us that they now knew what was necessary in regard to our principles, and we were dismissed favorably.

Friday, March 5, we took leave of the two H. H. Senators, who, after taking our address, promised to let us know immediately when the project would be ready, since nothing could be done in our matter until that time. On Saturday, March 6, at 8 o'clock in the morning we left St. Petersburg (Sudermann and Goerz to Prussia) and, after having had a rest day in Moscow on Sunday, covered the 1474 versts from St. Petersburg to Losowaja until Tuesday, March 9, at 5 o'clock in the evening. Because the rivers now began to break up and the roads became almost completely impassable, we did not reach our homeland until Monday, March 15, although protected from all dangers.

Tiege  
March 1871

**Franz Isaac**  
**Hermann Janzen**

#### A few more personal remarks:

When we (Isaac and Epp) were at H. v. Hahn's on March 3, he asked, among other things, whether we had also seen the Emperor, and when we responded in the negative, he called his daughter over and she said to us, the Emperor is usually punctually at 3:30 o'clock in the summer garden, but not today because he is hunting. We thanked them for the message but decided to go to the summer garden first thing in the morning on the 4th, but because all the deputies were invited to the Count on the 4th (see travel report), this trip could not be made until the 5th. We still had time to take a look at the beautiful little church, which is built next to the gate of the Summer Garden in memory of the salvation of His Majesty the Emperor Alexander II from the hand of the murderer. It bears the inscription: Do not touch my anointed ones (1 Chron. 17:22).

Now we sat down opposite the entrance gate of the garden on a stone bench by the Nevaufer. Here a young officer sat down with us, who, during a conversation with him, asked us why we were sitting here.

When we answered that we hoped to see the Emperor here, he quickly stretched out his arm, pointed and said: "Here he comes! His Majesty walked along the fence of the summer garden in a gray soldier's coat, with a white red-browed cap, toward the entrance gate, and his well-known colossally built coachman drove alongside. When the Emperor had already entered the garden, in which planks had been laid for a comfortable walk, we went to the gate and stood there, awaiting His Majesty's return. When the Emperor entered the gate after his walk, at which his coachman stopped with the cab, a soldier who was standing in the gate and had the Emperor's coat wanted to put it on him, but the Emperor pulled back his arm and the soldier held the coat to himself. His Majesty turned and stood before us. No doubt he knew about our mission and asked if we were from the Taurida Governorate, and when we had answered this question, he asked if we were Mennonites, and when this was also answered, he finally asked, and why did you come? Answer, with regard to the new military law. Thereupon the Emperor said a stretched "Ah" and indicated to the soldier by his movement that he now wished the coat. After the coat was put on, he boarded the cab and drove back to the Winter Palace. We had achieved our purpose, not only we had seen the father of the country, but he had shown us the grace to be allowed to answer a few questions from him.

After a year, the Mennonite congregations were again prompted by disturbing news from St. Petersburg to send a deputation with the following authority:

**To the Mennonite  
Church Aelteste: Johann Harder, Franz Goerz, Jakob Wiebe, Isaak Peters,  
Jakob Toews and the Preacher Franz Isaac**

Beloved brothers!

Due to the news that the new law regarding compulsory military service to be introduced in our country is planned in such a way that we Mennonites will also be obliged to partially fulfill it, we are deeply distressed and concerned about our freedom of faith. Therefore, beloved brethren, we hereby instruct and authorize you first of all to make appropriate inquiries about the state of this matter, and if our freedom of faith should really be threatened, to support the plea of our people for further benevolent toleration and legal

establishment of our freedom of defense also for the future. If our freedom of religion should really be threatened, you are to lay down at the feet of His Majesty, our most gracious Emperor, the plea of our people for further benevolent toleration and legal establishment of our freedom of defense also for the future.

Let your pleading, seeking and inquiring be directed towards portraying us a way in which we can fulfill our obligation to the state and prove our loyalty and attachment to throne and fatherland outside the military law and compulsory military service, without burdening our conscience. In the meantime, however, we will pray to Him who promised, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

May He, the Almighty and faithful God and Savior, be with you and let you, let us all, find grace before the eyes of His anointed, into whose hand He has given the decision about our future. The will of the Lord be done, for He is gracious and a merciful One.

Given in the Aelteste' Conference of the Molotschna  
and Krimmer Mennonites in Alexanderwohl Colony  
January 25, 1872

Signed:

The Church Aelteste:                   **August Lenzmann, Bernhard Peters,  
Jakob Buller**

Preachers: **Aron Rempel, Abraham Regier, Johann Dueck, Isaak Sawatzki, Diedrich Geddert, David Penner, Jakob Klassen, Peter Friesen, Peter Goerz, Peter Regehr, Jakob Fast, Peter Retzlaff, Peter Balzer, Peter Baerkmann. Jakob Letkemann, Jakob Enns, Kornelius Isaac, Abraham Wiens, Heinrich Epp, Joseph Sawatzki, Peter Voth, Jakob Thiessen, Aron Wall, Jakob Dueck, Heinrich Goerz**

The result of the trip is given in the following travel report:

With the order to inquire in the appropriate places about the present state of affairs with regard to our freedom of religion, which might be threatened by a new military law to be introduced, and, if necessary, to lay down at the feet of His Majesty our most gracious Emperor the plea of our people for further toleration and legal establishment of our freedom of military service also for the future, we set out on our journey on the 2nd of March and arrived at the Residence under God's gracious protection on the 7th of March. Here we were informed by the chairman of the departmental commission assigned to draft the part of the new law that referred to us, Senator H. v. Gerngross, that the law had been written exactly in the way we had been told (by Pastor

Hans) that the Commission had unanimously decided to obligate us to medical services, if possible, without weapons. However, further appeal regarding this matter must first be made to His Imperial Highness, the Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich, President of the Imperial Council, said His Excellency [Gerngross]. This would only be made when the Imperial Council meets in the months of September and October of this year and only after this first step could the final step to the Lord and Emperor be taken. An immediate application to His Majesty, however, would not only mean threshing empty straw, but would only stand in the way of a timely final steps, because a repeated approach to His Majesty would not be permitted for the same subject.

But what astonished us about this audience with the H. Senator was the detailed knowledge that His Excellency had of the meeting held in Alexanderwohl on January 11. Not only did His Excellency reproach us with the fact that a foreigner <sup>1)</sup> had made propaganda for emigration at the conference, but also that a deputation had been dispatched to seek from the government the right to be allowed in the future to do what we had done in the past (e.g., the Podwod services in the Crimean War and also to obtain the right to proselytize throughout the empire <sup>2)</sup>).

As for the dispatch of a deputation, we rejected the accusation as untrue, but insofar as the matter was in reality so, we immediately rejected it orally and before our departure also in writing, i.e., we declared to Your Excellency that the communities represented by us were at all times opposed to such efforts and that the request made to them in an isolated case had been rejected with all firmness.

To Senator the Honorable v. Gerngross.

Your Excellency! We, the undersigned, representatives of the Mennonite congregations in the Taurida, Ekaterinoslav and Samarian Governments, feel urged in our conscience, before our departure, to

1) Kornelius Janzen, Berdyansk, had to leave Russia in a hurry.

2) Either there was a secret activity in Alexanderwohl, which the deputies did not know about, or the reporter exaggerated the matter.

from the Residence, to repeat the declaration already made orally before Your Excellency, and that the communities represented by us have on the whole at all times remained aloof from the endeavor to make propoganda for emigration, to withdraw from the obligations hitherto borne in podvod benefits, or even to obtain the right to make proselytes in the Russian Empire, and that the similar request made to them in an isolated case has been rejected with all determination.

It would hurt us deeply if the High Government were to infer the attitude of the whole from the actions of individuals. We love our fatherland, want to remain in it and under the high protection of His Majesty, our beloved father, Emperor and Lord, and Most High His government, we want to nourish ourselves faithfully and honestly and, according to the words of the Holy Scriptures, seek the best of the country as much as lies in our part. But if the forthcoming military reform arouses uneasiness and concern in our conscience as to whether we might be endangered in our profession of faith by the same. It has never been our intention to take any other course for the preservation of our religious freedom hitherto assured to us by the Most High than that permitted by law, by request and by order, in the confident hope that the wisdom and benevolence of our High Government will know how to find ways and means by which our religious confession, in view of our non-participation in warfare, will be spared.

Your Excellency will not disregard our above declaration but will accept it as an expression of the loyal attitude of the Mennonites residing in the Russian Empire, and will permit the assurance of our personal respect and reverence for Your Excellency, with which we most humbly commend ourselves to your benevolence.

The representatives of the Mennonites in the Taurida Governorate:  
Church Aelteste: **Johann Harder, Franz Goerz,**  
**Isaak Peters, Jakob Toews,** Preacher

**Franz Isaac**

The same of the Mennonites in the Ekaterinoslav Governorate:  
Aeltester **Peter Klassen,** Preacher **Heinrich Epp;**

The same of the Mennonites in the Samaria Governorate:  
Preachers **Johann Epp, Jakob Toews**

St. Petersburg

February 14, 1872

Now that all the deputies of the Mennonite congregations living in the Taurida, Ekaterinoslav and Samaria governorates

had agreed that it was not yet time to make further efforts to preserve our freedom and had declared in a joint conference that joint action was absolutely necessary in this matter of such great importance to the community and that a general conference should be scheduled during the spring or summer months in order to reach a complete understanding, we began our return journey and arrived safely in our homeland on the 20th.

On February 23, 1872

Aeltester **Johann Harder**  
Preacher **Franz Isaak**

The H. Pastor of the Brethren congregation [*Brüdergemeinde*] in St. Petersburg had promised the deputation that he would inform us of events of importance to us, and in accordance with this promise he sent us on May 1, 1872, the wording of the bill concerning us, as it had been projected by the commission, as follows:

"The Mennonites called up for military service shall be used for service only away from the front and in the hospitals, military workshops, or similar establishments, and 'shall be exempt from carrying arms.' But this measure does not extend to those Mennonites who join the sect or immigrate to the Russian Empire from abroad after the publication of the decree on general conscription." \*).

Furthermore, the H. Pastor on May 6, in warning against emigration, writes among other things:

What the government is asking you to do in this proposal is indeed nothing that involves participation in the evil that is in the wake of the war. Medical services and operation of military workshops, unless these are understood to include armories, etc.,

\*) In the German translation of the law on general conscription, which was confirmed by the Allerhöchst on January 1, 1874, the wording is: "The Mennonites can only be used for services away from the front for hospitals or in the workshops of the land troops or the navy and in similar institutions, whereby they are exempt from carrying a rifle. But this rule is not extended to Mennonites who join a sect or who move to this country from abroad after the enactment of this law."

Comment. This and the above translation have slightly different wording, but the same content.

are rather intended to alleviate the ills of war, and a Christian may well offer a hand in this.

