

The Chortitzer Mennonites
An Attempt to Portray Their Development
By
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Rosenthal near Chortitz, Russia
1 December 1888

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Edited by Carole Grier and Glenn H. Penner (2020)

THE CHORTITZER MENNONITES

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Foreword

In 1889 it will be a hundred years since the Chortitzer Mennonites first settled within the boundaries of Russia.

A hundred and one years have gone by since our forefathers bundled up their meagre belongings and again reached for their pilgrim staff to leave a country they could no longer tolerate and to search for a country that would open their friendly doors to them. This is truly an important time in history, a time for ten decades of retrospect. To show this backward look to our members as well as to those far removed in a summarized form and to offer it to the Chortitzer Church, I have felt the need to write what follows.

It must be noted at the outset that this is no answer to professional editing or perfection of writing; it is only an attempt to represent the development of our churches. Very briefly I have tried to present the most important events of the past centuries and I have tried to keep away from adding colour to these occurrences.

In presenting these events, I have tried to base my work on original writings or reliable copies. At the same time, I have gathered my own notes based on credible experiences and the information I have received from older persons.

I have received handwritten material as follows: the original from the church leader of the Kronsweider Church, Peter Hildebrand's manuscript, the oldest material available concerning the immigration of our fathers during and shortly following the settlement activities. Also numerous copies and single copies of events that followed as well as original letters by George V. Trapp, our colleague and assessor. Original letters also from deputy Bartsch, many letters, copies and original documents. Some were from the old elder, my Father, David Epp, and from his diaries. I also received deeds from the archives of the Chortitzer area office from the year 1848. A summarized overview of the founding of the Chortitz colony, authorized by his excellence, the chairman of the welfare committee, V. Hahn together with the mayors' offices, and the school teachers. The overall view was put together by teacher H. Heese. A report was also written by a member of the 'Agricultural Committee', Peters, to the Welfare Committee titled, 'A Simple History of the Chortitzer Mennonites' Immigration to Russia, Their settlement and their destiny – 1857.

I have availed myself of the following books: 'Origin, Development and Destiny of the Anabaptists or Mennonites' by A. Brons, 'Our Colonies' by A. Klaus translated into German by J. Toews, 'Yearbook' by Mannhardt, Danzig, 1888.

What I have gathered in my free time, what I have seen and finally compiled, will find the readers' indulgence, I trust. May this booklet find a special place in the church and in the eyes of God, our Guide and Protector, and may it serve to interest those who have a special concern about our people.

D. Epp

Rosenthal near Chortitz 1 December 1888

I. The Call to Russia

1. The Mennonites in and around Danzig are Invited to Settle on the Southern Russian Steppes

Our fellow Christians, earlier known as ‘Anabaptists’ and later named after Menno as Mennonists, or Mennonites, were subjected to a great deal of persecution in the distant past.

Their policy of adult baptism, the repudiation of conscription, as well as refusal to take the oath according to the teachings of Christ, earned them the intolerance of all sovereign countries. Not infrequently, they were driven from place to place because of their convictions after they presumed, they had found a home.

Many of those who belonged to our church had come to Prussia. At the start they had been promised a ‘free city’ but soon limitations were imposed on them until, under Frederick Wilhelm II, land was no longer available to them. The personal release from conscription had to be purchased with exorbitantly large sums of money and in addition all their citizens’ rights were taken from them especially where the possession of private property was concerned. Under these conditions, the situation of the Mennonites in Prussia up to the end of the eighteenth century was a sad one. And since they were concerned that their religious and economic rights would almost certainly be limited as well, many looked to the future with anxiety.

Thoughts again turned to emigration, but where? Free America had so far not affected them with its magic. This situation presented itself to them only about 80 years later when cursory attempts to find an asylum there came to naught.

Then a call came as if from God, the invitation from Catherine II of Russia. Since she was driven by a strong desire to populate the vast, so far unpopulated steppes, with competent settlers, she sent out invitations to all farmers especially the Mennonites in and around Danzig, to come and settle in Russia.

Representing this royal wish was the imperial authority G. von Trappe. Endowed with full authority, he arrived in Danzig in August 1786 in efforts to fulfil his mandate.

Obviously, Trappe could not look for support from the Danzig authorities who were not too pleased to have him there; so, he turned to the church elder, Peter Epp, and shared with him the plans of the czarina and enlisted his help.

Convinced of the good intentions of Catherine as well as of the advantages that could arise from these generous offers for his fellow Christians, Epp soon became a vigorous proponent of this project, a fact that was of inestimable value to Trappe for his mission.

Thanks to the united efforts of these two men, the message brought by Trappe’s presence and his mission soon spread like wild-fire from place to place and the sparks fell on many an oppressed heart. When the czarina’s manifest of 22 July 1763 became common knowledge, the sparks flared anew and they travelled like the wind.

But because many could not fully believe either the rumors or the printed word, curious people soon flocked from near and far to hear from the mouth of the authorized representative himself the confirmation of what had seemed unbelievable to them at home. And truly, wasn't that the voice of the Lord, who had given His afflicted children in the moment of their greatest need a "Pella" where they could flee to in order to preserve their freedom of faith and with it the peace of conscience? Completely free religion according to the principles of their fathers: recognition of the "yes" and "no" in lieu of an oath, exemption from military, etc. and all conceivable facilitations and concessions for settlement, the best prospects for a materially more secure future - that was what they were now offered to them. Anyone who could still fail to recognize the workings of God's providence here, he should have ceased to notice His all-loving to notice.

(from a copy)

- I) "We allow all foreigners to come into our country, to settle and to make their homes in all districts."
- II) These friends may settle not only in our area where official title arrangements have been made but in other distant areas according to their desires where they should report to their nearest district or city authorities.
- III) Since there will be those foreigners arriving in Russia who will find themselves lacking the necessary funds to defray their travelling expenses, they should report to the minister or the nearest authority who will then provide them with the necessary travelling funds.
- IV) As soon as these foreigners arrive in our area and have reported to the title office or to the boundary city authority, they will be required to state their true intentions and purposes and just what their desires are and if they plan to join the body of merchants as well as becoming members of our society and citizens and in which city; or if they have a desire to settle in colonies on good and fruitful soil for the purpose of carrying out agricultural activities, or if they are interested in other occupations so that these people can come to their conclusions promptly and that all this shown on the register where, in our dominion free and appropriate land is available. There may be lands available in addition to what has been indicated in the registers and we allow settlement there as well which they many choose of their own free will.
- V) Every foreigner who arrives in our country and plans to settle and has reported to the authorities for that purpose has, as stated in #4, the privilege of making his own choice and then practice rite of the oath and the duty and loyalty according to his religion.
- VI) So that foreigners who wish to settle in our country may become aware of the extent of our generosity towards them the following is our will:
 - 1) Permission is granted to all foreigners to freely practice their religion unhindered according to their church customs and traditions but those who do not live in cities but settle in uninhabited areas or in colonies, are allowed to

have the freedom to build churches and bell towers and to support their priests and clergy apart from convents. At the same time, everyone is warned not to lead any native Christians astray or to convince them of their faith or to try to persuade them to accept their belief or to replace his faith with fear of punishment, which is against the law. There are numerous faiths bordering our country, not counting the Mohammedans, whom we try to tolerate and guide towards a Christian religion, but they too have their freedom.

- 2) No foreigners who settle in Russia will be required to pay to the treasury any sum whatsoever nor be forced to perform any general or special services. They will not be asked to billet soldiers. In a word, everyone shall be exempt from taxes and duties as follows: namely those where many families settle in colonies in unsettled areas shall be free for ten years. Those who settle in the cities and register with the merchants or corporations, or in neighboring Lapland, Estonia, Ingeria, Karelian, or Finland or in Moscow, have five years exemption. In the remaining areas, or provinces and cities they have ten years' exemption. Those who come to stay permanently and not only for a brief stop-over have an additional half year of free board.
- 3) All possible support and provision is offered the foreign settlers who have come to Russia for the purposes of agriculture, labour, or to manufacture or to set up factories. It shall be sufficient, not only for each one's individual land requirement, but the required advances will be made but only for those that have not yet established themselves in Russia.
- 4) Our treasury shall provide for the purchase of all necessary building materials, cattle, agricultural machinery, tools for labour, and this shall be without interest for a period of ten years, and then the capital is to be repaid in 3 equal payments.
- 5) We leave it to the established colonies to form their own policies within their jurisdiction. Our authorities shall play no part in this. Aside from this, the colonists are duty bound to recognize our civil rights. In case they request administrative assistance or assistance in providing a person to provide security or defense until they become acquainted with their neighbors, or ask for the help of soldiers for purposes of discipline, this shall be provided.
- 6) We allow every permanent settler duty free imports regardless of the value or the material with the condition that this is for his own personal use only and not for sale.
- 7) Those who settle in Russia shall not, during their stay here be required to serve in either the military or the civil service against their will; as well no one shall be conscripted for land service until the free years have expired. However, anyone volunteering for military service shall be paid a regular soldier's pay at the end of his term plus thirty rubles.

- 8) As soon as the foreigners have received their entitlement and have registered at the title office and indicated their decision to move into the interior of the country, they shall be paid their food and travel expenses up to their destination.
 - 9) Should any of these foreigners build factories and manufacture wares which hitherto not been available in Russia, he will be allowed to sell and distribute his goods without paying sea-tax or border-tax.
 - 10) Foreign capitalists who build factories or other establishments at their own expense are allowed to purchase from and sell to farmers and other people.
 - 11) We also allow colonies or villages that have settled, to set up marketplaces according to their own wishes.
- VII) The above noted advantages and privileges should make not only the newly arrived happy but these privileges will continue to apply to offspring even if they are born in Russia and this advantage will continue for ten years.
 - VIII) Following the ten free years all who have settled in Russia are duty-bound to deliver their regular dues and provide their service to the country.
 - IX) Finally, if there are any settlers who should decide to leave our country, he is perfectly free to do so with the following conditions: that they are required to submit a portion of what they have earned in Russia to our national treasury; those who have lived here from one to five years must leave one-fifth, those who have lived here from five to ten years must leave one-tenth and then they can travel anywhere they wish.
 - X) If there are those who desire to settle in Russia but for some reason or other feel they have other matters, other conditions or privileges they wish to discuss, they must avail themselves, either in writing or personally, of the services of the title-offices. We will then consider all resolutions with the promise to deal justly and righteously with them.

Despite what the rumors and the printed word could bring, many curious people soon streamed forward to hear from the mouth of the authorities a confirmation of what had seemed so incredible to them until recently.

And truly, was this not the voice of the Lord who showed his children where they could go and find freedom of faith and peace for their conscience at their hour of deepest pain. Full freedom to practice their religion and the fundamental policies of their fathers. Full recognition that 'yes' or 'no' would serve in place of the oath, release from military service, etc. and at the same time have the comfort and patronage of their host country as they settled. At the same time there was the security of the future in the material sense. Anyone who would not acknowledge God under these circumstances would no longer have noticed God's all loving kindness.

2. The Election of the Deputies

Trappe's canvassing was not without success. In short order several families declared themselves prepared to accept the offer of the czarina and leave their homes to settle within the boundaries of Russia.

What may our forefathers have thought about a land of which their knowledge was so limited. They probably imagined themselves fighting off bears and wolves or perhaps other major obstacles such as the Tatars and others with whom they might be forced to contend. Such thoughts cannot have been too far from their minds despite the assurances of Trappe when they contemplated their move to the east. Naturally they knew they must get firsthand knowledge regarding this land of promise before they dared move wife and children into this area. So they requested that several men from their midst be appointed to make an inspection trip to Russia so they could look over the area and report back their findings.

With the help of Elder P. Epp, the interested parties spread the information and, of course, it reached Trappe. He had no objection to this suggestion and replied in his gentle manner: "That is great, my children. Find yourselves a couple of men to whom you can give authority. I personally have made a few acquaintances here and there. I know a man whom I could introduce to my monarch and in whom I have noticed the presence of the Spirit. It is a certain Hoepfner of the coast. Find another man, my dear children, and I will notify my ruler!" He explained to them that the deputies would be expected to have written authorization to embark on this inspection trip in order to be presented to the Russian authorities.

That was easier said than done. Next to their shortage of money there were keen signs of disapproval from the (Prussian) authorities regarding their intentions. They were not willing to approve their emigration much less provide assistance. They were not about to sign any authorization and no one on Prussian territory dared participate in an inspection trip on a personal basis. As a result, all initial efforts to come to a decision about this remained fruitless despite all their hard work. Elder Epp's efforts also were of no avail.

Then they sought help from the Russian Consul in Danzig. He recognized their desires for support and a solution to their emigration problem and he was eager to help but admitted he could do nothing until they authorized some men who could show documents confirming their mission.

Since a delay because of fear and indecision could bring no results, assistance towards the acceptance of the czarina's offer would have been almost criminal, so all these insignificant fears were put aside and despite the furrowed brow of an angry magistrate, the vote to authorize deputies was held.

In addition to Jacob Hoepfner, who had been suggested by Trappe, Johann Bartsch and Jacob von Kampen were elected. Sixty signatures were listed on the authorization document. When this document was presented to the consul, he promised them full support. "This is great, my children. I will do my part." He continued by presenting the following picture to them: "Our monarch, the gracious Catherina, is travelling to the Crimea in spring and then the deputies will hopefully be able to speak to her. We will send our petition and your authorized documents to St. Petersburg immediately." He cautioned the deputies, "Prepare yourselves for travel!"

The first decisive step had been taken. How will all this turn out? Would the uncertain future they had experienced so far now take on a definite and beautiful form? Could these happy anticipations burst all of a sudden like a soap bubble? With bated breath they awaited the royal response.

They did not have to wait long. In a relatively short time, the happy news arrived that the three selected men would be sent to Russia as "authorized Mennonites" at the expense of the Russian crown so they could select a suitable place to settle and to carry out the specific wishes of the Mennonites and lay these before the royal authorities.

What they had doubted in their hearts for so long they now saw take shape, namely, that the "great czarina from the east" was actually serious about the immigration of the Mennonites.

3. The Deputies Make Their First Trip: Choice of a Place to Settle.

Even though the choice to emigrate was a positive one for all, it brought some sad times for the deputies. They were now to leave house and home, be separated from their loved ones and travel to an unknown, partly uninhabited country. The day of their return was not known. What they might encounter on this uncharted route was known only to the Highest. The thought alone that God was alive and would guide and protect them in this strange land, was enough; in addition there was the conviction that this step had to be taken since the prospects for remaining here in Prussia and Danzig were very gloomy. And finally, there was confidence and support from those remaining behind and so energetic preparations were made for the big journey. Because of the season, it was not considered advisable to postpone their departure any further. The planned route was to take them across the East Sea to Riga. However, the approaching autumn seas could be heavy and crossings could be dangerous.

When all seemed ready, a disappointing delay occurred. The third deputy, Jacob van Kampen, withdrew from the expedition. He gave the excuse that his parents would not permit him to go. To prevent any misunderstandings, the head committee in Riga had to be notified before their departure that one of the deputies could not participate for certain reasons and that only Hoepfner and Bartsch would be coming.

Finally, the time of departure arrived. Everything possible had been prepared. Trappe, too, had done his best to prepare them for the journey. To make things more expeditious for the trip and to remove as many obstacles as possible, he provided them with an accompanying document which contained the following:

“I, the undersigned, herewith certify that I, through the guidance from His Highness Potemkin, under whose command we engage in the activities of settling 300 Mennonite families, authorize the deputies, Hoepfner and Bartsch, to inspect the unoccupied crown lands with the following conditions:

- a) To defray their living expenses during the journey as well as in Cherson until it is completed, everyone is to receive 4 Dutch Ducats or the equivalent in Russian funds, of eleven rubles which I have paid out according to the agreed terms until 19 October (Old Calendar) counting from the date of their departure.