When the time was approaching for the Imperial Council to begin reviewing and examining the commission's proposal, and the dispatch of a deputation was already being discussed at the Molotschna, the Governor General His High Excellency H. v. Kotzebue demanded that the deputation come to Kerch in order to present it, if possible, to His Majesty, who would be arriving there. The deputation went to Kerch first, but nothing was achieved except that the deputies had several very good opportunities to see the father of the country, Alexander II, face to face, even if not to speak, since His Majesty did not grant an audience. The deputation now went back to St. Petersburg and after its return made the following report:

### **Report On the Third Deputation Trip of September 1872**

Since the deputies sent to the Residence in the month of February of this year under the auspices of our freedom of military service had been informed by Senator v. Gerngross that it would not be time for further action in this matter until the Imperial Council [*Reichsrat*] had deliberated and examined the newly proposed military law in the months of September and October, we, the undersigned, were summoned on August 30, 1872, by the Molotschna Mennonites. We, the undersigned, were instructed and authorized by the Molotschna Mennonite Council to travel once again to the capital, in order to approach the Imperial Council on behalf of our congregations, and probably also His Majesty the Emperor, with a most humble request for further benevolent toleration and legal establishment of our freedom of faith and conscience.

On the sixth day of September we started our journey and since it was considered necessary to first consult with our brothers in the Samaria governorate about this matter, which was so important to us, in order to then be able to jointly present our request to the great people of the empire, we immediately traveled from Orel by the Eastern Railway to Saratov and arrived on September 12 at our brothers not far (60 versts) from Saratov, where the Aeltester Diedrich Hamm from the Mennonite congregation living 500 versts to the north also arrived soon after our arrival. To discuss our matter, a conference of Aelteste and teachers took place on September 14 at Lysanderhöh, to which we were also invited. Here it was decided to work with us in fellowship in the same sense with the government in the same way as we had the mandate and authority to do so.

On the 16th we left Köppental again and reached the capital on the 21st at 10 o'clock in the morning. Here, however, several days passed before we were able to learn so much about the state of our affairs that perhaps the solution of the military law question might be postponed for a while. In order to learn something more precise, however, we sought an audience with H. Baron v. Medem, and when this audience was granted to us on the 28th, we learned from His Excellency that the further discussion of the projected military law could well be delayed through the entire winter, but he added that the matter depended entirely on the Emperor and that His Majesty was also engaged in this matter. Majesty had sternly rejected the petition of the Bulgarians, who had also been sent on this matter, but since it was a matter of faith with us, we would in any case be taken into consideration in some way, either we would be exempted by a tax or given free years, but in the worst case we would be obliged to perform medical services. Finally, we asked him to arrange an audience with His High Excellency, H. Minister Voluyev, if he thought it would be good. The Honorable Baron found this very expedient, and even more so because the Honorable Minister, as he told us, was a friend of the Mennonites. The H. Baron immediately decided that we could come back to the ministry at 1 o'clock the following day to speak with the H. Minister. The next day, when we entered the Cabinet of the Honorable Minister at the appointed time, His High Excellency did not wait long and addressed us in Russian, but when he noticed that we did not speak Russian well, he very willingly agreed to speak to us in German. Your High Excellency asked us, "What do you want?" and we answered, "Your High Excellency will forgive us, out of anxious concern whether our freedom could be endangered by the new military law, we are for the third time in the Residence and ask Your High Excellency in this matter for advice, assistance and for intercession with the High Government." To which His High Excellency replied, "My advice is simply this, behave quite calmly in this matter and wait and see. The new military law has not yet been deliberated, and therefore I will refrain for today and until then from saying anything definite about it. The laws given by a government are all more or less subject to the changes of the times, only the laws given by the good Lord are firm and unchangeable. So be calm, and do not listen to any rumors circulating in this matter of yours, do not turn to any advocate either. His Majesty the Emperor is the crowned advocate of all His subjects, trust absolutely His Majesty and His ministers. You are in St. Petersburg for the third time now, but now travel

confidently and go home, for His Majesty is informed of everything and also knows of your distressed situation. You have given me the pleasure of having seen you, and even if I cannot tell you anything definite in this matter itself, I give you the promise that I will submit both the fears you have presented to me and what I have answered to you to His Majesty, and what I promise I keep, trust my words."

Since we had already learned that the commission set up to project the new military law was still not ready, we also sought an audience with the President of this commission, His Highness Count v. Haydn, which was granted to us on the 3rd of this month. We presented our request to His Highness that we should not be placed under the new military law, but that we should be graciously left with the freedoms under which our fathers had been called up and immigrated to the Russian Empire, explaining at the same time that we were ready at any time, not only out of necessity of conscience, but also out of gratitude and loyal attachment to throne and fatherland, to give to the Emperor what is the Emperor's. Understanding this well, the count replied that a monetary tax would not be accepted, but that personal service in the medical service was required, which, however, could be rendered entirely without arms. However, so that our serving persons should not lose their spiritual care through dispersion, the Mennonites could take over special hospitals and the physicians required for the same could be recruited and trained from among them. In addition, as His Highness further said, our young men should also be used for tailoring and shoemaking work, and thus we would find opportunities to do good in various ways. When we expressed the hope that by the grace of the Emperor we could still be left with our present liberties, His Serene Highness said that we could only expect to be left with our present liberties for a few years, about a decade or perhaps a little longer, but not forever. If we wanted to take further steps in this matter, said the Count, we would have to turn to the President of the Imperial Council, the Grand Duke Constantine, but at present it was not yet time, because the commission would only finish its work in January of the following year, and if the Imperial Council were to discuss the project, two months could easily pass. Finally, His Highness offered to let us know when it would be time to send a deputation to the capital again, for which purpose the H. Count asked us for an address. With the certain condition that the Honorable Pastor of the Brethren Church,

Theodor Hans, would willingly take on the task of transmitting the Count's instructions to us, we gave His Highness the address of this pastor, and he not only gladly took on this task, but also agreed to speak with the Count about this matter in good time, so that nothing would be forgotten or missed.

Fully convinced that there was nothing more that could be done with regard to our mission here in the residence for some time, we all decided to return home. Before we separated, however, the two Aelteste Diedrich and David Hamm from the Samaria and the two Aelteste Tobias Unruh and Jakob Stuki from the Volhynia governorate declared that they would authorize the deputation to be sent from the Molotschna and Chortitza districts to the distant work to take the necessary steps also in the name of their communities.

Written in St. Petersburg  
October 4, 1872

Aeltester **Bernhard Peters**  
Preacher **Peter Goerz, Franz Isaac**

As a result of the message received from His Highness through the H. Pastor that the new military law was already before the Imperial Council, a deputation left for the fourth time in February 1873. (The Aelteste Gerhard Dueck and Bernhard Peters, Preachers Peter Goerz and Heinrich Epp and member Heinrich Heese). This time it was necessary, if possible, to obtain an audience with His Imperial Highness Konstantin Nikolaevich, the President of the Imperial Council, and to ask Him for His high cooperation in preserving the freedom of conscience of the Mennonites.

When the deputies reached the H. Pastor, he handed them the powers of the Samaria and Volhynia Mennonites. When the deputation went to Count v. Haydn, His Highness advised them to contact the Grand Duke's wing adjutant, and the adjutant promised to report them to the Grand Duke. On February 6, they were granted an audience at the Marble Palace. His Imperial Highness was kind and patronizing, but said that if there was a general conscription, we could not be excluded from it, but the government would spare our consciences and use us only in hospitals and workshops. His Imperial Highness said, "You have already lived so many years in Russia and enjoyed so many benefits, and as good Christians, surely it is your duty to provide food for a soldier who has been shot." When the deputies wanted to explain to him that such a thing, done under the military law, was different, his look darkened somewhat; he soon broke off, copied down the petition with his own hand and dispatched it.

**Your Imperial Highness!**  
**Most Gracious Sir, Constantine Nikolaevich**

Deeply disturbed in our hearts by the imminent military reform in our fatherland, which threatens us with the loss of our religious freedom, hitherto enjoyed under the high protection of the Government, we dare to approach Your Imperial Highness in such distress with the most humble request that, in evaluating the draft law before the Imperial Council at the end of this period, to direct your attention to the following:

- 1) Following the apostolic teaching of Menno Simons, our ancestors have suffered many tribulations and persecutions in the early times for the sake of their faith. At the end of the last century, the great Russian Empress Catherine II summoned our fathers abroad to Russia under conditions to which they not only agreed to with joy, but in which many also recognized the voice of God blessing them for the firm faith of their fathers. The most important point for them was that they received complete religious freedom for themselves and their descendants and eternal exemption from military service.
- 2) These preliminary conditions were confirmed by Emperor Paul I. by a Most High Letter of Grace of: September 6, 1800 and subsequently approved on: November 9, 1838 by the Emperor and Lord Nikolay Pavlovich, your father resting in God.
- 3) The faith of our fathers is a sacred legacy for us, the most precious inheritance and treasure given to us by God, surpassing all earthly goods and welfare. It is confirmed by all the words of the Holy Gospel. Our Savior Jesus Christ preached peace and not war, war only against our sins. We do not seek earthly honor and violence and follow the words of the Savior, Matt. 20:25-27 and John 18:36. We have no right to resist evil, Matt. 5:39. We must not bare the sword after the Lord commanded His disciple Peter to sheathe it, John 18:11, to peace the Lord has called us, I Cor. 7:15. Our Savior is a King of peace, and if we want to be children of peace and inherit the eternal kingdom of peace, we must live in peace with each of our fellow brothers, who are created in the Image of God. The Spirit, who speaks to us in the Holy Scriptures, commands us to pursue peace and love as gifts of God, which God has sent to us through Jesus Christ. According to our confession of faith, we can not

participate in war activities, in a direct or indirect way, because in any case we would contribute to the war. Furthermore, we are subject to the higher powers and authorities according to Rom. 13:7, Give to everyone what you owe them. If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. We strive to be useful to our fatherland, as much as depends on us, we pray to God for its welfare; we also pray for the Emperor and His House and are well aware that when the Lord God blesses His anointed and the Empire, the abundance of divine benefits will also be poured out on us, His least children and subjects. The tolerance by which our government has always been most praiseworthy known, your justice and benevolence, give us the boldness to lay this petition at the feet of Your Imperial Highness, with the full confidence and hope that the high Imperial Council will not disregard our religious concerns and reasons, and that as a result we may not be subjected to the effect of the law on general conscription.

In the autumn of 1873, it was again decided to make a trip to St. Petersburg (the fifth one) in order to lay down, if possible, the fears and requests of the Mennonites to the steps of the throne of His Majesty (the previous deputies). The H. Pastor advised them to address H. Minister Voluyev with their request. On December 5 they were granted an audience and asked His Excellency for advice on further steps to be taken in order to gain an audience with His Majesty. The H. Minister told them that the Emperor could not receive a deputation, knew the wishes of the Mennonites, and had ordered that they be taken into consideration as far as possible and compatible with their confession.