- b) Free travel costs by water and by land, not only as far as Cherson but also the return trip next spring via Warsaw or via St. Petersburg, as His Highness will decree.
- c) Free board during the journey as well as during the stay-over in Cherson.
- d) If, in the course of the coming spring, several hundred Mennonite families should move to Russia, His Highness will graciously provide a substantial gift of grace to the deputies for their efforts.

The above named deputies will be required to report to the authorities when they reach the borders of His Highness, the princes' domain so they can be provided with the necessary guidance and direction for the inspection of the crown lands. This will lead towards the development of the unoccupied lands according to the wishes of His Royal Highness.

Tor the purposes of security for the above named men, I have personally and in my own hand completed and signed these documents.”

Dated 22 September 1786

Trappe

Russian Royal Colleague-Assessor and Authorized agent for the reception of Colonists for the Crown.

Thus prepared, these men got underway 19 October (Old Calendar) 31 October (New Calendar) with many friends and acquaintances accompanying them to the ship. Here they had to say their sad farewells to their loved ones and who can wonder when, on this occasion, hardened men wept tears of sorrow and sadness. With sincerest blessings from those who remained behind, they ascended the swaying scaffold and prepared to cross the mouth of the Duna. The captain, a Mr. Kedtel, a man of honest and sympathetic nature, attributed the emotion of these passengers to fear of travelling be sea. With simple words, he explained that God had given him the assurance of safe passage and they should not be troubled by any fear or doubts.

This simple man's staunch faith in God's help had its good effect on the low morale of the deputies. Soon joy and serenity would have returned to their hearts had not danger and consequent worries arisen. It seemed as if no faith in God could calm the released elements. But nothing happened. He who controls the winds kept His promise and allowed the ship to reach port in Riga undamaged.

Bartsch describes this voyage in a letter to his wife 11 November 1786 – Riga: “We arrived, thanks and praise to God, in Riga after 8 days of good but also terrible weather with much wind and great danger but no one was lost. We are in Riga now and have received the money promised us for our support and we will continue our travel and inspection, God willing, as soon as possible. When we will return I cannot say but you can be sure it will not be before late spring.”

Thanks to the Russian winter, whose acquaintance they now made, Hoepfner and Bartsch continued on their journey by sleigh after they had completed their business. Their objective was now Dubrowna, a nice little town in White Russia in the district of Mohilew. Here they reported

to the commander of the town, Baron von Staal, showed him their papers and requested further support.

Trappe had not advised them in detail how he had provided assurances for their reception with Baron von Staal but the baron's sociable nature served to smooth their road ahead.

Bartsch writes to his wife: "...We had not really planned to write again, but since we had such a friendly reception from Baron von Staal and since he offered to include our letters with his to Danzig, I will write what is really only important. We left Riga and arrived in Dubrowna 12 days later. We covered this distance in good health and thanks to God, we have encountered neither sickness nor need. We arrived in Dubrowna 29 November and leave for Kremenschug by courier 1 December. We expect to speak to His Highness Potemkin personally and tell him of our plans. We have received our monthly funds regularly but since the cost of living here is high we must be very careful.

Dubrowna 1 December 1786 Johann Bartsch

From Dubrowna they drove on through Kremenschug to Cherson on the Dnieper to set up winter quarters there. They were now close to their goal but despite the cold season the two men could not rest. As soon as the weather permitted they crisscrossed the area to acquaint themselves with the characteristics of the soil, the population and the general conditions in this part of the country. With the approval of the Russian government, they began to look around for a preferred locality where they might consider settling. After some serious research, testing and comparing, they finally decided on the area near the city of Berislow on the left bank of the Dnieper where the Korskaja River flows into the Dnieper near the highway that led to the Crimea. To them this seemed the most suitable area. The land was level and fruitful, much the same as they were accustomed to in Prussia. On the island of Tawan, there were plush meadows, and the river as well as the highway promised to provide the possibility of a market for their products.

4. The Meeting Between the Deputies and the Czarina and the Trip to St. Petersburg

The selection of the settlement area had been made and with this, a part of their obligation had been fulfilled. Now the second obligation was awaiting its discharge. Mutual agreements and conditions with the royal Russian crown and the petitions for the royal privileges still had to be dealt with. To accomplish this, they were obliged to make the difficult and distant trip to the (royal) residence.

So as not to waste any time, they planned to start this trip right away when the following obstacles prevented them from carrying this out; in the spring of 1787, the Czarina undertook a trip to the Crimea. This opened the way for a possible meeting with the Czarina which had been negotiated by the Russian Consul in Danzig earlier. Hoepfner and Bartsch actually experienced the honour, on May 13 in Kremenschug, to be introduced, as representatives of the Prussian

Mennonites, to cabinet minister Count Besborodko, to the Roman royal ambassador, the ambassadors of France and England and many personalities of high standing.

After they had kissed the hand of the Czarina as a reverent greeting, they addressed her majesty with the following words: “Most gracious majesty, almost 300 families and members of our faith have heard her majesty’s wise call through her kind and generous government and they have sent us out to search out serviceable areas where we can settle, firstly on the banks of the Dnieper and to humbly entreat your majesty for those rights which your majesty has assured to foreigners. We consider ourselves fortunate to see your countenance. We humble ourselves before your holy majesty, we and our brothers in faith, commend ourselves before the greatest ruler for protection and mercy.” (according to the manuscript by P. Hildebrand)

The czarina gave friendly ear to their words, assured them verbally of all concessions already mentioned and graciously dismissed them. It was her special wish that Hoepfner and Bartsch should accompany the royal retinue to the Crimea.

This special acknowledgement of the deputies went far beyond what they had expected. Our friends would have much preferred to continue on their own but they were aware that they must honour the distinction they were being shown. Only after they were on their return trip and had reached Kremenschug were they dismissed from the royal train. At the same time they received their dispatch to St. Petersburg.

Prince Potemkin initially objected to the trip to the capitol since he considered it an unnecessary expense to have another written confirmation of what her majesty had already promised foreigners and surely she would keep her word.

But when he was reminded of his mortality by the authorities and that the crown was permanent, he approved the visit to St. Petersburg. As a matter of fact, he praised the way all this was being managed, gave them some ducats and provided a letter of recommendation. The other personages of high standing who were travelling with the royal retinue also wished them well.

So these two friends did not lack obvious proof that God was helping them. Yes, the friendly cooperation they encountered on all sides motivated them anew to greater efforts and allowed them to continue their project in confidence. They wasted no time hurrying across the wide Sarmatian ‘prairies’. They fully expected to complete their journey without incident but that was not to be. Something happened at the last moment. Not far from the city, the driver suddenly swerved as the result of careless driving and the occupants were thrown from the vehicle and Hoepfner broke his leg.

Arriving in the city, Bartsch immediately sought medical assistance for his suffering friend. The hand of God led them to the right door. The attending doctor showed himself to be an expert who not only was able to lessen the pain but fixed the leg so that healing began immediately.

Those with less faith might have seen their accident as a bad omen for the future but our deputies were not so superstitious. They had experienced too much and gone too far to allow this incident to shake their faith in God.

Bartsch too had suffered a painful illness of this journey. He writes to his wife as follows: “St. Petersburg, 27 August 1787.....I am feeling much better than I did last fall when we left. Last winter I had a vexation when all my toes froze and I don’t know how that happened because I was very sick and did not really know what was happening to me. But it is all better now.”

Hoepfner recovered rapidly but some time had to elapse before his leg was better and he was able to maneuver with the boots that were in general use in the country. This resulted in an annoying delay had not the Russian court etiquette come to their aid. Everyone in the court walked around in their stocking feet. Naturally this was ideal for Hoepfner’s leg. As soon as he was able, they went to work with renewed energy.

The wishes of the Mennonites were presented to the Russian government in the following way through petitions and decisions (according to a copy):

“EXTRACT”

From His Highness, Potemkin’s Tawritscheskoy, allowing the Danziger Mennonites the confirmed privileges by Her Russian Majesty as follows:

Request 1

That they have unhindered privileges to practice their religion according to the customs and tenets of their church

Decision 1

Allowed

Request 2

Item: A) Sixty-five dessiatin for each family opposite the city of Berislaw, along the Kronskija River on the right side of the Perekop road not including the wasteland in the sixty-five dessiatin

Decision A

It will be so assigned

B) and the island of Tawan lying opposite Berislaw with its surrounding water and other islands for which there have been no plans so far, is indispensable to them because of its hay meadows.

Decision B

Only a part of this island can be assigned because the building of a bridge across the Dnieper and because of other crown activities a small part of this must remain with the crown.

C) Full authority over fishing in Dnieper and the Kronsckja waters as far as their boundaries reach and that strangers not be given these privileges in this area and within these boundaries.

Decision C

You are given the right to use the water touching on these lands as the law states.

D) Since there are no woods on the above described lands and since such is needed for firewood, we humbly ask that at least one half of these on the island off Kairo be designated for that purpose.

Decision D

A certain, not too large a quantity, will be designated.

Petition 3

A ten-year immunity from all duties and taxes is requested

Decision 3

Allowed

Petition 4

After 10 years immunity from duties and taxes, an annual payment of 15 Kopecs from each family for each Dessiatin to be made with permanent immunity from (Podwoden) billeting and civil duty.

Decision 4

This is herewith confirmed and as soon as the 10 years have expired, the crown requires 15 Kopecs for land owned and occupied by Mennonites and they are free from billeting, civil duty and (Podwoden) except when the commandos pass through; then the bridges in your area will be maintained by you.

Petition 5

That everyone be allowed to build factories and other industries in the towns and villages of Jekaterina or in the district of Taurin and to buy and sell and enter into agreements unhindered with freedom from duty and taxes and that the sale of products be allowed in the cities as well as in the villages.

Decision 5

This is allowed within the laws of the state.

Petition 6

That the contents of the royal manifest of 22 July 1763 be available for each Mennonite family that is in need, which means an advance of 500 rubles for the development of their farms and that 100 rubles be made available to them upon their arrival in Riga and that said sum be repaid in 3 equal installments upon the expiry of 10 years without interest.

Decision 6

Confirmed

Petition 7

That the assurance of freedom of religion be inviolable by you and your descendants.

Decision 7

This shall be as per your custom.

Petition 8

That they and their descendants shall be free from military service for all time since the tenets of their religion forbid absolutely the participation in military service.

Decision 8

They shall be free from conscription

Petition 9

That after their arrival from Danzig, all necessary materials for a proper house, after the German style, be supplied as well as oak lumber for 2 mills and 6 proper millstones and other material for the construction of 2 mills and that, apart from a few crown workers, they will construct the mills themselves.

Decision 9

For every family one hundred and twenty beams and the required number of beams for 2 mills and 6 millstones will be provided.

Petition 10

That each family moving to Russia receive money for their support

Decision 10

The trip and the trip expenses shall be paid for.

Petition 11

That all who arrive at the Russian border are provided with horses and vehicles up to Berislaw and that from the day of their arrival at the border up to the end of their trip they receive 25 Kopecs.

Decision 11

Horses and vehicles will be provided within limits. Concerning the money, every person over age 15 shall receive 12 Kopecs.

Petition 12

Similar to points 10 and 11 regarding the reimbursement of the paid money, they wish to be free from repaying the building material for the houses and that they do not have to repay this after the 10 years since the crown will benefit not a little from the goods that the Mennonites bring with them and they bring good craftsmen and fabricators. Through industry and agriculture, the crown will benefit beyond the costs in a short time.

Decision 12

That will depend on her royal majesty.

Petition 13

That they avail themselves of the unoccupied quarantine buildings on the other side of the river Konskija until their homes are completed and that adequate tents be provided for the construction workers and that homes be assigned in Berislaw for those remaining.

Decision 13

Homes and tents they shall have but for a limited time only and which they will be obliged to return. Quarters shall be provided for them as well.

Petition 14

That from the day of their arrival in Berislaw until the first crop is in, each person shall receive 10 Kopecs with the condition that, after 10 years it shall be repaid in 3 equal installments.

Decision 14

Allowed

Petition 15

That prompt orders be sent to Berislaw and Tauran that no wood can be cut and no cattle are to be grazed on assigned lands so that there is enough for their own use.

Decision 15

These orders will be given.

Petition 16

Should there be many other Mennonite families who decide to emigrate to Russia that they enjoy the same rights and privileges and that they be allowed to settle in the beautiful and fruitful area so graciously shown to the deputies, namely the Crimea, Feodosia, Bakschi, Ssarai and other areas they themselves may choose. And where the lands have not yet been assigned and with the condition that they are not bound to any citizenship because of the money they receive.

Decision 16

When these are sent by the same deputies, similar arrangements can be made as have been made with these.

Petition 17

That it will be graciously decided to send v. Trappe to them again with detailed instructions. It was he who convinced these Mennonites and made them willing to emigrate to Russia in the first place. He is totally familiar with all the circumstances and is in a position to remove all obstacles they might encounter or that would prevent their departure. He can give them guidance and instruction and look after their needs.

Decision 17

It will be so ordered.

Petition 18

That at their arrival in Berislaw that they are provided with a German speaking surveyor who will survey not only the whole area but partition the land for the owners.

Decision 18

It will be given to them.

Petition 19

That because of the long distance that Tauran is removed from their Fatherland, they are prevented from taking along the various seed necessary for seeding the land, they shall receive a variety of grains which they will be required to repay in time.

Decision 19

It will be given to them.

Petition 20

Finally they ask that upon their arrival in Berislaw, a strong order be given that no one is to offend them, rob them, or steal their property until they have adequately established.

Decision 20

These orders will be given.

The foregoing is a true translation from the original [from Russian to German] privileges, attested herewith and signed in my own hand and my impressed seal.

Danzig 3 March 1788

S de Sokolowsky

Accredited Charge d’Affaires in Danzig

Hoepfner and Bartsch made efforts to gain an audience with the grand duke, later Czar Petrowitsch. To achieve this, they were obliged to appear at court daily. There was a long waiting period and their courage had begun to wane, especially since negotiations with the government were also developing very slowly. Unexpectedly, they were called to a relative of the czarina, the duke of Anhalt-Zerbst and he renewed their spirits with his friendly, consoling words: "Dear children," he said among other things, "Do not let time become tedious for you. There is much to do at the court. Please come and see me anytime, unannounced when time gets heavy on your hands. I can assure you of my czarina's benevolence." Finally, one early morning hour, their patience was crowned with success. An adjutant from the castle brought the message that they were to meet the grand duke immediately.

They needed no urging. They travelled the distance to the palace in record time where they were received by von Trappe. He explained that his Highness would be appearing shortly. Many lobbyists and petitioners were already in the large hall.

For the introductory procedures they were taken into a separate room. They had barely entered when the grand duke appeared with his wife on his arm.

Both Royal Highnesses held out their hands to be kissed. The grand duke condescended to be kissed on the cheek. In the gentlest manner this royal pair spent time with the deputies and enquired into many aspects of Mennonite life and their lifestyles. In conclusion, the grand duke accepted, with friendly condescension, the Mennonite statement of faith from the deputies, which they had decorated beautifully.

"The friendliness and expression of grace and mercy that these two had received from the Russian ruling family touched them both and with complete confidence they entrusted themselves to this pair."

5. The Deputies Return Home and What Happened at Home During their Absence

Finally, the negotiations with the government were completed; the conditions were confirmed and after an eight week stop at the Royal Russian Residence, Hoepfner and Bartsch were finally able to turn their backs on this place and begin their return journey.