The only way now was to get to Count Shuvalov, but even to get before the Count was impossible. The Count's adjutant informed the deputies that everything possible had been done for the Mennonites, but the new law had meanwhile been confirmed.

Since the hope of coming before the Emperor in person was now completely extinguished, the deputies decided to have their petition addressed to the Emperor handed over to the Count by the adjutant, with the most humble request to him to hand it over to His Majesty. When the petition had been delivered, the deputies left for their homeland in the firm hope that, although they would not personally appear before the Emperor,

their request will reach His ear and find its way to the Father's heart.

The petition follows:

Your Majesty!

With a sorrowful heart, but nevertheless with joyful confidence that our most humble request will be received graciously, we reverently approach the steps of the throne of Your Imperial Majesty.

Called to the Empire by the High Government, provided with a Most High Letter of Grace, which assured us complete freedom of faith and conscience and exemption from any military and civil service for all times, our fathers found here for themselves and their descendants an asylum, which has so far remained intact for us, thanks to the protection of Your Imperial Majesty and the Highest of Your ancestors.

However, the intended introduction of general conscription, which, as we have learned, is to be made a law in the near future, has caused us the greatest concern that we might lose an essential part of our creed, the article of conscientious objection, and we have not only presented our concerns to the commission set up at that time to draft the law in question, but also had the honor, at the beginning of this year, of expressing them in a petition to His Imperial Highness Konstantin Nikolaevich, the H. President of the Imperial Council.

The matter is so serious and important for us, it is a vital question for the continuity of our community, that we feel urged in our hearts to turn to our beloved father of the country, to the Emperor and Lord, to lay down our most urgent request for the preservation of our freedom of conscience, which we have enjoyed up to now, most humbly and in deepest reverence, but in childlike faith in the fatherly heart of Your Majesty, which has an open ear even for the cry of pain of the least children in the country.

In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who through our fathers has given us a gospel of peace, who through His Holy Word commands us to follow in love his footsteps in the way of suffering and endurance, but not of war and what is connected with it, we beseech Your Majesty to graciously release us from military service, and we will not cease to call upon God and Lord to shower the fullness of His grace and blessings upon the dear head of His anointed

and the Most Sublime House and to protect our dear fatherland from all wars and misfortunes, so that its welfare may develop and be permanently founded in peace under the blessed and wise government of its beloved monarch.

In deepest reverence, devotion and loyalty remain

Your Majesty

December 22, 1873. most subservient representatives of the Mennonites:

(the signatures)

The new military law with its 157th paragraph concerning the Mennonites had been confirmed by the Highest of All on January 1, 1874; however, what His High Excellency, the Honorable Minister Voluyev said to the third deputation: "Trust absolutely in Your Majesty! The Emperor did not give an audience to any of the deputations, but to our great joy we learned that the last decisive word in our matter was the Emperor's word.

We were already prepared for what now lay ahead of us, what we could not achieve through all the deputations, by the following letter from the dear pastor of the Brethren congregation, who took such a lively interest in our fate. The pastor writes:

My beloved brother!

I have just learned from a very reliable source that His Majesty the Emperor has decided to inquire directly about your circumstances in the person of the Honorable General Todleben, namely to convince himself whether it is not possible to prevent the emigration projected by you and to keep you in the country.

You know, dear brothers, that I have assured you orally and in writing that His Majesty is favorably disposed towards you. Now a proof of fact comes into your hands. You will, beloved brethren, meet the aforesaid General v. Todleben, as Her Majesty's envoy to you, with the owing deference, but also with the fullest confidence, which his mission deserves. He will gather you and visit you, his word to you is the Emperor's word, his interest in you, that of His Majesty. May the Lord God richly bless this mission, the envoy and, above all, the imperial station.

St. Petersburg  
Your brother

With Cordial Love  
**Theodor Hans**

His High Excellency Adjutant General v. Todleben was not long in coming, first had the clerical and secular leaders come to him and then he spoke to the assembled congregation in the churches. (In Halbstadt on April 21, 1874.) His High Excellency declared that he had come to the Mennonites in the name of and by special order of His Majesty the Emperor in order to assure them of the Emperor's grace and mercy, which would spare our conscience and creed in order to keep us, if possible, from emigrating to America. He pointed out the benevolence of His Majesty that he had shown for us in the drafting of the military law, in that we were excluded from active service in the army and were only to serve in the hospitals and workshops of the War and Navy Department, without being required to carry or use weapons. Since the Mennonites, however, still consider this to be participation in warfare, and since the medical service, properly organized, is in reality also a war service, they therefore want to move to America and seek a place of refuge there where they can live their faith. His Majesty sees with regret that those whom he loves as his children see an uncertain future. Like all other subjects, he also wants to exclude us from any indirect participation in military service and to assign us other services in exchange, which are of benefit to the state and cannot offend our conscience. There could be no question of a monetary tax under any condition; we would have to accept personal services. His Majesty could not act otherwise if he wanted to be fair to his other subjects, whom he embraces with the same love as he shows towards us. Since, according to our confession, we could neither directly nor indirectly participate in military affairs, our services should have nothing to do with what is called war, but should be for entirely peaceful purposes, and since we further wished to see our young men protected from the danger of being led away from our confession and faith, they should remain together, perhaps in two places, and we could assign them a spiritual teacher who would supervise them and give them the necessary spiritual care. Also, we should not be under the War Ministry, His Majesty would issue a special order about our position to the state regarding our services. We should continue as before with our internal institutions and retain the management of our school system. We should continue to live calmly as before in our confession, to teach our children in the same.

We could be sure that we would not find such privileges anywhere else than here in Russia. The Emperor would have told him that he did not want to offend our faith and that those people who remain faithful to their faith and their God would always be loyal subjects of their Emperor. We had voluntarily rendered important services to him and the fatherland in the Crimean War by caring for wounded soldiers, and he could not forget that. His High Excellency went on to describe the uncertainty of our future in America and said, among other things, that in America there is freedom of conscience, but that when war comes, the Mennonites will be forced to serve in the armed forces because there is a shortage of people. In the South this was the case during the Civil War. "You are now turning your attention to the north, good, but a war with England is probably not very far away and you will then be sitting right in the front line. But do you not have freedom of conscience here too? Have you not been able to preach in your churches and teach in your schools, as your creed demands, without being hindered? Have you not enjoyed here the protection of Catherine, Paul, Alexander I, Nicolai and Alexander II? And is not the past a guarantee that the Russian monarchs will continue to protect you? Your Majesty loves you no less than the rest of his subjects, and it would be unfortunate if you were to abandon what your fathers' and your own diligence has earned you, and leave a country that has shown you hospitality, for the sake of religious freedom, which no one here will deprive you of. When His Majesty called me and gave me this order to you, when I saw from his words and from his whole being the participation and love that he has in his heart for the Mennonites, I was deeply moved, even though I was not personally involved in the matter. Therefore, before you make a decision, consider what duty and responsibility you have towards God, towards your fatherland, towards the fatherland where you have found hospitality, and towards your families themselves, if you reject the unusual imperial kindness with which His Majesty has shown you. What I say and promise to you, I do all in the name of His Majesty the Emperor, who has authorized me to do so. Now consult about the matter with your brethren and tell it also to your wives, who are in worry and fear for the future of your sons."

The tone and speech of His High Excellency were paternally benevolent. The address was essentially one and the same in all communities, but

only in Chortitza it was rendered as verbatim as possible, as it is given here.

The services proposed for our young men were as follows:

- 1) Service in military hospitals, not in war hospitals but in civilian hospitals, but the circumstance would not be suitable for us that the institutions are too small to have a larger number of our young men together;
- 2) In factories and workshops, for instance in Nikolaev, Odessa or Taganrog, where no things are made for war, but only objects for a peaceful purpose. Here the young people could be together in larger numbers;
- 3) In forestry, an occupation that is known to us and in which we could not find anything suspicious. In this case, however, the young men would not be able to stay close to home, but would have to be employed in the Kursk or other forest-rich governorates;
- 4) In the fire departments in cities, the purpose of which is to save human life or property threatened by flames;
- 5) On the railroads.

If war broke out and moved to the area where our young men serve, they are to be transferred and kept away from the theater of war, etc.

The following letter was presented to His High Excellency:

To His High Excellency  
the Honorable Adjutant General von Todleben

Your High Excellency has repeatedly assured us and many other of our brethren in the days of your presence here, and always with the same certainty, that we may continue to enjoy the grace and favor of Your Majesty, our most gracious Emperor and Lord, unchanged and unabridged, and that the same has been revealed to us especially anew, in that Your Majesty, by means of the extraordinary and special measures, has given us the right to be treated with the same kindness as before. Majesty, through the extraordinary mission of His High Excellency, grants us the grace of being able to fulfill the principles of our creed while fulfilling the general personal duty of service, in that we are granted a completely unarmed service outside of

of the Department of the Ministry of War, which does not bring us into any connection with warfare.

In laying down at the feet of His Majesty our most humble and heartfelt thanks for the consideration we have been graciously granted for our principles of faith and the duties of conscience arising therefrom, we declare on behalf of the greater part of our brethren in faith that we are prepared to accept personal service.

However, since we are quite insufficiently acquainted with the nature of the types of exercise of this duty granted to us, we ask to be allowed to state in a memorandum to be drafted most humbly, after careful consideration, which of the special types of service granted to us we would give preference to as most desirable for our circumstances. At the same time, we feel compelled to express our warmest personal thanks to Your High Excellency for the fact that he has approached us with true fatherly friendship, and at the same time we enclose the most humble request that he be the interpreter of our most humble requests and wishes to His Majesty, and that he also approve the following points in particular:

- 1) That, if in the future a change should be made in the military law and we should consequently lose the privileges now graciously granted to us, we should be allowed free emigration;
- 2) That our schools, which have hitherto been left to us by the benevolent monarchs of the Russian Empire in free administration and close supervision, may remain in this condition and enjoy the rights of the other schools of the Empire corresponding to them, whereby we undertake, already out of a sense of duty to our dear fatherland, to devote all possible attention and care to the learning of the national language, and
- 3) That it be made possible, by placing our young people in some places and in closed groups, to supervise them properly, to give them the necessary care and to be able to maintain our church discipline according to our confession of faith in our congregational order.

With the heartfelt wish and the most fervent prayer: God preserve and protect Your Majesty the Emperor and Lord, Your Majesty the Empress, Your Imperial Highness, the heir to the throne and the entire Imperial House for many, many years to come, we remain as

Your High Excellency most humble  
(the signatures of the clerical and secular  
of the Molotschna and Chortitza districts follow).