They did not travel alone. G. Trappe, who was named director of the emigrating Mennonites and their planned settlements, according to Petition 17, accompanied them, at first as far as Danzig where he planned to complete his work of trying to win immigrants for his country.

The small travelling group took the marsh route via Riga and Warsaw. Since the King of Poland was the Protector of Danzig at that time, it seemed in order to acquaint him with the objectives of the Mennonites. Perhaps they could depend on his protection for this project which, to all appearances, had not yet met with success.

After suffering a great deal of discomfort and dealing with many annoyances on this long and aggravating return journey, they arrived at the Russian Consulate on a Saturday just before St. Martin's day [November 11] in Langgarten, Danzig, amid crashing sounds of the post bugle and received a very friendly greeting from the Consul.

It was market day and many country residents from the surrounding area were present and among them were those who had great interest in this expedition to Russia. In awe, they saw these deputies, whom they had long ago considered lost, and the happy call went out, "Hoepfner has returned!" to all the places where the 'immigration eager' people lived.

Much had happened at home during the deputies' absence that related to the favorable conditions for a mass emigration. Since these authorized men had stayed away longer than they had anticipated and since reports from them had been very sparse, evil tongues soon got busy spreading rumors about the deputies' long absence, rumors, although untrue, were readily believed. It soon became evident that what at first was only imagined, soon became fact for many, namely Hoepfner and Bartsch had vanished and died in the Russian wilderness and a curse on anyone who still carried hope for their return.

This kind of talk naturally weakened the confidence and faith regarding the honesty and disposition of a government which apparently cared nothing about its promise to protect the deputies and to keep them safe. Perhaps Hoepfner and Bartsch anticipated something of this nature or they received some word of this because Bartsch wrote this to his wife from Riga, "Should there be some delay (in their return) and some carefree people cause some grief with their talk about our long delay, I ask you, dearest wife, seriously, do not believe every rumor, since many will talk but few will speak credibly." Riga 7 October 1787

On the other hand, we also find examples of unshakable faith. A few months before their return, six men, Hans Hamm, Kornelius Willems, Peter Regier Jacob Harder, Dietr. Isaak and Franz Barkman, as well as the unmarried Abraham Krahn came from the Prussian district to visit the relatives of the deputies and enquired if no further reports had been received from them.

At the same time, they reported that they had already disposed of most of their chattels and the things that were unsuitable for transporting and they had come with their wives and children prepared to join those who were planning to emigrate.

The reply was not especially encouraging but they ignored the pessimistic response and despite their very limited means, prepared themselves for the departure.

An opportunity to travel to Riga soon presented itself but it was far more difficult to obtain a Russian passport necessary for emigration.

As already mentioned, these families were not from Danzig so they were not directly included in Katherina's invitation. Yet they were anxious to take advantage of her offer especially since they had, so to speak, 'burnt their bridges behind them.'

Then someone had an idea that could be of practical value under these circumstances. The mayor of the village where they were temporarily staying gave them a certificate they were residents of the Danzig area and had now also decided to emigrate. No one in the village raised any objections and they wished them well. When presented with this certificate, the consul found no reason to refuse their request for a pass. The Russian Consul in Danzig, who was the Russian delegated to be in charge of these affairs, was not particular in issuing such authority and no wonder that many a 'rowdy sheep' was later found among the herd.

In the meantime, a letter arrived from the deputies from St. Petersburg advising the emigrants to provide themselves with a variety of seed grain which would have to be taken along to their new place of settlement.

This advice fanned a renewed flame of hope in their oppressed hearts. Relaxed and of good courage these above named families could now follow their plans and proceed on their way.

The voyage to Riga was uneventful but shortages occurred as soon as they got there. They had used up all the money they had brought along and the ship's captain had not been paid. Living quarters had to be found and provisions bought, What to do? There was no other way but to sell off some of their clothing and other things they could do without just to raise the money to live.

And their passes? They did them no good since they had not the vaguest idea to whom to deliver them.

But when the need is greatest, God's help is nearest. At this time, Hoepfner, Bartsch and v Trappe arrived in Riga on their return trip to Prussia. All their needs were solved. They soon found their way to the main committee, free billeting was soon found and advance funds were paid out. The faith these first emigrants had had in the Russian crown was not paying off.

6. Trappe's Continued Activities and Success

When he arrived in Danzig, Trappe continued his interrupted work with renewed energy. Hoepfner and Bartsch turned out to be excellent contacts. The gracious condescension of the Russian ruling class to the plain and simple representatives of the Mennonites, the shining prospects of the future, was the daily topic of conversation among the participating groups and this reached the most distant huts of poverty.

The deputies' reports found confirmation in the documents they had brought along. The 'Extract' laid out the feelings of the government in the clearest possible terms regarding the rights and privileges that the immigrants could expect. In addition, this royal privilege was the highest imperial assurance that was promised them, and now this was recorded on paper.

"Her Imperial Majesty's sincerest wishes of peace, to the deputies of the Mennonite Association that resides in the Danzig area, to them be it known, that when your society which has indicated its desire to settle in Russia, the following Resolution from the Lord General Duke Gregory Alexandrowitsch Potemkin Tawriczeskoy of Ekaterina, Charkow and Taurin, and Her Imperial Majesty and which was introduced to them and should satisfy them, she will sign in her own hand and impressed with the Imperial Seal. The current Senate has been notified.

7 September 1787 (from the original letter)

Signed by special order of Her Imperial Majesty
Earl Alexander v Besborodko

The foregoing transcript of the original Imperial Immennoi Ukas word by word confirmed and assured for the Mennonites immigrating to Russia

Danzig 3 March 1788

The Russian Imperial Dominion Assessor and Accredited Charge d'Affaires in Danzig
S de Sokolowsky

All the foregoing put together should have been enough to satisfy those who had their heads turned in an easterly direction, but Trappe, not completely satisfied, had a special 'entreaty' printed and distributed wherever Mennonites lived. Following is a copy of this document:

An Entreaty

The Mennonites in Imperial Russia

"Since we, the undersigned, whom her Imperial Majesty, the Russian Monarch have been asked to intercede with the gracious cabinet Resolution, called in Russian, Immennoi Ukas and which has her Imperial confirmation and contains the approval of the rights and privileges requested by the Mennonites from the Danzig area and which was drawn up by the illustrious Duke Potemkin Tawritscheskoy and who has been named the director and curator over the

planned settlement. I am fully aware of the malice, the cunning, the envy and spite that has been directed at Russia during my absence and that efforts have been made to scare, to frighten and to threaten the esteemed Mennonites. So I consider it the duty not only of my heart but my duty towards my honorable great Russian Monarch with my total devotion to appease innocent people who have already partly shown their trust to our czarina and because of this trust in the rights and privileges granted to them, have sold their property and chattels, preparing themselves for the move. I do this with sincere intentions and conscience.

Above all, I wish all alert Mennonites much health and blessing from the bottom of my heart from the Giver of everything good. I wish them this in spiritual as well as in material matters, that He provide good fortune and blessing for every undertaking according to His will. You, my dears, who resist all prejudice, evil and lies and who are desperately trying to improve your current oppressed lot by moving to Russia, know how often I have sincerely and genuinely opened my heart to you and advised you to take the whole matter to God and say, "If this is your doing, then help us to succeed; if it is the work of men, prevent us from doing it and help us to change our minds."

Since you remain steadfast in your intention of moving to Russia together with God, I believe as you do, that it is His will, that He has some hidden plans, and which He, the Almighty, will carry out for the glorification of his name and shame all adversaries. I publicly wish you good fortune in your decisions and sincerely urge all who wish to become landowners in Russia to come, to see and experience what it means, what outstanding good fortune it is to live peacefully and content under Katharina's benevolent government, the great and good mother of our country. To live 10 years free of all duties and taxes and have access to all citizens' rights and peacefully owning property with rights of inheritance of 4 Hufen of land [approximately 120 acres] which you will be presented with. Being presented with the modest sum of 39 quarter rubles is no small thing.

Two years ago, Quakers were able to move to France from the America that was liberated by France without the slightest regard for the effect this would have on France or how it related to the liberation of America; and so you may consider your choice of making Russia your Fatherland, where there is a much higher level of freedom of conscience and desired happiness for foreigners than in France. For where is there a monarch in this world who has done more for foreigners? It is the miracle of the century that Russia's wisest monarch, Katharina, the greatest, the most generous and imbibed with the greatest spirit of patience and who has been the ruler for the past unforgettable 25 years; she has done the most good and is continuing to do it.

Malicious and ungrateful people are freely and openly showing their thanklessness towards Russia with shameless countenances, unchecked and with a loud voice. You do not deserve that. And Russia's great monarch often humbled herself before them with undeserved kindness. And now they want to make it a crime that you sent your deputies to the czarina in order to try and improve your lot, to become landowners which you can never become in the Danzig area. They are a laughable lot. How quiet these incompetents would have remained if

you Mennonites had gotten to idea to take refuge with another monarch who would not have given ear to free people when they asked for their rights and privileges.

You are free people and a free person has the right and the ability to improve his condition and so have you! Who can, who will, who dares to refuse you? The restless heads in your so-called free city? Who has given them the right and the power to do that? No one. They shall not, they dare not make free men into slaves. The well-known discerning, famous French writer, Count Mirabeau, gave the King of Prussia, Frederick William, the advice to allow free emigration on a printed tract. I don't think that advice was so bad and I think if King Frederick William, the beloved, continues to be good and kind in his reign over his subjects as he has begun, no one in Prussia need fear emigration.

And so, my dear friends, that all these absurd rumors that are rampant can be laughed off, I hereby state publicly that everything in Riga is ready for your reception as directed by imperial command and that I have made preparations for you to be transported from Riga to Dubrowna in White Russia. For the time being you will stay in Riga where you will await the order from his grace, the appointed Governor-General by her Imperial Majesty, General Field-Marshal, duke of Potemkin Tawritscheskoy as to when you will leave and when you are expected to arrive at your destination. And so, my friends, you will be certain of your goal as alert and intelligent people should be. Only the crazy rabble in Danzig could say that you are being lured to Russia at great cost so that you could be robbed by the enemy. In Dubrowna, a town in White Russia, you will be under the protection of the commander, Colonel Baron von Staal, General Adjutant of Taurien. This excellent and good-hearted man with a German training is (as your delegates know well) a good friend and patron of the Mennonites and remembers you from the Seven Years' War. I give you my word that this noble, knowledgeable man, who knows that the Mennonites will do well in Russia, will look after you in all unforeseen circumstances and treat you with honesty and forthrightness.

I now ask three things of you. First, that you provide yourselves with good teachers and ministers who will look after your spiritual welfare and that you behave in a godly manner on your pilgrimage so that you can be a light unto the people and they can see your good works, and praise our Father in Heaven.

Secondly, I ask, my friends, that as much as possible you prevent 'rowdy sheep' from invading the herd. They live openly in wickedness and sin like drunkards for example. These could easily hurt and shame the Mennonites.

Thirdly, I plead that when I am absent you keep your love and faith in me and continue to believe that I am and will be a true friend and patron of all good Mennonites.

I confess I was moved to tears when you gave me a farewell and I witnessed many a moist eye in your midst. Soon, soon, as soon as my gracious monarch permits, I expect to be united with you again and to see you in good health and happy so that it can be truly said of you, "You walk in the Lord and live a godly and industrious life." I wish you the presence of God, good fortune and blessings on your journey to your planned destination and my sincerest love and affection until the day I die.

Your true friend and well-wisher

Trappe

From Her Russian Imperial Majesty, the confirmed director and curator over the Mennonite colonies.

This paternal goodwill and polished urging did not fail to achieve its objective; in large numbers the emigrating-minded came from far and near and from nearby Thorn. Since Trappe was responsible for getting this emigration flow going, he personally distributed the following invitation at the Church at Neugarten in the city district on New Year's Day, 1788:

“The respected members of the two churches in Danzig who are interested and who have signed the authority for the deputies who went to Russia, are hereby informed that these same authorities who, according to their instruction, found exceptionally fruitful land on the Dnieper River. They returned 13 May of this year well and in good spirits and they received great beneficence from his honor the Duke Potemkin Tawritscheskoi in Kremenschug in the presence of Her Majesty, the cabinet ministers, the Count Besborodko, the Roman Imperial ambassador, the emissaries from England and France and many other notable persons. They were introduced to them all and assured personally by the Russian monarch of the highest imperial protection and mercy for them and all the Mennonites from Danzig who planned to move to Russia.

Her Imperial Majesty has seen fit to confer on all Mennonites who are interested in moving to Russia not only the 65 Dessiatin [about 165 Acres] of the best farming land for every family but also her best wishes, advance funds and the most generous rights and privileges, considerations that have never been extended to any foreigners in her 25 year reign as czarina. And so all Mennonites from the Danzig district, who are still planning to take advantage of the czarina's goodwill and kindness are herewith invited to the Russian Embassy 19 January 1788 at 9:00 o'clock in the morning so that the rights and privileges can be explained to the people whose ancestors from Holland came here as free men.”

Danzig 29 December 1787

Naturally everyone obeyed this summons. A large crowd gathered in the “great hall” of the Russian Consulate. Curious and full of anxious anticipation regarding the outcome of this meeting, they envisaged all promises coming true. When the time for the meeting to end neared, an adjutant entered the room. In broken German, he asked if there were any present here who did not plan to emigrate. The answer was “no”. “Then, come my children,” he said.

With that he conducted them into another beautiful room in which they saw a life-sized portrait of the czarina. Someone who was present is said to have heard another say: “It seemed as if the czarina herself was present.”

The consul appeared in full uniform accompanied by Trappe. After a friendly greeting, they were informed in friendly terms of their kind imperial majesty and how she had regarded and respected the deputies, and that she now invited them all to her country where they would be

afforded the rights and privileges and favors that so far had never been granted to foreigners. Finally, they were earnestly admonished not to forget the Lord and to continue to walk in His ways for then, certainly everything would go well with those participating in this undertaking.

Such an appeal made a great impression on this devoted group. Now they were all one heart and soul and they parted with the best of intentions. An obvious result of this meeting was that a small group, consisting of 7 families, with Hoepfner and his family at the head, prepared for departure.

As a result of all the efforts that Hoepfner had already made concerning this project such as his loyalty to the Russian government, he was assured of the following rights and privileges:

Privileges

We, the undersigned, testify and attest herewith, that since the honorable Mennonite, Jacob Hoepfner, who, as deputy of the Mennonites that wish to emigrate to Russia, has been introduced to her Majesty, the czarina. He has been seen as having an unshakable loyalty to and dependency on Russia and has assisted in helping the Russian dominion achieve some definite advantages. We wish to recognize him for his loyal services in the following way:

1. The corn and gristmill referred to in point #9 that has been promised by the crown and which includes building material but with the condition that Hoepfner repay this within 15 years without interest according to the contents of the "Immennoi Ukas" when the mill becomes his property.
2. In addition to the 65 dessiatin each family receives, he shall receive for his own property 20 dessiatin meadow on the island of Tawan and he shall have the right to select the land.
3. The permission to brew beer and vinegar and to sell it unhindered in towns and villages.
4. The permission to set up a butcher shop and a bakery and to sell the products with the consideration that for this area, where there is continuous traffic to and from the Crimea, such service is highly desirable and so a cash advance of 800 rubles in addition to the 65 dessiatin will be given to him which he shall also repay in 15 years without interest.
5. Finally, he is assured that in consideration of his important service, his travel costs and those of his wife and children will be forgiven by imperial goodwill and favor.

We are signing this as an assurance for the Mennonite deputy, Jacob Hoepfner, in our own hand and impressed with our royal seal this 19 January 1788 at the general assembly of the Mennonites in Danzig.

George Trappe

Confirmed by her imperial majesty as director and curator of the Mennonite colonies.

S de Sokolowsky

Imperial Russia; Dominion Collegian-Assessor
Charge d'Affaires in Danzig

Aside from the added advance in point #4 of 800 rubles, he has benefitted from no other promises. He was assigned a piece of meadow at the beginning on the island of Chortitza but as the population increased, this was taken from him.

II. The Immigration

7. The Caravan to Dubrowna: A Beginning is made with Religious Concerns

The already mentioned 7 families, 50 individuals in total, now eagerly prepared themselves as the first of several caravans that would be moving to Russia. This then was the beginning of regular immigration of Prussian Mennonites from Danzig to Russia. Danzig authorities now issued the necessary papers with much less hesitancy than had first been suspected.

The reason for this change apparently, was the poverty of the first emigrants. Since no disadvantage or prejudice was experienced as a result of their leaving, they let them go unmolested.

They made their departure on the first Easter holiday (22 March 1788 New Calendar) from the village of Bohnsack by wagon. Friends had gathered very early for the last farewell. At 9:00 the caravan started to move, first as far as the church where they were accompanied by those present for the farewell. This dear old, honorable house of God was silent witness to the emotional farewells that followed. And so, they left for unknown lands and who could tell what would befall them on their journey. These travelers reached Stutthof by evening, situated on the freshwater gulf for their first night. They would continue across the frozen gulf the next day. Apparently chunks of ice had frozen together to form a bridge of sorts for them. A thaw during the night had weakened the ice considerably. As a result, quick action was taken, sleds were found and the wagons tied to them and a hasty crossing was made across the treacherous ice.

They all made it safely, but as these travelers again reached terra firma, the heavens opened up and it rained heavily without interruption for a long time. This was not a dangerous situation, but the roads became extremely heavy and muddy. They progressed very slowly. Because the days were short, it got dark relatively early and they had not reached the shelter where they had planned to spend the night. Despite the nasty weather, they had to spend the night out in the open.

That is how it continued with a variety of weather that usually accompanies March and April. Finally, after five weeks of travel along the road to Riga, they arrived in the Hansa city on the second day of Easter, Old Calendar. Here they rested for a long while. Here the tired animals as well as the worn-out travelers had to be brought back into shape.

After a four-week rest, the caravan got under way again. Their objective now was Dubrowna. They reached it on the 24 June and placed themselves under the protection of the already mentioned Baron von Staal.

This was as far as they had planned to move this year. Since Russia was at war with the Turks and the area designated for settlement by the Mennonites was not secure and at the same time for these immigrants to wait for more followers, these newly arrived immigrants were obliged to move into quarters provided by the government. It would not be until the following spring that they would see their designated settlement areas.

In the meantime new groups of Mennonites were preparing and equipping themselves to move as well. To organize the new church (remember, the Russian authorities expected to deal with only one church organization) and to elect new spiritual leaders, a fellowship meeting was held 28 July 1788 in Rosenort near Marienburg. Twenty elders, many ministers, deacons and church members participated.

However, the vote to elect deacons never took place, since from a human point of view there was no one among the immigrants who was thought to have the qualifications to provide spiritual leadership or was thought to be able to lead the group successfully. This shortage of people with the required qualifications became a concern for the authorities and they became annoyingly parsimonious about issuing visas. This resulted in a number of immigration-ready people being left behind. These later left the country secretly.

Left all to themselves they, like the first ones, began their journey confidently. No one knew at that time that it would be these unorganized church groups that would be the reason for a rift between the brethren. The seed of discontent was already there in the religious customs among the travelers. They were not members of the organized church; some belonged to the Flemish, some to the Frisian societies. The individual churches, especially these two, saw church matters in very diverse ways. They went so far that any member from one church marrying a member from the other church would result in 'shunning'.

Trappe was clear-sighted enough to be aware of the chasm that was developing among the new settlers and made efforts to tear down the wall that existed between these two groups and he tried to introduce some semblance of unity and to organize it into one church.

About this time, Trappe travelled to Amsterdam where, by now, there was considerably less disunity among the Mennonites than there had been. He motivated the clergy and the administrators of the "Amsterdam Anabaptist Church" to challenge their fellow Mennonites in Prussia that the two groups should meld without interfering with one another in Russia. Since many of the Prussian Mennonites originated in Holland, Trappe was convinced that they would not ignore this good advice coming from there.

Following is a translated version of a letter sent to them:

Amsterdam 15 May 1788

"To the beloved elders and their honorable fellow-workers and stewards of the Mennonite church outside of Danzig – we wish you all God's blessing and peace through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends and Brethren:

We have had the honor to entertain and to speak with the honorable v Trappe in our church and in our homes. He has informed us that there are a certain number of Mennonites from our church as well as from other churches who have made

their way to Cherson at the invitation of her imperial majesty so that, God willing, this may release them from their oppressed state. The honorable v. Trappe has further informed us that her imperial majesty not only allows full freedom of religious worship but has offered to erect a church for you; but at the same time her majesty would like to see the various church groups unite as one church and that there should be permission to intermarry.

As his honor understands the situation, it is still the practice in your church to impose the ban on those who marry outside your church. He has asked us if it could not be possible that these friends who are going to Cherson and wish to marry could do so without being banned or removed from the church.

This plea we could not and would not deny his lordship Trappe, especially so because we ourselves, not so long ago, were faced with the same problems.

And truly brethren, when we take into account God's infallible word, we will soon become aware that the practice of banning is far too harsh for those who have chosen a partner outside their own church. Obviously, even though these persons have their weaknesses, they may otherwise be good Christians; we are all in need of help in many ways. Should someone be separated from the church for this reason alone and denied the seal of unity as long as he or she is alive? No! We are reminded daily how incomprehensible is the love of God for all his children and so we have not dared any longer to treat our brothers so harshly and so grievously.

That the late Menno Simons would have found this acceptable during his time is quite another thing since everything else around was Catholic. Now things are far different. We believe that if Mennonites fall in love with Mennonites who have been nurtured in the same teachings, they should be free to marry.

So we pray, dear brethren, that you would consider this in the fear of the Lord. It would be a great joy to us if we could hear in the near future that this matter will be resolved according to the wishes of the members.

We close with friendly greetings and God's blessing on your church and for our brethren in Christ.

From the fellow workers and elders of the Onde Vlaamschen Doopgesinde Gemeinde in Amsterdam.

This was signed by the fellow workers and elders of the above named church; one signed himself J. E. Sepp.

The above excellently worded letter was not without its positive results. When the next group departed, the elder from the Heubuden, Cornelius Regier, strongly counselled the people to demonstrate their Christian love to their neighbor in this strange land. In hindsight, marriages between members of the different churches continued in Russia. Dubrowna was the gathering place for the arriving Mennonites. From here they were to continue forward together. When

winter set in, 228 families had gathered here. The Russian government kept its promises as far as was possible and many favors were directed towards the new arrivals.

They watched for the approach of spring in peace and unity. All quarrels were suspended and they considered themselves members of one family and with the same destiny, tied to one another with the same hopes and prospects.

But it did not remain that way for long.

All pious souls now yearned for a time of rejuvenation following their hardships and the ups and downs during their journey. The lack of spiritual leaders had become apparent already on their journey and now they wished to build themselves up through devotional exercises, but there was no one to lead them.

Finally, it was decided to appoint 'readers' until ministers could be found. After much discussion, the members Jakob Wientz, Gerhard Neufeld and Jakob Schoet were finally elected. (One was Frisian and the others Flemish) The appointees could read a sermon but they did not feel themselves called or responsible as special spiritual counsellors, nor did they feel called to conduct weddings, etc. And yet there were those in this large group who desired the holy blessing of matrimony. Only spiritual leaders could now prevent the pending unchastity and immorality by looking after the desires of those who had fallen love, and marry them. To whom does a child turn but to its mother in times of trouble and depression? Our friends turned to their mother church in Prussia with their letters containing pleas for someone to come and provide stability and steadfastness within this group and that they should not be left without a leader.

The response was not long in coming yet this response was not what they had hoped for. The ministerial said that it would be next to impossible to organize the church successfully before they reached their destination. Added to this was the high cost of sending an elder after the group. Taking all this into consideration, the ministerial advised the brethren in Dubrowna to have laymen read services on Sunday, especially those of Jakob Kroeker, for the time being.

That is how the situation remained but the number of couples waiting to get married had risen to 12. Then a meeting of the brotherhood commissioned Jakob Schoet and Bernhard Penner to write to Prussia and explain the local situation in greater detail and ask for help. The call went out to Peter Epp from the city district who had been an active proponent of emigration. "Come and help us," the letter said. To cover his travel costs, 100 ducats were voluntarily enclosed in the letter.

This letter resulted in another meeting of the elders and leaders in Tiegerfeld. Elder Gerhard Wiebe relayed the results of this meeting to the immigrants. Hoepfner and a certain Peter Albrecht were to conduct an election for the leaders; confirmation of the elected individuals would take place from Prussia by letter.

That was good news and in peace and unity the Flemish and Frisians prepared for an election. It almost seemed as if the wishes of the government, that there should be only one church in the south, might come true.

At this meeting, 12 minister candidates were nominated. Jacob Wiens with 40 votes, Gerhard Neufeld with 22, Bernhard Penner 4, Jakob Schoet 12, David Giesbrecht 6, Johann

Wiebe 2, etc., etc. The verified ballots were forwarded to the home church and they decided on Jacob Wiens, Gerhard Neufeld, Bernhard Penner and David Giesbrecht. The last two were confirmed by lot. Confirmation followed immediately. The first deacons were Cornelius Friesen and Peter Dyck.

So now they had ministers but no elders (bishops) who could officiate at communions. This emergency could have been solved by another election but according to old Mennonite custom, a bishop could be confirmed only by another bishop. This was not possible here because no bishop had come along with immigrants from Prussia. And now the first symptoms of a split showed themselves. During the election of the ministers apparently everything had gone smoothly, but a lame duck followed.

Many of the Frisians who had maintained a reserved position regarding the melding of the two groups now began to resist. They maintained not enough consideration had been given, during the election of the ministers, to the candidates from the Frisian side. Others, including Bartsch, had quietly joined the Flemish church, which was by far in the majority in numbers.

A variety of rifts occurred now and gradually the rift between the two sister churches, which was thought to have been resolved earlier, grew. A new call for help went out to Prussia. With greater urgency than ever, Peter Epp was urged to go there; perhaps this discord, this dissension could still be nipped in the bud.

Peter Epp could not resist this repeated request. Despite his poor health, he decided, with the blessings of his church, to embark on this long and hazardous journey. But He who governs all things had decided otherwise; before Epp could embark on his journey, he died.

They were deeply saddened by this news in Dubrowna. They had so looked forward to having this kind man in their midst. The possibility of participating in communion was postponed indefinitely, and the weeds of dissent continued to flourish.

8. Continuing the Journey: Chortitza for the First Time

Already at the beginning of the journey, it had been decided that 6 men would be sent from Dubrowna once they had arrived at the place of the planned settlement, to receive the lumber that had been promised to them by the crown. The lumber was to be floated down the Dnieper slowly and arranged in such a way as to meet the immigrants upon their arrival.

Three weeks before Easter 1789, when weather and roads still did not allow their departure, the appointed men made their way to Kremenschug under Hoepfner's leadership. Peter Hildebrand, [who later became] the Frisian minister, joined the group.

Although there was still quite a lot of snow, the melting snow made travel by sleigh difficult. They made the decision to travel by wagon; but they had made a mistake. The snow

did not melt very fast and sudden changes in the weather covered the roads with snow again. Naturally travel by wagon fully loaded was cumbersome.

But our pioneers were equal to the task and soon sleighs were found to substitute for the wagons. They transferred the wagons with the supplies onto the sleighs and were able to continue their way to Orschen quite a bit faster and with less effort. (The names of locations are taken exactly from the Hildebrandt manuscript.)

The trip was, however, not comfortable nor attractive. Alternating rain and frost made travelling through the valleys and ravines dangerous.

Following a brief rest in the aforementioned place, they continued despite wind and weather. Spring and winter were fighting for supremacy. Rain and snow alternated like the images in a kaleidoscope. The roads could not improve under these conditions. They were so muddy there was danger of getting bogged down and the roads were covered with water and ice. At times it looked like a lake all around them and frequently a wagon would break through the ice. At first, these were scary experiences but in time these travelers got used to such interruptions and stoically they raised the sleds out of the mud holes time and again.

That was a trip that our friends from Prussia had not experienced before. They saw the dark grey clouds hanging from the sky which gave the whole scene an unfriendly outlook, and we should not wonder that their first impression of this land of promise was not the best.

Towns and villages were far and in between. There, in this sparsely populated area at Meilow, they were obliged to refill their bread sacks. They agreed amongst themselves that for the time being they would not continue with their travels. They would await better weather and drier roads here at Welikowerst, three and a half Werst from Tschernigow.

At any rate, the beautiful spring days could not stay away forever and finally all these irritations went away and as spring unfolded the travelers again resumed their journey.

The spring thaws, however, created many delays because of high water levels and spring run-offs. In the Tschernigow area, spring floods were 5 to 6 feet deep. It was fortunate that this road served the theatre of war and tremendous efforts were required to transport troops across these flooded areas.

It is impossible to say how long our people would have had to wait because of the mass requirements of the military, had God not provided special dispensation. Hoepfner had made some acquaintances among the officers at the time of his visit with Duke Potemkin and providentially, he met one of these here. Thanks to this officer and his men, they soon crossed the 9 Werst [?? km or ?? miles] stretch of flood water.

Then they found themselves in a more cultivated area. Green fields and meadows and large, beautiful villages came into view where they noticed orchards beginning to bud. This together with the blue sky and singing birds soon had them in love with this area. From Nischen to Kremenschug the road was lined with birches on both sides and their journey here could in no way compare to the roads on which they had travelled earlier. Now all the dissatisfaction disappeared like a fog before a warm sun. Happy and full of vigour, they reached Kremenschug.

The lumber had not arrived.

As soon as Duke Potemkin became aware of Hoepfner's presence in Kremenschug, he summoned Hoepfner to his place to discuss an important matter with him. The duke now felt the 'Wusche-Krimski' Plan (near Berislow) was no longer secure enough for settlement because of the war with Turkey, so he suggested the historically well-known area of Retschka Chortitza to them for an alternative area for settlement. This was located about 70 Werst from Jekatherinoslaw. No opportunity for discussion was provided to the deputies and the duke advised them to go there without delay and inspect the newly suggested area, and report back to him.

This was a disappointing turn of events. The area first selected by the deputies had met the wishes of his people so fully that it was almost unthinkable now to consider another place to settle.

But what could they do? His honour had given an order and the Mennonites could do little but obey.

Let's leave Hoepfner to his new inspection trip while we take another look at the remaining immigrants. When the roads became passable again in spring, the whole group left their winter quarters in Dubrowna and began their journey to their new settlement. Many drove wagons which they had purchased with their scarce support funds. They also took along other members of their group who had no wagons. The rest was shipped down the Dnieper on boats. Only the well-to-do took all their belongings with them on the wagons. Most had packed their things in chests and boxes already in Danzig and left them with the Russian Consul to be forwarded. The Consul then forwarded them by ship to Riga, then down the Dnieper by Podwodden and finally to Kremenschug by barge to Jekatharinoslaw.