After the last audience, the following lines were presented to the High Lord:

**To the noble man!**

You came, O noble man, to make us happy  
by our great Emperor's word of grace!  
Now you depart. And many eyes look after thee tearfully,  
because thou in this place didst scatter the seed of grace  
so richly and loved us so faithfully and fatherly!  
We thank Thee - And if Thy work prosper -  
God grant it! it is a sweet reward for Thee.

God reward thee and keep thee hereafter,  
But still more at life's blessed goal  
Enjoy with thine own rest and peace,  
The fruits of thy noble labors much to reap!  
May the God of peace give you that,  
Who, alas, how richly through Christ may bless,  
But I go through life with the wish:  
Oh, if I could see the noble man there again!

B. H.

His High Excellency received these lines, went to his table, sat down and read them slowly. After reading them over, he stood up, approached the two people who had stayed behind, thanked them and said: "With the same feelings expressed here, I part from you.

April 24, 1874 at midnight.

The Chortitza Mennonites presented His High Excellency with an address of thanks to His Majesty the Emperor:

**Your Imperial Majesty!  
Most gracious Emperor and Lord!**

With deeply moved souls we dare to express our heartfelt gratitude for Your Imperial Majesty's grace and mercy. Although we had never lost faith in the fatherly heart of Your Majesty, although we did not misjudge the paternal benevolence of His Majesty towards us when the new military law was issued and were also assured of it in high places, we nevertheless saw that the circumstances would not permit otherwise than that we would have to participate at least indirectly in the war effort if we remained here and that the Lord God wanted to carry out a sifting and chastisement of His community.

We therefore felt urged in our conscience to look for another place of asylum where we could live our faith unhindered, without concealing from ourselves what loss we would thereby have to suffer in the property acquired through our fathers' diligence, and not without feeling in advance in our hearts the pain of separation from a country where we had been happy and enjoyed hospitality, which we had come to love as our homeland, and taking with us a grateful remembrance of the grace we had enjoyed and the high protection of Your Majesty and His Exalted Ancestors.

Then, like a messenger of peace, His High Excellency General-Adjutant v. Todleben came to us in the name of Your Majesty and overcame all our doubts of conscience by making, as a faithful interpreter of Your Majesty's fatherly feelings towards us, Your least children in the country, offers of service in the exercise of which we can do justice to the state, be kept away from warfare and not be impaired in our faithful adherence to our creed.

Majesty! Father! We cannot find words to express our thanks properly. This comes from the Lord, who once again looked upon us in grace, and poured into Your Majesty's heart such participation and love for us. A mountain of heavy worries has been rolled away from our hearts, and like a new gift of imperial grace, we look at our possessions, which we had already partially sacrificed in our hearts to the adherence to the confession of our fathers, which they handed down to us as a sacred legacy sealed with their blood. With renewed joy we look at the homes we have been given in dear Russia, at the mountains that surround us, at the schools where we hear the Word of God and where our children are instructed in it, at the cemeteries where our loved one's rest. With moved souls we lift our eyes to the mountains from which our help has come and pray, Lord, who looked upon and turned the distress of your children, bless far away beloved father of the country, bless his father's heart with your spirit of grace, salvation and peace. Bless him with many fatherly joys in the bosom of His Most Serene Family, protect and preserve the dear life of Your Anointed! Bless and keep our dear beloved motherland! Bless with your spirit of grace the heir to the throne, far away future father of the country! Bless and protect also from all danger our beloved fatherland.

If, according to our understanding of the evangelical truth, we are not allowed to draw the sword and thus render our services to the fatherland, we want to use with renewed faithfulness the weapon of prayer given to us by the Lord for the best of the same and call upon the King of Peace, Jesus Christ, unceasingly, our fatherland.

from all danger, to bless the work of peace of Your Majesty's High Government for the happiness of the peoples who dwell under Your mighty scepter, and thus to prove a sincere and true allegiance of subjects, with which deepest reverence, devotion and love

Most humbly to Your Imperial Majesty  
 On behalf of the Mennonite communities in the  
 Chortitza, Ekaterinoslav Governorate:  
 April 26, 1874  
 The clerical leaders and District Aelteste

## 4 - The Forestry Service

A decree of the conducting Senate of May 1875 contains, concerning the Mennonites, the following provisions:

- 1) For the performance of active service, they shall be assigned and come into use in the places of service, especially within the limits of the New Russian territory and the neighboring governorates:
  - a) in the workshops of the naval department,
  - b) in the fire department commands, and
  - c) in the special mobile commands of the Forestry Department, whose task is forest cultivation in Southern Russia;
- 2) For the compulsory service of Mennonites there are the same terms as established by the law on compulsory military service;
- 3) Mennonites who have entered the service shall be united into special groups in order to grant them the possibility of performing their prayers together according to the statutes of their faith;
- 4) After the end of active service, in case of war, the Mennonites shall likewise be turned only to the types of service mentioned in Article 1.

These ways of service have been confirmed by His Majesty and all doubts have fallen, but the compulsion of conscience has also been completely lifted.

In order to organize this matter, the Domain Ministry sent the State Councillor Bark to the Mennonites with the following proposals.

The government intends to use the Mennonites, who are to be conscripted for active service, exclusively for forest plantations and to form 6 mobile (подвижные команды) [mobile teams] forest commands from them in the governorates of Ekaterinoslav and Taurida, but the Minister of Crown Lands counts on the material cooperation of the Mennonites. The H. Minister now proposed to the Mennonites to take over the maintenance of all forest commands and to build the necessary barracks for them. The government, on the other hand, would pay 20 Kopek per man for each day's work, and was also otherwise prepared, if it should be necessary, to give them support in the form of money, but this should be credited to them as prepaid daily wages. If the Mennonite congregations should not agree to this, it would also be impossible for the government to keep the Mennonite workers together in larger numbers on the Crown forts, rather man would then be forced to send them in small lots to various forts of the country.

Since it was quite impossible to provide the necessary care and supervision to the Mennonite workers, if they were scattered in small parts all over the country, and since being away from the community for years could alienate even the strongest members of it, the Halbstadt Volost first decided, by a community resolution of June 25, 1880, to take over the complete maintenance of the Mennonite Forest commands, but in such a way:

- 1) that the number of commands, as promised by H. Councillor Bark, amounts to only 6;
- 2) that each command could have a leader elected by the Mennonite congregations with the necessary assistants, who would supervise the Mennonite workers during non-working hours and also manage the economic part of the command;
- 4) that the daily wage of 20 Kopek determined by the Ministry of Crown Lands be paid to the Mennonite leader against receipt at the end of each month;
- 5) that, if possible, not far from each barracks 100-200 Dessiantine land, either free of charge or against payment of a cheap rent, which may be sown for the benefit of the command;

- 7) that for the construction of the barracks in the course of the first three years, the Ministry of Crown Lands, will pay an annual advance of 8000 Rubles. The reimbursement of the same shall be made by deducting the third part of the daily wages to be paid annually;
- 8) That in the event that after the expiration of the next 20 years the government should make other provisions for the Mennonites, the barracks listed by the same shall be assessed by sworn assessors and paid by the Crown to the Mennonites;
- 13) That special conscription districts will be established for the Mennonites;
- 14) that the Mennonite workers, under the direction of the local forestry superiors, will be provided with the opportunity to perfect themselves in the Russian language through reading and writing during non-working hours;
- 15) if this constitution of the mobile forestry commands meets with the approval of the main Mennonite constituencies, namely the Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld, Chortitza and Schönfeld, it shall be binding on all Mennonites residing in the Cherson, Samaria, Volhynia governorates.

This also applies to the Mennonites who live in special communities in the Ekaterinoslav and Taurida governorates.

The original has the required signatures, testifying to the participation of all the Mennonites of Russia.

The above are only the most important points of the congregation's charter.

1880 was the first year of the drawing of lots for the Mennonite youths destined for service. The compulsory period of service is four years, a privilege granted by the Council of Ministers on the proposal of the Minister of the Domain, but which immediately presupposes that the Mennonite workers will not be given a leave of indefinite duration (безрочный отпускъ) [indefinite leave] such as is granted to your military for 6 years of active service.

In 1881 the barracks for Anadolsk and Azovsk forestry command in Ekaterinoslav Governorate were built. The Anadol barracks, made of wood, burned down after a few years and had to be replaced by a new building. In 1882 the barracks for the Vladimirov and Razyn command in the Cherson governorate were built. In 1883 the barracks for the Neuberdjan command in the Taurida Governorate were built and

instead of the obligated sixth at the request of the government later on the same forester's estate a residential building for the Honorable Forester, in return the sixth command was granted a Crown building at the so-called Altberdjansche forester's estate.

Until the barracks were completed, the Mennonite workers had to live in temporary wooden barracks.

The cost of all the barracks, stables, forges, etc. was about 165,000 Rubles The 24,000 Rubles offered by the government were not used. Support offered by the government has not been claimed.

At each command there is a preacher, who is entrusted with the special pastoral care for the brothers in faith in the service; at the same time, he has to lead the economic part of the command as a deacon.

The total number of Mennonite workers is about 500 men.

The annual cost estimate to cover all expenses varies between 60 - 70 000 Rubles in fruitful years, the harvests from the arable land granted by the Crown for each barracks (except for the Reuberdjan barracks) provide a significant contribution.

As the representative of the Mennonite communities in the matter of the commands, and at the same time as the main manager of all economic matters of all barracks, there is a representative elected by the communities for 3 years, who is assisted by the Volost Aelteste of the Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld and Chortitza Volosts.

## **Section 4**

### **Review**

#### **Chronological table**

#### **Map of the Molotschna Mennonite District**

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## 4th Section

### Review

If we look back from the above contributions to the history of the Molotschna Mennonites, and first of all to the civil and economic part of it, we find that our people, even if only after difficult struggles, have finally found their way. But if we review the ecclesiastical field, there can be no question of a proper development of the whole, because the right foundation on which a spiritual building can be built has so often been misunderstood and not only the past bears witness to the misunderstanding of the right foundation, but also the present still offers little prospect of anything better. For in this field enlightenment is a slow growing plant, and whether this plant will ever flourish among our people, the future will reveal.

Our fathers were called into the country to be a model for the surrounding neighboring peoples, and this not only in economic terms, but in every respect we should and would let our light shine through in word and deed. If we look at the beginning, there could hardly be any question of fulfilling the task set for us. Yet in those days, when we were still able to accomplish so little, when we were, so to speak, in infancy and youth, the paternal government showered us with benevolence and good deeds, regardless of our inability to perform, or rather precisely because of this inability. It treated us as a father treats his underage children, it gave us a guardianship authority almost up to the present time, with which we could communicate in every respect in the German language, it gave us a significant capital for the construction of our first churches, the introduction of sheep breeding to increase prosperity at a time when there were still no grain sales, was a work of our benevolent government.