Four weeks after the arrival of the 'seven' who had gone before, all the rest also arrived in Kremenschug. Those who went down the Dnieper on boats were taken on to Jekatharinoslaw whereas Hoepfner's party decided to wait until they had inspected the area.

When the long awaited deputy again arrived in town, Potemkin had already left for Alepoll. Hoepfner had to follow him. Three weeks he stayed away. And the Duke had not changed his mind; the Mennonites would settle in the Chortitza area.

At the same time that the Mennonites left Prussia, 90 Lutheran families from the area around Danzig had emigrated to Russia. They also reached Kremenschug and they settled in the Nowomoskow area. Their head colony became known as Josephthal.

On to Chortitza was now the choice of our members. Only a few days separated them now from the sod they were soon to call home. What a variety of opinions and expectations there must have been regarding their new surroundings, their new homes. This much is certain: Many hoped for an Eldorado, a land of milk and honey. We shall soon see what their hopes turned out to be in reality.

III. The Settlement.

9. The New Settlement: A More Detailed Picture

In July 1789, the first group of immigrants reached their destination, the modest Chortitzer valley through which the Dnieper had flowed from time immemorial. Although their first positive impressions were gradually dissipating, yet they were astounded when they descended the last hill. A long wide valley locked in by high hills met their eyes. However, at the bottom of the hill, they were met with a sorry sight. They saw a primitive, uncultivated area of abandoned huts, ruins and debris with only 3 or 4 habitable old cottages still standing. There was no sign of life, no trees, no shrubs; who would not have felt fear and loneliness at such a time?

More than the loneliness, many feared the nature of the terrain. They could not believe their eyes. In such a pit as this they, the children of the lowlands, were to live and feel at home? These hills were to be productive? Here they were expected to prosper and grow? How great the disappointment must have been for these people who were accustomed to plowing in the marshes of the lowlands. Then there were those who depended on others for support on how to farm, especially those who had never used a plow before.

What a disappointment! So this was the promised land for which they had torn themselves away from home and friends with heavy hearts and along long and difficult roads. These then were the rich soils the deputies and praised to them. It was enough to inflame their whole being. The deputies had tricked and betrayed them and the ones responsible for the sorry mess they were in. They would be held to account; these thieves would find out what it meant to take people into the wilderness where they were left to starve.

The excited crowd could hardly wait for Hoepfner to return from his trip and use him as the individual on whom to vent their indignation. An eye witness relates; "When they became aware of the approach of the deputies, a band on horseback met them and rudely asked: 'Is this the area where we are supposed to settle?' 'Yes,' was the reply." There was no time to analyze the facts. Immediately a storm of abuse and invectives exploded that defies description. The negative element that had been concealed until now, like a snake among flowers, now began its work.

Then the level-headed and the peaceable ones interrupted the waves of anger. They suggested everyone take another good look at the area and research it a little better before going off half-cocked. The suggestion was accepted and many went to look. Most returned with a look of satisfaction on their faces. One Mr. Anton Klassen made the following remark: "This land is equal to any land in Prussia that has a value of 800 Gulden per Morgen [One Morgen was 41 Acres]. And here we should not be able to make our living? If the Lord blesses the time and the land we should certainly settle here. I can think of no better land."

Such judgement from a respected man stopped the rantings for the time being and gave new hope and courage to the doubters. So far things would not have been too serious had it not

been for a strange series of events that again released the specters of discontent. The immigrants' belongings which had been left with the authorities to be forwarded, had arrived. When these people began to unpack with joyous anticipation expecting to put their pots and pans and other personal belongings to immediate use, they found, to their dismay, that they had been robbed and the chests and boxes had been repacked with rocks and stones that were completely worthless. The few items that made it to the owners were spoiled in the wet holds of the boats on which they arrived and now totally useless.

There was great consternation. With the exception of the few who had taken their goods along with them on the wagons, they were now completely robbed of everything. And what was the result of all this? Those who did not possess enough moral strength to accept this disappointment with composure were pushed to the edge of despair, distraction and depression, or else they gave themselves over to indignation, resentment and discontent.

Then came another period of untimely weather. The August sky brought one heavy downpour after another. Since only a few of the huts they found near Chortitz were habitable, most immigrants were now forced to live in makeshift tents or in their covered wagons. Understandably, the rain and the chill had the most adverse effects on the health of these homeless people. It resulted in a wave of dysentery which, because of the absence of medical help, took away many a young and old person.

To prevent further sacrifices to the weather, they took matters in hand in earnest and built sod huts (Szemplanki) so that people could be brought under shelter. This was outside Chortitza where the present colony of Neuendorf is situated. Others tried to improvise shelter on the mountainside called 'Schweinskopf' [hogshead] because the mountain resembles the head of a pig in the corner where the Dnieper and Chortitzer meet. The two deputies moved on to the island of Chortitza taking several families with them and where Hoepfner, with his extraordinary energy, had built a house. He had selected a spot called 'Kirschengarten' [Cherry garden], a plantation of the duke of Potemkin. Most of his fellow travelers did not possess that amount of energy and were satisfied to build temporary little sod houses even though they were poorly constructed and gave little protection against wind and weather. The discontented could not be persuaded to build for themselves. Some of these people wanted different land and felt this could be obtained through a show of discontent and spite.

We are, however, not yet through listing the harmful effects upon the settlement. Many thieves lived in the area. They brazenly stole the few things the settlers had left. It was almost impossible to protect their horses from the thieves. One after another, they disappeared. When the lumber that was floated down the Dnieper on large floats by the authorities for the settlers arrived at Zarska Pristanj, the free-booters just helped themselves.

In large groups, they came by night, drove the night watchmen away by throwing rocks at them, took the lumber they wanted and leisurely moved downstream with their

loot. Pulling the lumber on to dry land helped to secure it but with the shortage of horses and the existing discord among the settlers, it was slow work.

Finally, even the most careless and indolent ones came to their senses. With united effort they brought the lumber ashore and made it impossible for the thieves to steal it.

Naturally, such a situation did not create much of an improvement in the relationship among the immigrants. The poison of dissatisfaction continued to spread and also infected the disposition of others.

When a human being sets his mind to something, it is difficult to change it. The prejudice against the deputies continued. Time and again the deputies were forced to bear the brunt of the complaints directed against them by the malcontents.

Despite all that happened, many had forgotten that winter was near. But it arrived with its precursors and it found many settlers still without shelter. Had it not been for the foresight of the government, they would have perished. They still lived in their tents, wagons and sod huts.

As a mother has compassion for her children and guides them on the way toward improvements, so the Russian authorities looked after those of our people who were now in a critical position. Some of them were brought under shelter in the village of Wolachsky near Jekatherinoslaw and the others were taken in by commander Schwartz in a garrison near Alexandrowsk. They received flour, corn and salt from the crown storage of the military.

The sensible and peaceful of the settlers thankfully acknowledged these acts of kindness; the imprudent ones however felt that here was proof that the others had already given in and acknowledged that they should have a better place to settle.

The cold winter days continued. The spring of 1790 arrived and with it the strict order to get settled without delay and to lay out the villages. Like a stream of cold water, this command cooled the heated dispositions and destroyed all their illusions. Here was no excuse. They could go neither left nor right; they had to obey.

Under the leadership of the two deputies, the villages of Chortitz, Rosenthal, the island of Chortitz, Einlage, Kronsweide, Neuenburg, Neuendorf, and Schoenhorst were started. Bartsch settled in the village of Rosenthal. Here he received a plot of land as a reward for his services from the immigrants. This plot of land was situated at the end of the village Kanzerowka where wild roses grew in profusion and the colony adopted the name Rosenthal.

Hoepfner remained on the island. The settlers built their homes here a certain distance apart so that, like in Prussia, everyone lived in the middle of his plot of land. "They had barely arranged and built their homes in this way when they realized the need to live closer together for security reasons. They did not feel safe from the robbers in the surrounding areas where not only their property but their lives were at stake as the following incident will describe: Hoepfner who was considered to be rich, was just

returning from a business trip in Chortitza one dark and cloudy evening with two of his companions. Arriving at his home, he wondered why no one was about. It was raining hard and a flash of lightning revealed for a brief moment, the situation before him. He saw a murderer pointing a weapon at him. If the firing pin had not been too wet to go off, Hoepfner would not have survived. "Defend yourselves," he shouted to his companions but a blow on his arm from the stock of a gun incapacitated him. Hoepfner and one of his companions were overpowered, muzzled, and tied up. The third companion, by the name of Hildebrand, got away."

Already during the day, the robbers had bound everyone in the household and ransacked the whole place intent on finding hidden money. Not finding any, they awaited Hoepfner with the hope of finding it on his person. They had stolen Hoepfner's guns (Hoepfner was a great hunter) which they used to overpower Hoepfner and his companion. Hildebrand ran to the watchman's hut where an old veteran was on duty. From there, Hildebrand ran to the other settlers to find help.

The old veteran immediately went into action, ran into the nearby woods and shouted loudly, "I am your protection." This frightened the robbers and since they became aware that one of the men had escaped, they knew help would soon arrive, they grabbed a few things and took off leaving behind the 14 rubles they had found earlier. (This was a report by a Mr. Peters, a member of the guardianship committee.)

As a result of this incident, the settlers arranged themselves in more closely situated homes which still exist today.

So now the building of homes should begin but money was very scarce. There was enough wood in the trees of the forest, but this all had to be prepared into the necessary lumber before they could start building. The promised support money (500 rubles per family) which was to assist in the building of the homesteads, came in very slowly. Had peace and tranquility prevailed among the Mennonites, they could have managed but the saner ones could do little to change or influence a reform of the situation.

Hoepfner's home was the cause of further strife. Some of the individuals accused him of having used some of the money that was to have been passed on to and shared with the settlers. The accusation received credibility and Hoepfner was reported to the commandant of the garrison. At the request of Commandant Schwarz, the vice-governor was called in to deal with the matter and he led a strong investigation into the whole affair. The deputies were found innocent and immediately the authorities directed their anger at the instigators and vowed to punish them. When they were finally found, despite Hoepfner's plea to the authorities for leniency on behalf of these wrongdoers, their hatred for Hoepfner grew. Hoepfner had asked that they be placed on probation and given the opportunity to acknowledge their wrongs. By now, the discord was so intense that putting aside these envies and rifts belonged to the realm of the impossibility.

But hate and anger generates no money. Under the impression that Bartsch and

Hoepfner could obtain some money from the authorities, they were begged to try and increase the financial support from the government. The deputies resisted but they tried. When they were unsuccessful in getting more funds, derision and scorn grew.

The desire for different land still lingered with some individuals. Finally some men embarked on a search for their fantasy land, land that obviously was not available within the boundaries of Russia.

Naturally they returned without success, and now they wanted to catch up with what the others had already done, such as building and cultivating. They had lost much time when they returned from their trip and as a result, their farms suffered for a long time as a result of these self-imposed wounds.

More colonies became organized as a result of increased immigration from Prussia and partly by people leaving overcrowded villages. In 1797, a new group of 118 families arrived here. They all belonged to the Frisian group and they founded two new villages, Schoenwiese near Alexandrowsk and Kronsgarten in the vicinity of Jekatherinoslaw.

A shortage of land suitable for settlement developed so the government solved this by buying a significant plot of land from the nobleman, Miklaschewski. On this land, the first villages founded were Burwalde and Nieder Chortitza. The first settlers consisted of 66 families who had moved to Russia earlier. The new arrivals built Kronsthal in 1809 and a sister colony, New Osterwick,, was built in 1812. At the beginning, there were only 20 families who lived there but later more arrived from Neuendorf and eventually New Osterwick became one of the largest colonies in the area. Schoeneberg followed in 1816 with 14 families who all came from the village of Lower Chortitz. The first completion of a village was made by Rosengart with 22 families, Blumengart with 14 families and Neuhorst with 12 families. These were all original settlers in 1824.

In 1833, the largest number settled in Kronsweide in a new area 4 Werst from the original stopping off area. That was the beginning of the village of Neukronsweide. Only 6 yards and several small businesses remained at the original place.

The Chortitza Colony today, 1889, consists of 32514.6 Dessiatin arable and 4739.1 Dessiatin unusable land.

IV. The Gradual Development of the Local Conditions

10. Church Organization and Spiritual Leadership

A. The Flemish, now the Chortitzer Church, could obviously not develop properly under the current disorders within the settlement in regard to its religious life. So, a successful maturing of the church organization could not be expected right from the beginning.

This is not to claim that all the fear of God was no longer evident in their intellectual development. There were still those who did not worship the gods of jealousy, malice, anger and discord but walked in the way of truth. But the sourdough existed that could bring all this back to life.

The church still had no elder, spiritual counsel or leader. Since no authority from Prussia would or could come to assist in the elections and ordinations, they finally took things in their own hands. A fellowship meeting in Chortitz in 1790 authorized Bernhard Penner as bishop, and the confirmation and ordination was completed by letter from Prussia. Penner lived in Neuendorf.

Because of the shortage of accommodation in this area, the first members congregated in an old abandoned mill. It stood where later the first church was built. (The manufacturing plant for agricultural machinery was located quite near.) Later, when the owner planned to dismantle the mill and move it, the desire and need for a prayer house became apparent and soon they began to speak of building a church. Thanks to the cooperation of Director von Essen, this project was approached with unity of purpose. It was decided that every settler would contribute a suitable piece of lumber for the church building and in due time pay 5 rubles as an advance. All this was agreed upon and the church building was begun. Only those who still raved about a different settlement area were dissatisfied.

The short-term influence of the first elder in the development of the church conditions was of little consequence. His failing health and strength prevented him from being very helpful in the development of the church. When his health continued to deteriorate, he asked for an assistant elder. The nomination went to a young 25-year-old member of the church by the name of Johann Wiebe who had not yet been called to the ministry. It was true that young energy was needed to carry the spiritual load that lay ahead, but Wiebe felt he did not possess sufficient strength, faith and courage to stand as a 'rock of peace' in the midst of all the wild dissatisfaction and waves of discontent.

As the elder saw his end approaching, he wrote a pastoral letter to the church dated 5 June 1791 in which he called upon them to again elect an elder and have him confirmed by the mother church by letter as previously. This letter of the elder was to be viewed by the church as his testament. He died 29 July 1791 leaving the church orphaned again.

Now Wiebe appeared to be inclined to heed the call to serve if another elder could be elected with whom he could share these responsibilities. The new nomination fell to 'OHM', David Epp, a man in his forties. In the face of these imposing responsibilities, he too resisted the

call but his faith in the Lord and pressure from the church caused him to relent and accept the nomination.

Now there were many in the church who desired that the two newly elected elders travel to Prussia at the church's cost and receive their confirmation and ordination there. Soon, however, voices were heard who opposed this so the church leadership, in order to get the feeling of the church membership, circulated a letter asking for the signature of those in favour.

This document showed 112 signatures. In the margin of the document, however, the following ambiguous note was appended: "Since, after closer examination Ohm Johann Wiebe has declared himself unqualified to become elder, immediately Ohm David Epp has indicated that he is not prepared to embark on this trip at this time. For that reason, we, the brethren of this village, consider it unnecessary to sign this letter before these two men accept their positions – Rosenthal"

This letter turned the scales. Nothing came of the trip despite Wiebe finally agreeing to accept the functions of an elder. Confirmation of both elders was now postponed indefinitely.

Now that two respected men were at the helm of the church, it could be expected that soon all misunderstandings would be resolved. But that did not happen. The elders, together with the church leadership, could do little to bring about peace and order. The reason for failure was that discord existed between the church members and the two deputies. The two deputies had been brought before the authorities for official instruction which resulted in open opposition. In the heat of this disagreement, one as well as the other, sinned grievously and often forgot the personal as well as the official responsibility they had for each other. The church suffered unspeakably. Even the church became divided in this matter and squabbles were the order of the day. In addition to all this dissension that already infected the church, a new twist was added.

Many of the opposing church members were no longer ready to accept elder D. Epp as their church elder after Wiebe had decided to accept the post, a new reason to take offence. In addition, these consuming flames were stirred by the directors for selfish reasons.

Finally, several church members took legal action before the governor where they accused the church leadership with the misuse of 1129 rubles of the colony's money. Another complaint went out to Prussia to the mother church signed by 18 persons, including the deputies and then the discontent reached its climax. Now it was obvious that a change had to occur, either in the direction of a renewal of spiritual life or spiritual ruin could result. And it did happen. Another appeal was sent to Prussia to their church for them to send suitable men who could analyze the situation in an unbiased manner and that they could then find an approach that would make reconciliation possible.

In the fall of 1793, elder Johann Wiebe, in the company of a Jacob von Barga, went to Prussia. A letter from the church leadership supported this move which was then later also crowned with success. Cornelius Regier, elder at the church in Heubuden in West Prussia and Cornelius Warkentin, a minister of the Rosenort church at Elbing, were commissioned to find a solution to the quarrels among the Chortitz brethren. The two brethren made their tedious way to Chortitz, not an easy trip for the 52-year-old elder.

18 April 1794 on Good Friday evening, the small party reached colony Neuedorf. Mrs. Amalie Brons reflects on their arrival: From all the homes, people came to see the ‘Ohms’ when their arrival was announced. Everyone pressed forward to greet these well-known men from Prussia. “We were moved to tears,” reads a letter C. Warkentin wrote to elder D. Thiessen in Prussia, “when so many pushed forward at our wagon with tears of happiness. Even the blind Abraham Wiebe was there.”

A few days later, the new arrivals went to Chortitz. Warkentin greeted the church members with a sermon. At the conclusion, all brethren were invited to a meeting in the church on the last Easter holiday to deal with the problem of peace.

Many attended this meeting on the designated day. Elder C. Regier led the discussion with an introduction based on Acts 10:36-38 following which he spoke on verse 29 of the same chapter. Apparently, the testimony their church had sent along was also read here:

“We, the undersigned elders, ministers, deacons of the G:G [Gottes Gemeinde] at Danzig wish our dear church at Chortitz many blessings of peace and the love of God, our Heavenly Father and our Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

In addition to our heartfelt wishes, we want to report that we received the document signed by 19 brethren dated 3 September 1793. Our hearts were moved to hear the sad situation of our church and at the same time, we are glad that you have kept faith in us. You have described the situation to us vividly as it currently exists. You have also earnestly and sincerely appealed to us, an appeal that is supported by Ohm David Epp and Ohm Gerhard Neufeld, to share with you some good counsel which we would gladly have done had it not been for the following circumstances that prevented us. Firstly, no quarrel can be solved unless both sides are heard. So we called on Ohm David Epp as the responsible person but since this was very remote and far removed we turned to our co-elder Ohm Gerhard Wiebe to put something together for us in writing but bad roads and poor weather interfered with this. On the heels of this, your dear elder Ohm Johann Wiebe and brother Jacob von Bargen came to see our co-elder Ohm Gerhard Wiebe and earnestly pleaded with him to send you a couple of men from your church leadership (as you also requested in your letter.) But before we replied we wanted to know if they had received your request.

We held four meetings concerning this matter and time went on. Finally, our love for you won out. Our 2 co-workers, Ohm Cornelius Regier, elder, and Ohm Cornelius Warkentin decided to undertake this long trip and we wish them our blessing and good luck.

These, dear brethren, are the real reasons why we postponed our reply until now. And since we have now given a full report about your writing to our co-workers, we ask you to throw your full support behind these workers and follow their advice. It is our hope that you will become convinced, as we are, that Christ-minded, clever and righteous men fear God and are concerned about the welfare of your church. We also hope it is your sincere desire next to prayer and pleading to God, that every effort be made to restore peace and order.

Consider yourselves fortunate, dear brethren that these men are coming to you and be thankful, loving and respectful of these dear, worthy men. But do not forget God as the

giver of all good things and to pray for His support. We will pray for you so that this important undertaking may be successful and that you may be a light shining for the Lord. We pray this with all our heart as we commit you to the lord.

We remain yours in mercy and love.

E.L.D.W.d & Schw. Br. in Herrn

Cornelius Epp	Jacob De Veer, elder
Jacob Krocker	Peter Tiessen
Jacob Bartsch	Hans Momber
Gerhard Fast	Gerdt Bachdach
Cornelius Focking	Joh. Kaurenhagen
Daniel de Veer”	

All the elders, ministers and the church members prepared to submit to the two visiting brethren. This expedited the discussions and resulted in good progress and concluded with a general reconciliation. Apparently, a special discussion took place between the deputies and the church leadership in the presence of the directors. The result of the reconciliation was drawn up in the following manner:

“the letter of reconciliation as concluded by our Flemish church in Chortitz”

Under elder David Epp’s rule, a number of disagreeable and unpleasant things occurred that resulted in envy, hate, quarrels and disputes within the church, and a letter signed by several brethren in which they made the rudest remarks against the church as well as against elder David Epp. They went so far as to separate them from the church, and this affected us all deeply. We appealed to the church in Prussia through our respected elder Johann Wiebe and Jacob Barga by letter, that an experienced elder should come to help us find unity, and to investigate our disagreements and under what circumstances reconciliation could be reached. Elder Cornelius Regier and Cornelius Warkentin went on this long and tedious journey to deal with this matter of reconciliation and they reached our church in Chortitz 18 April 1794 creating great joy. The church members were called to a meeting for the purpose of making a close examination of this matter in the presence of these respected men. The new unity was expressed as follows:

1. The 18 brethren who signed the letter admitted they were wrong.
2. Since Heinrich Klassen, Anton and Jacob Hoepfner, Johann Sawatsky and Franz Bergman were unable to prove that our church minister had the 1129 rubles, of which they were accused in a letter to the governor, they acknowledged they were wrong.
3. It has also been found that a respected minister and the church erred in a number of cases and for that reason the respected minister and the church acknowledge they were wrong. It has also been found that wrongs were committed by both parties. Now, through the grace of God and the help of these two respected men, all errors have been laid aside and replaced with unity and love. It is confirmed that no one from either party shall be a

detriment to this unity. Whoever acts contrary to this shall be dealt with as a criminal and a disturber of the peace.

4. It has been established and confirmed that the 600 rubles that were returned from Prussia shall be applied to the general use of the church as well as to the ministers in Dubrowna as it has been the practice in Prussia.

As it happened in the church in Chortitz June 1794

Cornelius Regier
Cornelius Warkentin
Baron Joh v Brackel

The two brethren from Prussia worked hard to eradicate the seeds of dissension and to put an end to the sorry plight within the church. Regier performed the rites of baptism for 31 baptism candidates. In the midst of these duties, he became ill. Apparently the rigours of the journey as well as the strain imposed by his reconciliation duties drained his energies and he ended up sick in bed.

Far from home, from wife and children, must have made it doubly difficult for him. Indeed, brotherly love did what was possible to ease the suffering, but it was in vain. It soon became apparent that death could not be far away, but he was fully aware that his responsibility had not yet ended. With his last energy, he confirmed his co-worker, the reverend C. Warkentin, as elder, so that he would have the authority to complete the work which he was to leave behind.

And so, this loyal soldier of Christ was called from his post after a twenty-day illness on June 16, 1794 (old calendar) to receive his just rewards from the Lord.

He is buried in the cemetery at Chortitz. A simple, yet decent headstone identifies his place of rest today, this man who contributed so much to the cause of peace in our church. Deep love and gratitude followed him to the grave.

Warkentin continued the interrupted work. He was able to confirm both elders Epp and Wiebe and contributed significant services to the Frisian (Kronsweide) church and finally returned home with the blessings of both churches. Elder D. Epp and minister Gerhard Willems accompanied him as far as Wischinka [the Hutterite community].

Now everything was to be in the past, forgotten and forgiven. For a long time, this actually seemed to be the case. Everything appeared to be working smoothly. Unity was clearly evident and the future looked promising. Unfortunately, ominous clouds soon appeared on the horizon darkening the optimism that had been so apparent here.

Who can tell with certainty where the first offences originated? The reconciled church again split into two camps: the church leadership and the deputies! The old weapons were again dusted off and the old confrontations began with renewed bitterness.

To distinguish between the guilty and the innocent is not our purpose here and proof from both parties is too sketchy for anyone to come to a definite conclusion. Who was right and who

was wrong, we do not know but the fact remains that the two deputies were barred from the church and Hoepfner was accused before the reigning senate?

Bartsch begged for forgiveness and was reinstated as member of the church. At first Hoepfner could not find the proper words. When he finally decided to ask for forgiveness the authorities had set things in motion and the order was given that he was to be excluded from the colony and to be imprisoned, that his property was to be disposed of by auction and the money used to repay the advances he had received from the government. Hoepfner was arrested and jailed in Jekatherinoslaw.

The day of the public auction arrived. Thanks to some of the church brethren, the auction was sufficiently publicized to attract a number of well-to-do noblemen with the result that most of the items sold for handsome prices. This need not have happened if the colonists had stood together as buyers. Many gave something back to the family but despite that, the Hoepfner family now stood destitute, deprived of its provider; it was a sorry sight.

Within the year, Czar Paul died. Alexander I mounted the throne of his father. This event meant an amnesty for many and our deputy also benefitted. He was set free.

In the meantime, much of the anger against him had cooled and now there was really no obstacle for Hoepfner's reinstatement as a church member or as a member of their society, had he desired this. But his reinstatement did not take place. His feelings regarding his experiences were still too fresh in his memory and he still rebelled against the reprimands he had received. He was not about to beg for forgiveness of his adversaries. Instead, he registered as a citizen in the city of Alexanderowsk and became a member of the Frisian church.

Now he retreated from all public functions. At first, he lived with the nobleman Miklaschewski. Finally, he lived for many years with his family in his own house on his own property in peace and tranquility.

While Bartsch withdrew from public life, living in deep melancholy, Hoepfner recovered his former spirits. His wish to be buried on his own property was acceded to.

His lonely grave can still be seen on the island. If you should visit this place, O reader, please give this man of the past a moment of your time to thank him. The service that he has rendered the Mennonites during that first immigration as well as during the founding of the villages was much greater than we have admitted. So why don't we remove the veil of the past concerning his errors, the errors which partly had their origins as a result of the anger, spite and hate of his fellow church members. Let us remember him for the sake of his children and children's children.

And all the rest, all those who took part in the unrest, are long asleep in their graves and the grass grows over their moldering bodies. We shall let them sleep in peace and with them the reasons and results of the discord and disunity that embittered their lives and caused great harm to the material development of their church and also to their religious life. Both the guilty and the innocent have found their judge. That disunity should help the present generation to avoid the same path and similar mistakes. It should serve as a powerful sermon in favour of peace, unity and sociability.

In the meantime, a new petition, relating to the imperial privileges, had been made. To deal with these, elder D. Epp and Reverend Gerhard Willms were sent to St. Petersburg 29 June 1798. They spent over two years in this capital city where they worked with sincere zeal and gave their best efforts to attain their goal. They stayed with a German merchant, Johann Hamm, during this time, with whom they stayed in close contact through correspondence. They arrived home with their treasure 28 October 1800. It stated:

“We, through the rich grace of God

Paul the first, Czar and Autocrat of all Russians...etc This is to document our most gracious approval of the petition received from the newly settled Mennonites of the new Russian government, who, according to all reports deserve our attention because of their industrious character and because of the model they present to the colonists. We therefore have included in our gracious letter to them...not only consideration for the strengthening of the conditions previously noted of their rights and privileges but also to encourage your diligence and care in the field of agriculture and we wish to add the following:

1. We underscore our promise to you and your descendants the religious rights so that you can follow the teachings of your faith and church customs unhindered. We also affirm, should it be legally necessary, that you need not take the oath but that your ‘yes’ or ‘no’ shall be legally acceptable.
2. That the 65 dessiatin of arable land allotted to every family shall belong to you and to your descendants permanently on the condition that the land shall not be, under any circumstances, sold, handed over or transferred to any stranger with the expressed permission of the proper authorities.
3. Also, we allow those already settled as well as those who will settle here in the future, to set up or build manufacturing plants, not only in their own district, but in any of our cities or towns, or to carry on any other business. Those who wish may also set up guilds or corporations within the laws of the country.
4. In conformity with their property rights, we allow the Mennonites the use and pleasure of their land such as fishing, brewing beer and vinegar for their own use and for marketing, and to distill liquor within limits.
5. We prohibit strange people from setting up liquor stores or to sell liquor without permission from the Mennonites.
6. We give you our unqualified assurance that no one, either those Mennonites already settled or Mennonites yet to come, will be required to serve in the military or civil service against his will.
7. We exempt all homes in all villages from billeting with the exception of cases where soldiers march through the villages when specific orders will apply. This exemption applies to teams of horses, for Podwoden and work of the crown. They are, however, responsible to maintain the bridges, the overpasses and roads in their districts. In general, they are to assist in keeping the (military) posts in order.

8. We graciously allow all Mennonites and their descendants the full freedom to do what they like with the products and property they own. This does not include the land they received from the crown.

It is the duty, however, of the village authorities to report the intention of anyone planning to leave the country with crown debts and liabilities or with his property that has been earned or acquired in Russia. He is liable to the crown for three years' earnings. Similar treatment shall be applied to inheritances of those living in Russia and having heirs in other lands and where it is customary to pass the inheritance on. It is also permitted for the village society to appoint administrators on behalf of orphans and their assets.

9. We confirm your ten year exemption from all duties and taxes and extend this to those who still plan to settle in new Russia.

Recent examination of your circumstances indicates that you have had several crop failures and cattle diseases causing need and difficulty and that the settlement at Chortitz is too crowded. For that reason, we have decided to transfer some families to other land. In hindsight, we approve, because of your need and poverty, the further extension of the exemption for a further term of ten years for those who are transferred and that they pay only 15 kopecs per dessiatin on their 65 dessiatin. They are also exempt from all other payments to the crown. The advances of funds are to be repaid in ten years by those who remain in Chortitz and in twenty years by those who were transferred to other land.

10. The conclusion reached by the imperial Czar has been communicated to the legal authorities; that the rights and privileges given to the Mennonites are not only to be extended to them and their descendants but that they are allowed to live in peace.

Affirmed in the city of Gatschina on this sixth day of September 1800, the fourth year of our government and the second of our Grand Master.

The original signed in his majesty's own hand.

The Count Paul of Rostoschin

This gives the Mennonites a special place under the law regarding the rights and privileges as designated under "The Organization of the Life Circumstances of the Mennonites on Crown Land as it applies to general conscription."

As witness, the special Imperial concession to our people, these rights and privileges are still in existence today. We give our thanks to the ruling house and the fatherland by leading quiet, pious lives in an effort to be an asset to the welfare of the country.

As the deputies retreated from public activities, the backs of the opposing feuding parties were broken. Slowly the waves of spite subsided, and the fresh air of peace emerged once again. Unity and love became more and more evident among individuals as well as within the church as a whole. This now laid the groundwork for a more expeditious approach to growth and development.

It is true, however, that a thick fog soon again enveloped the colony. The forty year feud that the Agricultural Society had with the district office and the church leadership increased but this did not result in any prolonged split. The largest number of the membership was on the side of the district office and the church leadership.