And how the Most High Government was interested in finding in us, even if only in very small beginnings, that for which it had called us to the country, we see further in the two visits of His Majesty the Emperor Alexander I and in other later visits by the Imperial House, but especially in the fatherly and friendly patronization of His Majesty towards the inhabitants.

However, as little as in the first years there could be talk of fulfillment of what we were called to do, so little was there in the records from the first time of any harmful activity, neither from the civil nor from the clerical side, but only in the twenties did this begin, and that first from the side of the clerical board. This very board, whose duty it was to instruct the community and to set a good example, caused a separation of the community, for reasons that cannot be justified, and flooded the government with groundless complaints and unjust demands that damaged our entire reputation. Hardly had we been allowed to enjoy the most exalted visits and the fatherly and friendly patronization of our most gracious monarch, and soon thereafter the government had to send a threat to one of the Aelteste that he might be deprived of his office and removed if he persisted in his persistence. \*) A hard blow for our whole people, that an Aeltester with his like-minded preachers had brought about this blow and the loss of our reputation. It was not only our reputation with the government that was damaged, but what weighed heavily here was the misleading of the community, the foundation for the development of party hatred and the loss of morality and religiousness.

From the further course of history, we have seen that the Aeltester Warkentin, even after receiving a warning, did not come to a better understanding and because of his unlawful overstepping of the limits of his authority was finally declared unworthy of his office by the government, whereby our reputation again suffered a blow. The damage to our whole people again sprang from the same source, and as history tells us about the action and public outrage of the Aeltester Wiens against the Honorable Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, this gave an even harder blow, and did not the government have to give up more and more the good opinion that we would set a good example to distant neighboring peoples and serve them as a model?

\*) See page 107: From the Ekaterinoslav Office of the Guardianship Committee, To the Molotschna Mennonite Spiritual Council.

That Warkentin, after the separation of the congregation, also demanded the transfer of a church, would not have been conspicuous in itself, and would not have been an unjust demand in other circumstances. While the cause of the separation and the conditions he set for ceding the church, were not acceptable, he thought he could still save at least a part of the congregation. But he exposes his narrowness and ignorance when he says in his letter to the Office that participation in the Bible Society, if not approved by the whole congregation, was wholly contrary to the precepts of Holy Scripture. And why was this work not approved by the whole congregation? Only because these preachers persuaded the congregation to do so in the first place. The warning from the government caused him to stop demanding the church, but did not stop him from repeatedly exceeding the limits of his authority and the threatened loss of office had to be applied.

The Aeltester Wiens, although he should have taken Warkentin as an example, sought in his opinion to be even more faithful in the care of his pastoral office, according to the words he used to quote: "So do not look for more in stewards than that they be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2). Warkentin only wanted to suffer the punishment in the place of the criminal, but Wiens believed to prove his loyalty to the council and pastors when he punished the members for punishing a criminal \*) and because he persisted in this sense towards the high authorities, the government had to literally fulfill what the Aeltester Warkentin had already been threatened with clearly enough and he was not allowed to remain in the brotherly and loving community.

Looking back at the period from the separation of the congregation to the expulsion of the Aeltester Wiens, the prophet's word is probably, "Darkness covers the earth and darkness the peoples", to be applied also in reference to our people, for the few rays of light that still broke forth now and then could not illuminate the darkness and penetrate the gloom, and even if now through these sad and serious events. Even if, as a result of these sad and serious events, which affected not only Warkentin and Wiens but also other Aelteste, external peace was established for a decade, all that was needed was to kindle the spark that was still glowing under the ashes in order to make the fire flare up again.

\*) This matter took place in the congregation of the Aeltester Dirk Warkentin, but the Aeltester Wiens took the whole leadership in this matter.

To this kindling of the fire, one looked for and found opportunity at the Ohrloff Barley Dispute. When this affair was well arranged by the preachers of Lichtenau and the right time for revenge was recognized by the District Mayor, then it was said, "What further need we have of testimony!" The spark hidden under the ashes flared up and the revenge plan was ready. The Lichtenau community had already been deprived of two Aelteste and this was not put on the account of these Aelteste, but on the account of Cornies and his blind followers, as they called all those who agreed with the work of this extraordinary man, that is, on the account of the Ohrloff community. At first, the Barley Dispute was only about the overthrow of the deacon, but as it became obvious in the further course of history, one did not want to and could not be satisfied with that at all, because when this intended overthrow had failed due to the; "Until here and no further" on the part of the High Government, one set out at the first opportunity to overthrow a preacher. The final goal was nothing less than the break-up of the congregation, and for this the District Mayor needed the spiritual power of the Aelteste, and these allowed themselves to be seduced into such presumption by signing a letter of violence prepared for this purpose (page 142), to prescribe to the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation not to take a step in the disputed matter without their (the 5 Aelteste) express permission, just as no Egyptian was allowed to move hand or foot on Pharaoh's command without Joseph's will, and in all this conduct the Aelteste supported and invoked the Aelteste' decision of April 7, 1851, only it turned out too clearly that they had found in the same only the word "subordination", because that this subordination consisted only in an advisory assistance, which they had completely overlooked in their striving to rule. The case is a consequence of arrogance. The high authority commanded the Aelteste to "halt" and with shame and displeasure they had to withdraw, they had to produce and hand over to the authority, as hard as it was for them, a letter of peace, which had to be confirmed with their signature, and still today to the disgrace of the whole Mennonite community, together with the lofty, imperious acts given by these Aelteste (as e. g. Page 142) about the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation is still kept in the respective archives, and what is most harmful for the whole, in the archives of the government as proof of the aberration of Mennonite Church Aelteste. It was not, as before, an isolated case, there were now five Aelteste full of the same spirit, who in the eyes of the high authority were detrimental to the reputation of the

Mennonites gave such a hard push. As far as the Halbstadt church is concerned, the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Council could at the very beginning well suspect what Neufeld, the builder of the church, was striving for, namely control of the church and the congregation. But this intention of his only became apparent when he tried to persuade the church preacher whom he had chosen through an emissary to take over the leadership of the church meetings in exchange for a salary, which he, Neufeld, wanted to pay, of course under Neufeld's leadership. When this plan was not accepted, and later in March 1860, a part of the congregation wanted to prevent the election of the Aelteste, or in other words, wanted to disrupt the congregation with the help of the five Aelteste. Neufeld had not only already joined this party, but in agreement with the Church Preacher Johann Dueck, rather stood by the side of the District Mayor in leading this whole thing. Why did Neufeld join this party? One must consider here that the Barley Dispute and the Ohrloff Church Dispute not only took place for the most part at the same time, but were also brought into being and led by one and the same spirit. The Church Preacher Heinrich Neufeld, who had falsely submitted the Barley Dispute to the District Office, was the brother of the church builder. Thomas Wiens, his relative, the son of the Church Preacher Dueck was Neufeld's son-in-law. Reason enough to join this party and to make an attempt in league with it to claim the Halbstadt church, in order to then hand it over to the Lichtenau - Petershagen congregation, which the whole party joined. For this purpose, however, the spiritual power of the Aelteste was needed and they offered all their supposed power by putting themselves completely at the disposal of the District Mayor in order to dispute the rightful possession of the church by the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation. And it was not a completely bad calculation; instead of not approved transfer of the small Petershagen church in 1824-1827, to now take this large, expensive building.

Since the District Mayor must have admitted to himself that he had achieved nothing, neither through his secular nor through the spiritual power of the Aelteste, because the deacon and the church preacher had slipped away from him, he took another daring approach, whereby the Ohrloff-Halbstadt Aeltester (Johann Harder) was to be removed, i.e. fall victim to the removal from office and be rendered harmless, because he, since he did not place himself under his direction in clerical matters like the other Aelteste, was always in his way and, thus harmful to his plans. As the documents and the given historical account show,

this planned business was prevented by the H. Chairman of the Guardianship Committee, but the whole matter had been so deliberately entangled that it was not easy even for the Committee to make the right decision, for when it finally decided that the church was to be given to the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation, with the obligation to bear  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the construction costs, and the congregation declared to the Committee by congregational vote that it could not possibly take on this obligation, because it did not have it, and therefore renounced possession of the church. The H. Chairman realized that the rendered decision still needed an explanation, and without delay he explained to the Aeltester Harder how his decision was to be understood. So again, the revenge plans failed, Harder remained Aeltester and the congregation had no obligation, but made a completely voluntary sacrifice to the builder of the church, who had earlier wanted to make a sacrifice to the congregation.

The Barley and Church Disputes had found their conclusions, but how and by what? Through the arm of the authorities. The attacks on the Ohrloff-Halbstadt community did not stop until the government put an end to them. It was truly no small disgrace for all Mennonites that, as with Warkentin and Wiens, the government again had to intervene. What impressions it may have made on the attackers, that they did not accomplish anything at all, but that the attacked community emerged justified from everything in the eyes of the government, that is left to the reader to judge.

The District Mayor, as we know from the first section, had a few more years before the government put an end to his activity for good.

If we look back at the treatment of the Mennonite Brethren Church, first compare its letter of resignation of January 6, 1860, with the letter of five Aelteste of March 11 of the same year. What spirit guided the author of this document and how dark the light must have been among the Aelteste to sign it. When and where had the Aelteste made the attempt to rebuke and instruct these people? Where then do those who left say that the whole Mennonite brotherhood has fallen into the devil's service? Haven't these people proven enough, right then and there, that they don't want to cause any controversy or give any offense? Has it been confirmed anywhere, at the beginning or later, that peaceful coexistence cannot be thought of? Has it been confirmed that in their rapture (if there was one at that time) they have made more and more rapid progress? Or did these

want to withdraw from the Mennonite brotherhood by leaving the ruined churches? Just read what they wanted.

Whoever is somewhat familiar with world and church history knows how Christians were once persecuted by Christians, how Christians used prison, torture, sword and fire against Christians, how even our ancestors were attacked and persecuted by Christians of other denominations. Do these attacks on the Brethren flow from a different spirit? That one could not go further in intolerance was only due to the fact that we no longer live in the medieval time of the Inquisition, but in the time of a humane and Christian government, but the spirit that guided the attacks was the same that moved so-called Christians to persecute Christians.

Why did the high authority ask so many questions that had to be answered? From the declarations of the five Aelteste, who gave their letter of March 11, 1860 the title: "From all Church Aelteste of the Molotschna Mennonite District", did they not rightly conclude that bad consequences were to be feared for the whole? If the highest clergy, and according to the caption, the whole clergy, which is considered competent in such matters on the part of the Government, and the local District Office describe these people as dangerous, then one must only wonder that the Government could remain so tolerant and, despite all the petitions, did not seriously attack the people, as was desired. It almost seemed as if the government must have remembered the aberration of Mennonite Church Aelteste of earlier times, and for that very reason must have doubted the validity of such petitions. Out of quite clever manipulation, the submissions of the Ohrloff- Halbstadt Aelteste and the Aelteste of the Kleine Gemeinde were withheld, which could be an obstacle to the intention of making these people as unhappy as possible.