The church grew stronger and blossomed and bore fruit. Churches were built and parishes organized resulting in the development of filial expansion. The first church in Chortitz, because of limited space in a growing membership, did not meet the requirements of the congregation and had to give way to a large, two-storey stone building that made no claim to architectural greatness with its high tile roof and small windows. Yet it had an impressive influence on the passersby as it stood there under the beautiful, tall trees. It still serves the Chortitzer parish as a congregation and is, at the same time, the head church of the whole colony.

The dismantled church in Chortitz was reassembled in Neuendorf but was replaced several decades later with a new and beautiful building. It was dedicated 7 October 1873. Newosterwick had received a new, tastefully built church already a year earlier and this one was dedicated 3 December 1872 with great ceremony. The church in Burwalde was built in 1861-62. In the rest of the villages, congregations met in the school classrooms.

The head Chortitzer church has a membership of 3200 baptized Christians and as many children. Member churches of the Chortitzer Church are:

1. The Nikolaifelder church since 1888 with its own church building and 460 baptized members.
2. The Neuchortitzer church with its model farms located near the Hebrew colonies and the colonies on the Seifart rented lands with 1330 members and 2140 children.
3. The church located on the grand prince Michael Nikolawitsch's land with 630 baptized members. This church elected its own elder, Reverend Johann Wiebe in 1870. He moved to North America in 1875 but no further election of an elder took place. Here, as in the other member churches, general leadership is exercised by the total church leadership. The elder of the Chortitzer head (mother) church is in charge overall and conducts baptisms in all the membership churches and serves communion. Some services are held in the school classrooms.
4. The Bergthal church had its own elder and its own church constitution.

The Chortitzer church has had nine elders until now. David Epp died soon after his return from St. Petersburg on 29 September 1802. Johann Wiebe followed him as elder and served for many years in this office until he died 31 March 1823. Already in 1806, he had asked for and received an assistant elder by the name of Peter Bergen but he died before Wiebe on 8 April 1809. Another assistant elder was elected in 1812 by the name of Jakob Dyck. He outlived Wiebe and guided the church until 18 October 1854. Franz Wiens was elected as the assistant elder in 1851 but he did not live long enough to accept his office. He died on 16 November

1853. Another assistant elder was called in 1854, Jakob Dyck II and he died 5 March 1855. Jakob Dyck I had died the year before so now the church had no shepherd. A new election on 29 March 1855 placed the Reverend Gerhard Dyck in this position. (He was born 4 June 1809 and was a minister since 1848). The elder of the Bergthal church, Braun, installed him in office as elder. Following 30 years as elder, the honourable Dyck asked to be relieved of his duties as he felt his strength leaving him. He called a conference on 19 April 1885 at Chortitz where the greater majority elected Heinrich Epp, father of the author, to the position of elder. Eight days later, the honourable Dyck confirmed him in his position. The responsibility of the total management now lay largely on his shoulders. Elder Dyck lived for two more years and died after a long and painful illness on 11 May 1887.

The outward traditions of baptism, shunning, communion, and reinstatement of those who were reprimanded, etc., have basically remained the same as they were in time immemorial in the Flemish churches. Small variations have not caused any major changes in these customs.

If we look at the intellectual life of our churches, we see the results of sin in many, many places and in many different forms and where it has its destructive influences. There is no doubt it will take much work and effort before those who are asleep in complacency will be shaken up out of their sleep and learn to know themselves. Frequently, the hypocritical pharisaic attitude is seen instead of the earlier humble acknowledgement of sin, but despite that, we have no reason to despair; for beside these poisonous mushrooms, many a flower blooms in God's garden, often hidden like the violet on the side of the road but is recognizable by its Word and its Walk. Let us all help to remove the obstacles that lie in the way and obscure the rays of God's mercy. Let us all, as one man, go to work bringing bricks and mortar to build our churches and obey the call of the Master Builder, Jesus Christ.

B. The Frisians, now the Kronsweide church.

Due to the paucity of notes and other information, I am unable to delve deeper into the current circumstances of this church.

As we have already heard, the desire of the Russian authorities to have only one Mennonite church society in Russia never materialized.

The separation of the Frisians from the Flemish already began in Dubrowna and became a reality at the time of the first settlement. At the time of their stay at the garrison at Alexandrowsk that first winter, a certain Mr. Klassen who was originally from Schweinsgruben held the first baptism and when the building of the first villages in spring was planned, the majority of the church members agreed to build a special village, Kronsweide (Neukronsweide), in order to be physically separated from the Flemish. In 1797, as new church members arrived from Prussia, two more villages were added: Schonwiese and Kronsgarten. As the population increased another village, Schonwiese was built. Their membership continued to increase significantly, and their numbers were spread out in places like Einlage, on the island of Chortitz as well as throughout the colonies.

Among the Frisians, too, there was dissatisfaction and discontent at the beginning. The disunity between the two church leaders will, no doubt, have contributed to this, and in time propriety went by the boards. As an example, if the minister did not have sufficient support, he would be replaced out of spite. (This also happened among the Flemish.)

Then, Regier and Warkentin from Prussia came also to the Frisians like rescuing angels. They gave the administration of the church over to the church leadership, since the elder had just recently died. They ordered an election of ministers and an elder confirmed the elected and provided a breathing space for the institution of a church constitution. After Regier died, Warkentin baptized the youth who had been prepared for this during the year. He then conducted communion with the church members which consisted of 50 families.

It is not known who followed Klassen when he died somewhere between 1794 and 1800. In 1800, a certain Heinrich Janz, who had just come from Prussia and had settled in Schonwiese, was called as elder. He died in 1824 and for the next 2 years, the elder from the Molotschna colony served in this capacity. Jakob Hildebrand was elected on 4 May 1826 and ordained 12 September. He died 5 October 1867. Peter Klassen followed him, and he was ordained 12 November 1867 by elder Gerhard Dyck from Chortitz.

In the Kronsweide church, a Reverend Peter Hildebrand served as elder. He was involved with the immigration of our people from the beginning.

The church counted (according to Manh yearbook 1888) 750 baptized members and 765 children. They have two churches, one in Kronsweide and the other in Schoenwiese. The last one was built in 1862. The difference in customs between the Chortitz church and the Kronsweide church is negligible where baptism and communion is concerned, yet often they have been impatient with each other's paths. But thank God, that is behind us. The old prejudices have disappeared and with them, the motives for discord. The feeling and the desire to belong together had been awakened, the feeling which years ago created splits – a poor beginning resulting in a beautiful conclusion.

C. Those Who Left

This includes those who have turned away from the existing Mennonite church and have become members of the Brethren church through baptism by immersion. This started in 1854. The basis and reasons for this withdrawal and the separation of the inner organization of this church is described in their own "Confession of Faith and the Constitution of Baptized Believers in the united Brethren church in Southern Russia (1876)" including notes:

Even though they call themselves Mennonites and as they have always been known, they have had little association with the Mennonite church that has existed in Russia for the past 100 years. The stricter element of this church goes so far as to say that unless a person has been baptized by immersion, that person cannot be a member of this church nor hope to reach salvation. They also baptize persons of Lutheran and Catholic faiths who do not acknowledge the state's position on pacifism. The ordination of this constitution as well as that of their first

elder, Abram Unger, was carried out by the Baptist elder, Onken, from Hamburg. They currently share communion with the Baptists.

On page 32 Item 2 of the appendix to their Confession of Faith, it says: The main reason for our separation from the general Mennonite church: Since the public life of our people in their daily walk does not meet the terms of the existing confession of faith, we declare it intellectually dead. (Matt. 7: 1 & 2)

On the basis that we were to submit to the judgements of God and the merciless attitudes of our higher authority and because our people entered Russia quietly and peacefully, and since they were convinced by the Word of God, we should show these ungodly people the light. We were partly excluded by them and partly we left on our own. On the basis of Holy Writ, (2 Cor. 16, 17, 18? and Rev. 18:4), we decided to set up our own church. The Chortitzer and Molotschna church Convention (with the exception of 2 elders) not only banned us from their church society but from colony status as well; but we were under God's protection and that of our merciful authorities and apart from a few exceptions, enjoy full freedom.

Main Reasons why we Separated from the other Mennonites:

1. Reception in the church—While the other Mennonites accept members through baptism and a memorized testimony of faith without any further proof of the position of their heart, usually persons 18 to 20 years of age, we accept only persons:
 - a. Who freely give a testimony of faith before an assembly of members of our church
 - b. Who can convince the membership that there has been a great change of heart of which Jesus speaks in John 3, 'except ye be born again---
 - c. Who give testimony through their daily walk.
2. Baptism—While other Mennonites baptize by pouring on of water, we do this through immersion in water. To prevent injury to their dignity, the candidate is draped in clean vestments.
3. While only whores and drunks are denied membership by the other Mennonites but the wicked, the scoffers and the misers are tolerated, we deny membership not only to all the above but to all who behave disorderly in their walk.

The exclusion usually takes 14 days with the other Mennonites, while with us, it depends on the rate of improvement.

The separated one may attend church to hear the Word of God but is admonished to confess and change his ways.

Article 10 of the church Constitution deals with the Confession of Faith.

Offices in The Church: Jesus Christ is the head. The church recognizes no visible supremacy on earth. The church elects its elders, ministers and servants from the general membership who are then ordained in their office.

Elders, Ministers – We do not recognize a ranking among the elders and ministers. We understand that Holy Writ states that bishops and presbyters know no ranking.

We consider learned persons preferable but not indispensable. The following qualifications are above all as found in John 21:15 to 17, as well as the qualifications and capabilities required in Paul's letters

The elders chair the church meetings. They are charged with the responsibilities of carrying out the conclusions of the church. In addition, they are responsible for the care of the members' souls. The ministers have the right and responsibility to preach. Concerning the purity of the sermons, they are under the constant surveillance of the church membership. In case a minister veers from the teachings of evangelism as it has been laid down by the church constitution and does not pay attention to admonitions, he can be summarily removed from office.

The holy baptism and the holy communion may be administered by the ministers as well as the elders. Frequently, the office of elder and minister resides in one and the same person.

Servants – The deacons or the servants of the church must possess the qualifications mentioned in the Bible. They support the elders and the ministers in their duties and they have a special responsibility regarding the secular matters of the church.

Responsibility of the members – consists of mutual love toward each other in active and practical participation. This applies in the spiritual as well as in the physical sense and includes everyone in a manner as the Lord, who is the head of the church, has prescribed. It is the special duty of every member to participate in the celebration of Holy Communion and to attend all church functions regularly. Only in the most dire circumstances, such as sickness, may a member be excused from attending the celebration of the Lord's Supper or the regular church services.

Acceptance (of a member) – can happen only after previous notification regarding the position of his soul, whether he has experienced rebirth, and then only by appearing personally before the congregation and a vote taken on his acceptability. In such cases, it is highly desirable that such a vote be unanimous.

So far according to the words of the confession of faith.

The church does not possess a building in the Chortitzer district. Meetings take place in private homes. The current elder is Aron Lepp residing in the colony of Andreasfeld.

So as not to seem partial, I have allowed the Brethren to speak for themselves. It is not the purpose of this book to determine to what extent the blame they direct at our church is justified,

or if our treatment of these brethren was always correct, or to separate and throw light on these issues. I leave the examination of a detailed investigation to the opinions of this new fellowship as well as to the Mennonite church that has existed for centuries. Certainly this faith fellowship will find its way to heaven if it works for Christ and not only for the church.

11. The Secular Direction and Jurisdiction

The Mennonites took on a special position in 1871 in regard to secular matters. The top leadership continued to have special directories to manage, and a trusteeship to manage a provisional (welfare) committee. The management of these directories was assisted by elders of the Chortitzer church. The two former deputies were appointed as temporary executors. Later village mayors were elected and charged with the administration of the prescribed authority.

These directories were under responsible government authority although apparently very little practical control was exercised by them, which explains their frequently noted arbitrary behavior.

The government had given the immigrants an independent form of self-administration independent of the state laws, yet the government put a fence around this; they created a state within a state in which an imperial authority functioned as a sovereign power. This arrangement would surely have been a benefit to the development of the colony if the directors had known how to use this authority. Unfortunately, the first men to be given this authority were ill-suited for these responsibilities. They were officials who felt their responsibility was to order and request but they failed to motivate, support and advise, and if someone like Essen, of whom we shall read later, does not use his authority at the first sign of disobedience, it must be attributed to his timidity and not to a lack of effort to achieve peace.

He as well as his successor, Brackel, sought in their own selfish ways to bring the poverty stricken colonists back on their feet with the colonists' own funds. From their standpoint, the disagreements between the two parties were desirable and came in handy, for instead of being impartial, Brackel supported first one side and then the other. Of course this weakened the influence of the directors and this helped to loosen the ties of order.

This discord would likely not have reached the level it did had a man like Trappe been in charge of the colony leadership. He was sensible and energetic as well as warmhearted at the same time. He had concern for our people. During Hoepfner's and Bartsch's stay in St. Petersburg, Trappe was appointed director for the founding of the Mennonite colonies. This was to recognize his efforts in bringing about the flow of Mennonite immigration from Prussia to Russia. Soon, however, he was appointed to another post and in his place a certain Italian, von Essen, who was an immigrant living in Kremenschug, was appointed as director. Despite the large pretentious scroll proclaiming his position, he lacked energy. As an example: There were persons in the colony who were dissatisfied with his management style and they let him know this in no uncertain terms. Instead of exercising his authority and calling the guilty ones to task, he turned to the "well-disposed members of the church." "I still would have many things to

mention how after I have been offended and insulted and with reason. Only because of peace and the welfare of all have I kept silent with the hope that the elders, the deputies and all the good men will manage these matters impartially and help to re-establish order and obedience, etc.”

Chortitz 4 April 1792 D. von Essen

Under his regime, Hoepfner and Bartsch too had to submit to his mistrust and lay down all their Chortitz ‘offices’. Where these papers, that would have been so helpful and valuable to this writer, finally disappeared to is unknown. No one from the Chortitzer District Archives has any knowledge of these papers.

Following von Essen, Johann Baron von Brackel became the colonies’ manager. The creation of the mayor’s office apparently occurred under von Essen.

Then came the ‘order’ from the commander in Jekatherinoslaw of all German colonists in the province, Johann von Brackel, whereby his authority was extended and at the same time more light was thrown on the responsibilities of the mayors.

After the poor attitudes of the malcontents has been described in *point 1*, the commander is given the following instructions in *point 2*: Should religion and shame no longer exist among these wicked people, the highly esteemed commander is ordered by his superiors to have these disobedient people bound and to have them work at the local forces base as long as your highness deems it proper, with the hope that their attitudes will improve.”

Then *point 3*: Under threat of punishment, the mayors are required to report and be responsible for the wickedness within the village. Should they fail to do this and the wickedness continues, you are free to punish the mayors as you see fit.

Point 4: The church members are to obey the mayor on pain of physical punishment and are to obey without resistance since these orders come from the government and not from the mayor. Any resistance will be considered rebellion against Russia and punishable under the law. Should the mayor fail to report these matters to the commander, the mayor must be punished. The mayors cannot be elected by the church without support from the commander. Furthermore, they must have proof from Germany (Prussia) as to the kind of people they are so they do not embarrass or shame their church as has happened in the past.

Point 7: Should the church members fail to respect and obey the mayor, the cudgel will be employed as is the custom in all other countries. The mayor is to read these regulations to the people, for their destiny hangs on this.