If we look back, we see that where the government had to intervene in this and also in other matters, it was challenged each time by ourselves in one way or another, but if there had not been such great darkness and such strong intolerance among us, it should never have been challenged, we always did it to ourselves. It attacked too much the authority of the Aelteste to let laymen dare to describe the decay of the churches and to presume to found something better by leaving them. If one had accepted a little inspiration from them, as was merited, and had these people left quietly,

who would have suffered from it? Why did the intolerance of brothers against brothers, who all had an equal right to exist, make our people appear again in such a bad light to the government? We did it to ourselves, namely the board itself. We could have been spared this disgrace, because the government, if it had not been bothered with such untrue reports, would not have taken any notice of whether there were so many communities on the Molotschna, if they only lived in peace next to and among each other.

And the attack of Aeltester Lenzmann on the brothers Lange and the school supporters, whom he welcomed so warmly at founding a school institution, which they wanted to bring into being, according to Lenzmann's own words. There was now the prospect that the uneducated preachers could be improved by this institution. But what did he do when he noticed that by the activity in this institution, not only the preachers in general could be put in a good light, but also his own supposed light could be darkened? Through false reports to the authorities, he helped with all his available strength to bring down this institution, and even if the resulting damage to the Mennonite congregations did not come to light so immediately, this became all the clearer when the very founders of said institution came to be respected by the High and Highest Government.

Explanatory Note. The original translator of A. Klaus' work "*Unsere Kolonien*" says on page 291: The slandering of the Lange brothers by the government did not proceed from the Mennonites alone, but also the pastor Friedrich Schock who participated in this dirty business. Suspecting the brothers, especially Johannes Lange, of dangerous political activities, this gang spared no means (e.g., bribery of an unscrupulous official who was charged with the investigation against Lange) to get rid of two bright minds, which threatened to become inconvenient for Mennonite Aelteste and their followers, by telling these Aelteste and their obedient sheep extremely nasty lies to their faces in front of the whole world.

Only thanks to the wise insight of the government officials of that time, as well as the influence of highly placed enlightened friends, the Lange brothers were spared the bitter bread of banishment. After Johannes Lange had performed 5 months of forced labor, both brothers were brilliantly acquitted of the lying accusations brought against them. The scoundrels among the Mennonites, however, were entirely to blame for the fact that two men as capable as the Lange brothers today no longer devote their energies to the entire Mennonite brotherhood, but only to a single congregation.

We see at a distance, looking back, that what harmed us and diminished our reputation in the government came primarily from the spiritual leaders. The damage was desperately bad and our wounds incurable, and even if we hoped that we would be healed, there was further damage, because there were no longer, as before, men at the helm who would have been able to counteract this harmful work or to counteract to some extent the consequences that had inevitably come for the whole.

Finally, by the year 1870, all struggle seemed to have come to an end, the opportunities or supposed causes for it had been cleared away, no serious obstacle had been placed in the way of the Brethren congregation on the part of the high authorities with regard to its existence, the Temple congregation had moved to the Caucasus, the landless had escaped their planned subjugation, and instead of the party interests so hotly championed, common interests now approached us, brought about by the circumstances of the time, there was now a common work.

The reader will remember that earlier, after the end of the separation dispute, a current observer of all events says: "The congregation was and remained separated and will probably remain separated until either all preachers come to a better understanding or a need from outside drives us." If there could be no question of a general better understanding on the part of the preachers now, when the feuds had ceased, the other point, namely the threat from without (for at first it had to be thought so) had approached us, namely through the introduction of a general military conscription law proposed by the government, which made us fear the loss of our freedom of faith. This matter had such a strong effect that party hatred was temporarily suspended, and without any special unification efforts, all party disputes receded into the background. By working together, they tried to avert the danger; but it was not an entirely harmless matter for those who were charged with representing the whole in this matter before the High Government. They had to appear before the great ones of the empire with petitions, as if the Mennonites were only the silent ones in the country and in general a people who, for conscience' sake, could not assume any obligations at all in regard to the military law, and yet the deputies (whether all of them?) were well aware that they represented there a people who, for conscience' sake, could actually do a great deal, for they were capable of breaking up entire congregations (Ohrloff, Brethren Church), they were capable of subjugating the the majority of the Mennonites,

if this had not all been prevented by the government, and although the government knew all this well, what the Mennonites were capable of, it was more tolerant towards us than itself was towards our brethren. They accepted these requests with the greatest pleasure and patronization, and did not let the deputies feel any shame, for which there was reason enough; but with all her benevolence toward us, she could not help obliging us by a point of law (157) to serve in hospitals or in workshops of the land troops or the navy or in similar institutions. And even if His Majesty, Emperor Alexander II, once again intervened with a firm hand and ordered us to serve in a way that in no way came into contact with the military law or contradicted our confession, we still have to ask in all seriousness, how long will these services last? Services? The point of the law concerning the Mennonites is not abolished, but the realization of it is possibly only postponed. It is firmly and unchanged in the military law, and even if we can take over what is said in this point without scruples of conscience, this change of service would bring with it for us many things that we would not like.

A second circumstance, which also spurred to common action and excluded any party interest, was that the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers was abolished, which until then, as already mentioned, had conducted the communication, the entire correspondence with all colonists in the German language, by which abolition now also our people were put into the position that they were no longer placed under a special, but with all Russian subjects under one and the same administration and jurisdiction. Thus, one came to understand what H. Minister Selenoi meant, when he said to the deputation sent to St. Petersburg for the sake of the military law that it was sinful that the Mennonites had not made more serious efforts to learn the national language. He had perfect reason for this rebuke. Now, when the Guardianship Committee was taken away from us, we began to realize that we were far from being ready for oral and written communication with the government, and it was agreed upon to work together through the schools more than before for the learning of the national language. In the Molotschna Volosts themselves, as well as in some of the resettlements, it is still possible to conduct business in the mother tongue where necessary, but in resettlements where the Mennonites belong to one Volost together with Russians, Tatars, Greeks, etc., neither the mother tongue nor

in the courts of the Volosts, there is no other way than to speak the language of the country, and if in some cases the Volost Aeltester, even if he is a German, has to do business in the village offices, where only Russian is spoken.

The aforementioned circumstances, the military law and the recognized lack of knowledge of the local language, drove the communities to put aside all differences in their views for the time being and to create something common, where neither Lichtenau nor Ohrloff, neither Rudnerweide, Gnadenfeld nor Pordenau etc. come into consideration, but now it was a matter of, as one had to assume, one for all and all for one, this was especially the case with regard to the military law.

Once people had become accustomed to working together, they soon began to extend this work further and further, of which the resolutions of the so-called Federal Conference provide the most varied evidence. The main purpose of these conferences, as can be seen from their resolutions, was to bring the Kingdom of God to an ever more condensed presentation; missionary work and traveling preaching were written on the banner, and one could not think otherwise than that a new era had dawned for our whole people, that all the wars would have found their conclusion already in the sixties, and truly, something more glorious, something more necessary, could not be imagined than a more united Church. And truly, something more glorious, something more necessary, could not be imagined than a more substantial presentation of the Kingdom of God among distant people, and the more one had given oneself over to the hope that the spiritual board had now really begun to plow a new and no longer to sow under the hedges, as it had happened in former times, the more unexpected was that which the conference on September 26 and 27, 1895, namely to exclude some communities from the Mennonite Association.

Such a decision was not expected at a time when it was believed that everything was in a right, even in the most important, serious work, so the beautiful hope that a better time had dawned for our people through a better understanding of the Aelteste or in general of the clergy, had become desecrated with one blow. Apart from this point of the declaration of exclusion, let us first take a closer look at the first point of the conference resolution of 1883. Here it says:

"Every believing Mennonite will recognize and love the faithful from other denominations as brothers and sisters in the Lord; the extension of this recognition and love, however, to occasional communion, is a matter of conscience and is regarded as freedom of opinion; this also answers the question of whether a

Mennonite Aeltester be allowed to administer the Lord's Supper beyond the boundaries of our community in case of emergency."

Compared with the time when one was not allowed to spread the Holy Scriptures in fellowship with other denominations, this is an advance in tolerance and generally better knowledge, which one would like to grasp with both hands. But if the conference now, on the same point, grants everyone the right to partake of the Lord's Supper also with members of other denominations, then one of our most serious articles of faith, namely, that we confess only baptism on faith, is with this granting or exemption, we do not want to say annulled, but our adult baptism is placed on the same ground as infant baptism. Because we would not enter into communion with unbaptized persons, which is how Mennonites have always regarded infant baptism, and therefore we recognize infant baptism as being equal to adult baptism, is now regarded as so insignificant that it is placed under the rubric of freedom of choice, which is to be by each parent or person. Even though it cannot be assumed that all conference members have heartily agreed to such far-reaching tolerance, there will be members in the congregations who agree with it from time to time, and here, too, the staff is not to be broken over this tolerance, but it is permitted to make a few remarks about point 5 (1895) in addition to this point. To everyone who knows that the weapons of our battle are not carnal and still understands something of Christian love, it will have become clear during the consideration of this 5th point that time when conflicts were set aside did not last as one might have expected. From the above-mentioned far-reaching tolerance, one had to conclude that the Conference, right at the beginning of its activity, wanted to loudly and publicly proclaim freedom of faith, conscience and opinion as an important and universal Christian characteristic, but if one contrasts this with the point of 1895, one comes to the conclusion that our clergy today are of the same mind as the five Aelteste of the sixties mentioned above were. For if the conference approves of the Mennonites or leaves them free to consider infant baptism just as valid as the baptism of faith, which according to our confession is the only valid baptism, and calls this equality freedom of opinion, what still prevents them from allowing those who believe that Jesus was fully created by God to have peace in their view of Scripture?

Furthermore, the Mennonites believe, according to their confession, that only true believers are allowed to celebrate the Lord's Supper, but in fact they also prove today what the five Aelteste informed the Guardianship Committee in 1861, namely that among the Mennonites the Lord's Supper is celebrated by believers and unbelievers together. If, however, the Friends of Jerusalem far to the east do not find it right to partake of the Lord's Supper in this way according to Scripture, and thus cannot accept the abuse of the Lord's Supper, and of baptism as well, then the conference declares them excluded from the Mennonite Association.

One must be amazed and ask how it is possible that among the Mennonites over and over again the stronger party with the clergy at the head, makes attacks on weaker parties, as if only they still have a right to exist, without even the slightest consideration that we Mennonites are all together only a tolerated sect. The pit, which was already dug for the Mennonite Brethren Church in the sixties, was dug much deeper by the Conference's decision, and we have to wait and see who will be the first to fall into it, but if we continue to dig this pit, we dig it for all Mennonites. What does it matter to the Aelteste if people break their bread, for toothless old men they will probably give up this petty, limited opinion, and even if not, this would be much easier to place under the freedoms of opinion than the above-mentioned point of 1883, and if these people refuse to comply with official regulations, then one could have taken the declaration of the Aeltester Harder as an example, when he says: that if someone challenges the arm of the authorities, the congregation must remain silent, and if these people call themselves Apostolic Brethren, this is such a petty matter that Aelteste should not concern themselves with after all, for if those are not what they claim to be, that is entirely their own affair, for which the Aelteste are not responsible, nor are they in any way affected by it.

Concerning the communities that have been declared excluded with regard to their denomination, the following should be mentioned:

1. The Templars understand the divinity of Christ perfectly, only recognizing it in this and because Jesus was a man living wholly and exclusively in the divine thought, because in him the power of the Spirit of God was so perfect, so without measure, that even the apostle could say: A God above all.

As far as the sacraments are concerned, this congregation sees in baptism that the baptized person, by being visibly baptized, publicly declares that he has changed his mind, and therefore that baptism is for him an expression of faith in Jesus as the King of the Kingdom of God, which was actually established by Jesus' death and resurrection, and that the baptized person thereby makes the declaration that he joins the work and the will of Jesus, namely the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and that he is determined to devote his whole existence to this work. Since this congregation does not consider this to be the meaning of baptism today, it refrains from baptism in its own congregation, not out of disdain or contempt, but because it holds it in such high esteem that it does not yet consider itself entitled to administer baptism among itself. Likewise, this church believes that if the Spirit of Christ does not reign in a community, because it does not pursue Christ's purposes, because the establishment of the Kingdom of God is not its main concern, there can be no question of a Lord's Supper after the institution of Christ. The first condition for the restoration and administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper again in the spirit of and according to the institution of Jesus Christ is the establishment of a society that is determined to carry out Christ's purpose of the Kingdom of God on earth.

## 2) The Jerusalem Friends \*)

Not the Aelteste and the conference, but the congregations have to decide (of course only according to their code of laws) and the task of the spiritual board is to guide the congregations correctly and to instruct them that also on their part an incorrect action is excluded. But how far have we strayed from this proper point of view, where both the clergy and the congregations recognize their task. Let us look around, are the evils in the congregations, as they are mentioned by the Brethren in their letter of resignation, less present today than they were then? But all this has no place in the congregations and in Mennonism, everyone can be a Mennonite without hindrance, but whoever understands some things in Scripture differently than the conference wants to understand them, it declares him excluded from the Mennonite Association, although the first-mentioned are in abundance in the midst of our congregations as Mennonites without hindrance.

\*) A report has not been received by the author.

The latter, e.g., the Friends of Jerusalem, have already moved several hundred versts away decades ago and yet do not burden the conference with anything, and even this, namely the spiritual board, could consider that already sufficient, what was perpetrated and sinned against them at that time, when this congregation was treated so shamefully and pushed out.

When the Molotschna Mennonites gained prestige through Cornies with the government, the latter seemed to want to ignore the recalcitrance and the harmfulness of the then Aelteste. When later the five Aeltester under the leadership of the District Mayor wanted to disrupt the Ohrloff - Halbstadt congregation, the government simply ordered these Aelteste to stop, without this having any other immediate consequences than that they had to withdraw with shame and displeasure. When these five Aelteste attacked the Brethren congregation, the government seemed to have already come to the conclusion that Mennonite Aelteste could not be relied upon, and let these people have their way. The Aeltester Lenzmann and his accomplices seemed to want to succeed in making the Friends of Jerusalem unhappy, but even then, the government recognized in time the intrigues that had been instigated, and this congregation did not suffer what the slanderers and persecutors of it had intended, but who can guarantee that the government will not finally intervene further? It cannot and will not remain, if the clergy does not decide to repent and only handle the law correctly, which the gospel prescribes to them, our people will go the same way as the people of Israel once had to go, as there, so also here, it will not remain with the mere loss of reputation, because the decline takes place step by step. As there all warnings were in vain and Israel was finally dragged into captivity, so also a judgment will fall upon our people, whether it will consist in that or only in that it will finally come under the military law, for which the clergy from time to time provides such excellent preparatory work, or whether the Lord will chastise with another punishment, he alone knows, he has ways of doing it all, he does not lack means.

If we now take a look at the congregation in particular, which, standing on the foundation of truth in all storms, was strong enough not only to resist all malicious attacks made against it, especially in the sixties, but also to eliminate its own agitators who made common cause with the attackers,

but which has recently come to the point that it is now itself working with such sad success on the work of destruction intended by the attackers at the time. \*) This is a painful experience for everyone who knew this community in a better state, and especially for those who are members of it, and is it not the most urgent duty of this community and mainly of the more insightful members of it to investigate seriously. Members of the same must seriously investigate where the causes of this disruption sprang. For it can hardly be denied that the way of leadership has been different for a long time than at the time when it was able to resist all attacks.

What has happened cannot be undone, but from what has happened, from the past, one can learn many useful lessons for the future, and if we ask which were the most dangerous cliffs for us, on which our little ship suffered damage, it was always the disrespect, the non-recognition or rather the complete rejection of the boundary between clerical and civil authority and obligation.

In the forties, the Aelteste Warkentin and Wiens failed on this cliff to the detriment of the entire congregation; in the sixties, the five Aelteste failed on the same cliff to the great detriment of the congregation, when they wanted to disrupt the Ohrloff-Halbstadt congregation and force the Mennonite Brethren Church from the Mennonite Union, and in vain we hoped that through the joint work of the spiritual board a new period would begin for our entire congregation, that a better future would be in the offing, even now, through the exclusion declaration of 1895, we have run up against the same cliff, we have not yet recognized from the sad past how to avoid it, even today we have not yet come to the realization that the weapons of our battle are not carnal.

But if carnal weapons are harmful for the clergy, but only the whole suffers when they are used, how are our great damages to be healed? When the damage is so desperately evil, this is certainly a difficult task, which, if there were no proven remedy, one would certainly have to despair of; but the healing of the damage depends on whether the spiritual director of this remedy is able to use it according to the correct usage.

\*) To write in detail about the disputes in the Ohrloff community is left to another pen, only so much is said that the present still surpasses the past, if that is possible.

The church must make use of the instructions and place itself entirely under the guidance of God's Spirit.

Jesus himself did not leave us in the dark about the way churches should be administered, because He as the wisest Lawgiver tells us in Matt. 18:15-17 the levels of spiritual jurisdiction for church matters. If we pay close attention to these levels, we find that our Lord and Master places the church, which according to Eph. 4:11 and Tit. 1:5 must be under the leadership of a spiritual board, as the last and highest authority. But the way in which the spiritual board has to conduct itself in its office is taught to us by the apostle in 1 Peter 5:1-4 with the words; Feed the flock of Christ, as you are commanded, and watch carefully, not as those who rule over the people, but become examples of the flock, so that when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

From these scriptural passages we see that a congregation, under the leadership of its board and in communion with it, must manage its affairs independently; but that congregations may find themselves in the unpleasant position of asking the spiritual boards of other congregations for advice and help. Experience teaches; however, the latter, as has always been the principle of the Mennonites from ancient times, must here as well as in their own congregation, present themselves only as role models, and not claim the right or the power to prescribe judgments and laws for the strictest observance on such occasion to the congregation in need of help, i.e., to rule over the affairs of other congregations. If this cannot be achieved at once, the termination of such matters must be left to time and to changing views and circumstances, as stated in the Mennonite principle briefly given on page 129.

Furthermore, experience teaches that congregational separations and the formation of new congregations occur, and have occurred repeatedly, especially in the Molotschna, and consequently it must be considered:

- 1) If the so-called Kleine Gemeinde, which left the mother community in 1812, had not been treated with contempt and had not been allowed to enjoy its rights, and if it had not been allowed to go so far that the high authorities had to protect it and help it to its rights, but rather

had this community granted their repeated request for independence, i.e., for confirmation of an Aeltester, and co-enjoyment of the rights, who would have suffered from it? And would it not have been much more praiseworthy for the mother community? Why did the high authorities, even the H. Minister, have to know that there was so much intolerance among us? Everyone who is not influenced by such intolerance will see that it would have been better, would have served more for peace, would have been much more advantageous for our reputation, for our credit with the high authorities, if this community had been helped by the mother community and its board to independence and enjoyment of its rights in peace and quiet;

- 2) The congregation of the Church Aeltester Jakob Warkentin divided into three parts in 1842 without any disadvantage to the congregations as a whole, and later into even more parts without any obstacle, as they exist unchallenged at present;
- 3) If we consider how the Mennonite Brethren Church was attacked, what was accomplished by the attacks? Nothing more than that the high authorities had to convince themselves again of our intolerance. This community has existed for almost four decades and who has suffered? Truly, no one. If one wanted to admit it, one would rather have to acknowledge that it has given us many a good example and has often been a model for us;
- 4) What has been achieved by so strongly slandering the Olgina or so-called Temple Church to the government? Nothing at all. This congregation has attained prestige all the way up to the throne, and for the mother congregation all that has remained is that the High and Most High Government has always had to realize that the Mennonites, who exist only as a tolerated sect, are highly intolerant of their own brethren.

We do not want to repeat here in detail what has happened, which has put us so much in the shade with the High Government, but if we recall everything a little, consider and take to heart the unsuccessful attacks, should we not realize that it is high, even the highest time, that we begin to plow new ground and no longer sow under the hedges? Is it not high time to seriously consider what serves our peace?

Would the Molotschna Mennonite congregations, under the leadership of their spiritual leaders and after serious consultation, like to

on the part of elected representatives for the future to establish something for the prevention of improprieties, as they have so often occurred among us and have been so detrimental to the community as a whole. The following points, even if they are not perfect, should be taken to heart, examined, improved or supplemented and then used as guidelines:

- 1) Although our congregations partially migrated as existing congregations, namely the Rudnerweide, Alexanderwohl, Gnadenfeld and Waldheim congregations, they organized themselves for the most part by leaving the mother congregations and voluntarily uniting to form independent congregations, such as the so-called Kleine Gemeinde, the Lichtenau with their own congregational organizations, the Ruckenau or Mennonite Brethren, the Olgina or Temple Church and recently the Halbstadt Church, and since the organization of these congregations, as experience teaches, is not disadvantageous to the whole, the existing congregations decided not to put any obstacle in the way of the possible formation of new congregations, as they have already proved in the case of the recently newly formed Halbstadt Church;
- 2) According to Eph. 4:11 and 1 Tim. 1:5, the congregations, both existing and new, must be under the leadership of a spiritual board and together they form an independent congregation. According to 1 Peter 5:1-4, the board of directors must never have a dominant position in the church, but rather an exemplary one, which shows that the power that the board of directors, and first and foremost the Aelteste, need to carry out their difficult profession is a spiritual power that can only grow under the guidance of the Spirit of God and that requires law and truth as a foundation without regard to the person;
- 3) When Jesus, the wisest Lawgiver in Matt. 18:15-17, indicates the levels of spiritual jurisdiction for congregational matters, we find that he refers to the congregation as the final and highest authority, and therefore every congregation has to administer its internal affairs independently, whereby it must be informed truthfully and in detail by its board of all occurrences in the congregation, so that every incorrect congregational judgment is corrected;

- 4) In the past we have seen examples of congregations where internal disputes, require the consultation with other congregations to eliminate. The spiritual leaders and all the leaders of our congregations, if they are asked to do so, to provide mutual advisory assistance. Just as the apostles (Acts 15:6) came together to examine the speech of those who made unjust demands, so the present church leaders, as role models of the flock, commit themselves to help bring any improprieties that occur to such a conclusion with their advice that they have the full conviction in their conscience, as the apostles once did, that the assistance they provide is also pleasing to the Holy Spirit (v.28), and if this right path is taken and followed, it can be hoped that fragmented communities will be led to reconciliation;
  
- 5) Since our congregations are opposed to the principle of apostolic authority, let every man be subject to the authority that has power over him (Rom. 13:1). They must, under the direction of their leaders, work hard to reduce the challenges of the authorities by living an upright Christian life, but on the other hand, they must also see to it that any harassment of the authorities in clerical matters, as well as encroachments beyond the boundaries of the clerical territory, are completely avoided, because both, as experience teaches, harm the entire congregation.

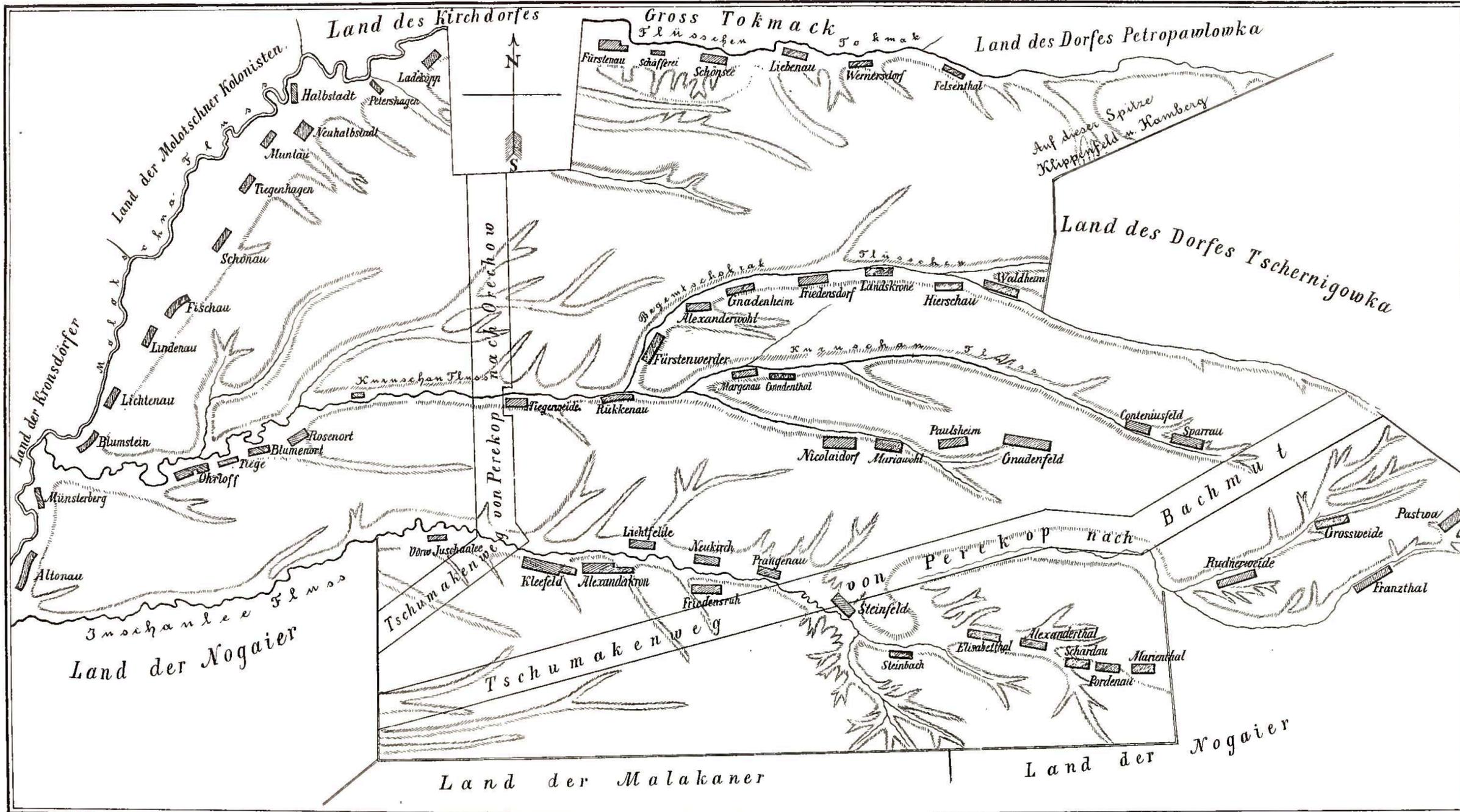
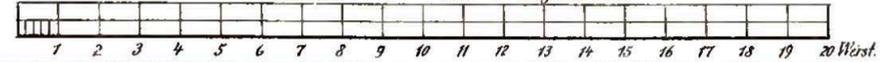
## Timetable

First immigration of Molotschna Mennonites	1803
First settlement on the Molotschna	1804
First Church Aeltester Jakob Enns confirmed	1805
First church built in Ohrloff	1809
Church built in Petershagen	1810
Separation of the Kleine Gemeinde	1812
First visit of His Majesty Alexander I	May 20, 1818
Immigration of the Rudnerweide community	1819
Immigration of the Alexanderwohl community	1820
Formation of a branch of the Bible Society	1821
Opening of Ohrloff Central School	1822
The Aeltester Jakob Warkentin confirmed	August 3, 1824
Second visit of His Majesty Alexander I	Oct. 22, 1825
Complaints about the Aeltester Jakob Warkentin (page 102)	May 7, 1830
Certification of the Molotschna Mennonite Association	Nov. 12, 1830
Immigration of the Gnadefeld community	1834
Immigration of the Waldheim community	1835
Visit of Alexander Nikolaevich, heir to the throne	1837
The Aeltester Warkentin declared unworthy of his office	June 28, 1842
Authorities' recognition of Kleine Gemeinde (page 92)	1843
Settlement of the Huttertalers	1843
Transferring the schools to Chairman Cornies	1843
The Aeltester Heinrich Wiens declared unworthy	Sept. 21, 1846
The Aeltester Wiens is expelled from the country (page 116)	1847
The sacrifice of the Molotschna Mennonites	1848
The Petershagen church demolished	1852
Beginning of the Ohrloff Barley Dispute	1858
Consecration of church in Neuhalbstadt	Dec. 28, 1858
Decision of the Aeltester in the Ohrloff Barley Dispute (page 130)	Aug. 2, 1859
Withdrawal of the Mennonite Brethren	Jan. 18, 1860
5 Aelteste hand over Brethren to secular authority (page 176)	1860
New invention - to make two issues from one (page 137)	March 10, 1860
The 5 Aelteste set up a monument (page 179)	March 11, 1860

Aeltester Harder's declaration about the brothers (page 183)	March 29, 1860
Second monument to the 5 Aelteste	June 10, 1860
Clarification by the Ohrloff community of its position (page 142)	June 11, 1860
Committee member, H. Councillor Lange visits Molotschna	July, Aug. 1860
H. Lange ends the Ohrloff Barley Dispute	August 5, 1860
The reopening of the Ohrloff Central School	Sep 12, 1860
Dispatch from H. Chairman v. Hamm	Oct. 29, 1861
End of the Church Dispute	September 1862
Ohrloff Church of the Brethren recognized	Nov. 12, 1862
Exit of the Temple Church (page 237)	April 6, 1863
Initial work on land grant (page 28) November	November 1863
Pastor Dobbert on the Mennonite Brethren Church (page 195)	July 1864
The manner and method of land allotment (page 35)	March 18, 1865
Privy Councillor v Islawin in the Molotschna	August 1865
Invective of landowners (pages 63 and 64)	August 1865
Supreme Command on Land Allotment and Suffrage (page 66)	Feb. 12, 1866
The H. Minister's decision on land use (page 76)	Feb. 13, 1870
Initial work on conscription	January 1871
Dispatch of the Honorable Gen. Adjutant v Todleben	April 1847
First muster of Mennonite youths for forest service	1880
Teaching of the Mennonite Deaf and Dumb began	January 1885
School for the Deaf and Dumb in Liege inaugurated	January 3, 1890

# Karte des Molotschnaer Mennoniten-Bezirks nach Hippenmayer v. J. 1852.

Massstab: 5 Werst 1 engl. Zoll.







## Glossary

**Anwohner** One who owned a cottage or small house, and yard. Sometimes referred to as a *Kleinhäusler*.

**Einwohner** A resident. In the Russian Mennonite context, one who rented a cottage, or rooms in a house.

**Dessiatine** or **Desiatina** A measurement of area equal to 1.09 hectares or 2.7 acres. There were 240 square *Sazhen* per dessiatine.

**Gubernia** Governate. The largest administrative division within Russia.

**H.** Hoch, meaning High or “most high”. An honorific whose English equivalent would be Honorable.

**Hufe** (pl. Hufen) Also called Huben. An old Germanic measure of area, brought over from Prussia. Equal to 31 acres or 16.8 hectares.

**Kirchenkonvent** The ministerial committee of a congregation. The same as Kirchenkonvent. Traditionally known as the **Lehrdienst**.

**Kirchenvorstand** See Kirchenkonvent.

**Oblast** An administrative division within Russia.

**Tschwt/Tschetvert** A Germanized variant of the Russian term Chetwert. A unit of dry measure equal to 5.95 bushels.

**Verst** 1.07 km or 0.66 miles.

**Volost** District.

**Vollwirt** or **Vollwirtschaft** A full farm consisting of 65 Dessiatine.

**Verst** 1.07 km or 0.66 miles.

**Vorsteher** A general term used by Mennonites for an official, either religious or administrative.

**Wirt** Someone who owned farmland.