To conclude, we find further orders that will serve to instruct the church. “14--- conclusion. Every mayor is to have these points at his disposal as well as every church minister and they shall be read loudly and clearly in church once a month so that there can be no excuse what everyone has to do---”

Johann v. Brackel
Commander of the colony

Unfortunately, this extension of authority contributed nothing towards the improvement of the state of affairs. Brackel as well as his successor, Brigonsow were able to wield this staff of 'threat' successfully, or to earn the respect and attention of the colonists that can only be earned without force. Apparently, these initially authorized persons were unable to apply this authority in the correct place or at the correct time to contain this negative mood.

To bring better order into the management machinery of the colonies, the first success was experienced by the "Advisory Committee for Foreign Settlers." This committee was established in 1800 and was located in Jekatherinoslaw. At the head of the committee was a chief justice. At first this was Contenius who took this deteriorated settlement on in a truly loyal and fatherly manner and levelled the way for them through good advice and deeds.

One of the first acts of the committee was to regulate the local management of the colony by setting up a district office in Chortitz, apparently in 1802. The first position was filled by a person from among the settlers, chief mayor who was given two assistants. This arrangement remained intact until the establishment of the Welfare Committee which was located in Odessa. Here the main authority was vested in the president who had inspectors from the colony. The final authority lay with the Russian ministry.

In 1871, the special administration of the Mennonites came to an end. An arrangement followed under the minister of the interior whereby administrative regulations were instituted that provided equality for all the 'children of the land.'

As mayors, or as they are known today 'Wolostelders', the following Chortitzers served one after the other: A certain Krahn, who was the first remains unknown. He was followed by Johann Siemens [Peter Siemens], Chortitz, and served for 18 years until 1823. Then came Issak Toews, Chortitz, Jakob Penner, Einlage, Peter Loewen, Chortitz, who served for 3 years as chief mayor. Then followed Jakob Bartsch (son of deputy Bartsch), Rosenthal, 6 years, Jakob van Kampen, Chortitz, 3 years, then again Jakob Bartsch, 11 years, Johann Siemens, Rosenthal, 3 years, Jakob Dyck, Chortitz, 9 years, Jakob Hamm and Heinrich Martens, both from Chortitz, Jakob Braun from what was known as Neuosterwick at that time, Isaak Lehn and Peter Andres, both from Rosenthal, each 3 years. Then for a period of 6 years, Johann Hildebrand, Island of Chortitz until 1887. The current Wolostelder, Franz Thiessen, Neuendorf, concludes his term in 1889. As Wolost secretaries the last years, Abraham Unrau is still at his desk after decades of work. Johann Epp died after having served in that office for 20 years, 17 March 1888. May his memory be honoured.

We have only two independent Wolosts, Chortitz and Nikolaifelder. Those who have colonies on their own land are incorporated into the nearest Russian Wolost.

In 1832, a "Society for the Expansion of Agriculture and Industry" was established under Chief Justice Fadejew. This society was designed to unite the districts but was an authorized institution consisting of 5 members whose job it was to promote agriculture and industry. The first were Franz Pauls, Kronsweide, Heinrich Hildebrand, Einlage, David Reddekopf, Rosenthal, and David Koop, Chortitz. It was chaired by the former mayor, Jakob Penner. This society was

known simply as the “Agricultural Society” and although perhaps not overly active, it promoted and motivated the colony onto greater activity. It functioned until the beginning of the seventies, continued for a while in name only and came to an end with the death of the last member, Jakob Niebuhr, Kronsthal, in 1880. When Cornies became well known for his leadership in the agricultural society, his efforts soon saw expanded results. He really did not like to work under the directives of the district office but wanted to overrule them and in this way take the reins of general management into his own hands. This resulted in many disagreements between the management authorities and the agricultural society finally resulting in the folding of this society.

In the beginning this jurisdiction was in the hands of the director who, together with the church elders, decided between right and wrong. This society of relentless righteousness of its office must have created great spiritual difficulties for the church leaders and must have been the initial reason for their involvement. Consequently, we can understand when the church ministers of that time cried out: “Thank God we are getting a district office,” when they heard the news that a regulated district office was to be instituted. At the same time, the jurisdiction of the Oberschulz was transferred to the district office. Today we have our own justice of the peace (Wolostgericht) that settles disputes of the colonists within limits.

12. The School Organization

“Where Germans settle, schools are immediately built.”

Our forefathers, too, remained true to this principle. Schools were built but obviously they resembled the underdeveloped child. The school local (district) was not better. At the beginning, school was often conducted in the teacher’s living room and instead of maps and instructions on the wall, the walls were frequently decorated with pots and pans or tools. Even the schools built later were uncomfortable and had many disadvantages. Small, low and dark were the usual marks of identification of these buildings. Two long cross-barred tables filled the classroom and here the young learners sat, boys at one table and the girls at the other. A long narrow, wooden bench was set along the side wall. Here the small Lilliputians found their places whose goal it was for the first half year to learn to sit still, a prerequisite for all future learning. Oh, how these tiny spirits must have suffered from doing nothing. No doubt many a tear or rip in pants or skirt must have occurred as a result of the restless fidgeting.

This inadequate arrangement for the school environment also reflected the education of the teacher. The requirements regarding the qualifications of the teacher were not great! Some reading and writing, arithmetic with whole numbers, the multiplication table by rote and familiarity with the use of the disciplinary rod were all the requirements that were necessary for the teacher to rule as a despot. No wonder that under these circumstances very little fruit matured.

Instruction was in Low German. Very little reading and understanding of High German was the end result. Instruction consisted predominantly of the student mechanically repeating

after the teacher. Every child was required to come to the front and read the lesson aloud to the teacher while the others waited and disported themselves comically. This of course frustrated and irked the teacher.

The children memorized the primer for about three years. Those who lasted longer in this closed environment got a little instruction in writing, catechism, Testament, Bible and arithmetic. A special and frequent occurrence was the approach to the mechanical learning of the multiplication table. This was removed from the dry arithmetic timetable and its recitation was appended to the morning or evening devotions.

As sometimes happens, there were enlightened men within the teaching circles who had a greater insight and brought substance into the classroom; these were, however, not very successful in making significant inroads into the educational conditions. Perhaps they were not encouraged.

“Instruction can only improve with the improvement of the teachers.” This insight alone can be credited with the development of the high school in Chortitz. This should now contribute not only to furthering the education of the students but especially to the learning of Russian. As well, it should serve to train teachers for the elementary schools. To attract suitable candidates, several (6 at first, later 8) students were supported by the church to attend this school. They agreed to teach as many years in the village schools as they attended this high school in consideration for a suitable salary.

Thus, the tree of learning grew new branches and soon a different life began. The graduates from the high school were now better educated and began instructing in the language of the country in which they lived; all because they had been taught what was important, and also the responsibilities of their calling. They had also learned some new methods of instruction, even though perhaps the methods did not always fit into the elementary school instruction system. And if the methods and the selection of the curriculum left something to be desired, this could be excused on the grounds that there was no official guidance. Self-instruction through study and practice is a very slow process. Pedagogical literature at that time was rare and slow to come by whereas today there is a rich supply of guidebooks which are available at the snap of our fingers. So today, greater responsibility can be expected from our teachers.

And so, our school organization, influenced from the inside and the outside, has reached its present level of competency. I do not feel qualified to go into a detailed study of this subject, but so much is certain: if we compare our schools of a hundred years ago with those of today, we have come a long way, yet the road to an ideal school system is very slow, even today. Yes, there are still so many things wrong that need to be improved that strong measures are needed to correct them. Primarily, the mechanical approach must be eliminated and sensible and character-building instructions must be provided.

To guard the novice teacher against too many blunders, he must be given the opportunity to have professional guidance and instruction. The high school, despite its designation as a “Teacher Training Institute for the Colonies”, is not qualified to provide such instruction. This

could so easily be accomplished by adding a pedagogical class. Every occupation requires training, how much more the art of the development of our youth.

The work begun in the primary schools should be continued in a training school and the ladies should not be excluded from this training school. We must remember that as mothers, they too have the shaping of the people in their hands. In neglecting the education of our children, we are sinning against our children, our people and our God.

In a material sense, our teachers are well qualified for the present but not for the future. What is to happen to the teacher who grows old in his services as a teacher and becomes incapable of continuing? He has been given no guarantee of a worry-free retirement; no one has promised to look after his widow or his orphans when he dies. Also no one needs to be surprised when most of the best teachers often reach for something else after a ten-year teaching stint. They look for something that they can invest in for the future, like a farm.

At present, there are a number of teachers who have united to form a support fund for retired and incapacitated teachers and their widows. Hopefully, the government will not interfere with this plan. All church members who have the concern of the teachers at heart are hereby given the opportunity to help bring this plan into being.

The number of school children in the Chortitz Colony is around 3000. The number of teachers is 60. The number of students per school varies from 30 to 160.

At the beginning, management of the elementary (village) schools was in the hands of the church. Later it became the responsibility of the (agricultural?) society to supervise them but their regime disappeared with the demise of the society. Then the ministers again became the school inspectors. Only in isolated cases did the ministers of the government, under whose jurisdiction they were in the final analysis, visit the schools; the high school was inspected more frequently. For a time, we had a provisional school trustee from among the colonists who set a precedent and made room for other trustees. A regulation was worked out whereby a search was instituted for suitable men as teachers. This regulation could not be confirmed because it apparently contradicted an existing law. The supervision of religion and of the German language has been retained by the colonists but, since 1881, the Mennonite schools have been operating under the minister of public education. All the elementary schools have been supported by the village churches.

The high school has assets of 52,000 rubles [40,000 in the orphans' fund and 12,000 in the National (Royal) bank]; yet the interest and the school funds are not enough to cover operating costs (since 1888 the cost has been 15 rubles per student). The remaining required funds are collected from the various congregations.

The Zentralschule [Central School or high school] owes its name to the first teacher, H. Heese, who was called from the collegiate institute in Ohrloff in 1841. The name 'Zentral' implied that the rays of education were spreading out over the colonies from a 'Zentral' school. The first year of its existence, this high school was located in the private home of an Einlage colonist; but in 1842, a building was constructed to accommodate this high school Heese left in 1846 and H. Franz, now living in Halbstadt,, Molotschna, took his place. Franz's energetic work

lasted until 1858. He was followed by the present church elder from Chortitz, G. H. Epp as teacher of the high school. Due to pressing circumstances, a new building was erected and now there were two classes. Soon a special teacher to instruct the Russian subjects was hired. After 19 years of service, Epp stepped down. He was followed first by teacher Johann Epp and then Jakob Braul each for one year. Then came Peter Riediger who is presently there. Coll.-Assess. Ignatius Schalansky was the first Russian teacher and he was followed by Wilh Penner and now the incumbent is Jakob Klassen. The average number of students is 50. Graduation papers guarantee they do not have to serve in the military or the forestry service up to category III.

The private school of the firm Lepp and Wallman, Koop and Hildebrand still exists in the Chortitz colony. This was built and supported by this firm for the sole purpose of giving the children of the workers an opportunity to get an education. It has two parallel classes: one for the German children and the other for the Russian children.

13. The Material Situation of the Colonists: Their Pursuits, Horticulture, Forests, Orphans' Society, Welfare.

At the time of their settlement, conditions that would allow for the raising of revenue were non-existent for the Mennonites. The discontent with the hilly (mountainous) landscape, the expectations of many for another place to settle, being deprived of even the most essential goods and chattels, and especially the disinclination and apathy resulting from discontent and poverty, all served to harm the progress of the settlers immeasurably. No wonder things looked so bleak for a time. Most went about their work in worn out clothing and feet wrapped in untanned leather. When the church elder, B Penner was to conduct the first baptism, he had no boots or shoes that he could wear to this important occasion. Three members, who were just a little better off, agreed to provide him with a pair of boots. The deputy Bartsch himself was a shoemaker.

Because of the continuing horse thievery, there was a significant shortage of horses and it was a common sight to see 4 or 5 farms pool their resources of horses to work at least small portions of this virgin land. Very little could be bought by way of household necessities although the need was there.

The support funds from the government were scarce; five to seven rubles were received per family from time to time but after long intervals. This was like a drop of water on a hot stone. Only once did each family receive 25 rubles.

When the director, Brackel, took over, a fresh breeze could be felt blowing across the fields. Through his endless and energetic approach, the colonists experienced, and were grateful for a new extension of ten 'free' years as well as a further one-time and unexpected payment of 165 rubles per family. Yet, the director wanted his share of the money. When they received this subsidy, they were required to pay back to the director, 5 kopecs out of each ruble. Anyone who resisted this was threatened with physical punishment; the choice was difficult.

Despite the fact that each recipient had to donate 5 rubles of his receipts to the church, this subsidy was of immense help in improving the agricultural conditions, had they been able to 'feed the director enough.' But that was a fact of life. Much of the money went into his bottomless pockets and when he was relieved of his post after only a short reign, the rubles left with him.

New immigrants arriving from Prussia in 1803 and 1804 settled in the Molotschna district in the province of Tauris. They were mostly well-to-do. The first winter they stayed with the Chortitzers. They, too, were eligible to receive support funds for food and shelter and the circulation of these funds was of great benefit to the colony.

The hard times in the field of agriculture took a turn for the better when a 'Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers' came into being. This committee worked towards the resolution of difficulties that plagued the settlers. Gradually they worked for an improvement of their welfare.

Let us give an older reporter an opportunity to speak.

Von Contenius, the chief justice of the aforementioned office, was actually the state counsellor whom God sent to assist us in determining our direction in this new country. Filled with Christian love, he concerned himself with the affairs of our church society with great insight. No branch of agriculture that might become important was ignored by him. His keen wit concerned itself with the household, with cattle-raising as well as with agriculture in general. He found ways of finding the necessary tools and machinery. He often travelled throughout the colony personally guiding and advising the settlers how to do certain things in order to succeed. He advised, warned, exhorted, admonished and punished; in short, he treated them as his own children, and truly his memory will remain in our hearts and we will honour him as a father!

The cattle industry consisted partly of cattle that had been brought along from Prussia and he tried to improve this branch of agriculture by bringing in new breeds of cattle. He instituted sheep breeding. Through his efforts the colony received 30 Spanish sheep, 15 rams and 15 ewes as a present from the crown. Under his direction, this pedigree stock was the foundation of a cooperatively operated sheep farm where herds of pedigreed sheep are still being raised (1857) by the settlers. (For the start of this cooperatively operated sheep farm, 3040.4 dessiatin were set aside. When this sheep farm was dissolved in 1867, the land was leased out and the proceeds used to buy new land for the landless.)

But von Contenius could see farther ahead. He saw that our area was well suited to grow mulberry trees. So, in 1801, he had a cooperative research school set up in Rosenthal for horticultural research where not only mulberry but other plants and fruit trees were researched. Each colony had to plant a mulberry plantation to make it possible to raise silkworms. Unfortunately, this branch of industry was not successful right from the beginning. Only later when his excellency, the real state counsellor, Hahn, took things in hand and energetically began to support and motivate the colonists in the spirit of his predecessor did this industry begin to develop rapidly. In 1842, the plantations were expanded to ½ a dessiatin per family and the silk

industry really flourished. Today (1857), it is already one of the main sources of income for the district.

When, in the course of time, progress was impeded as a result of crop failures, poor crops, cattle diseases, floods, etc., it could slow industry down but not stop it. Poor crops and crop failures occurred in 1823, 1824, 1833, 1842, and 1845; cattle diseases in 1804, 1810, 1812, 1813, 1828, 1833, etc., floods in 1820, 1829. The flood of 1845 affected only those living close to the Dnieper.

The second half of the century also had its share of poor crops. In the mother colony of Chortitz, many families suffered as a result of these poor crops during the end of the seventies and early eighties. The spectre of poverty showed itself in many other places. Yet, thank God, the efforts of the farmers have produced rich results in the last three years and the material situation has generally improved greatly although it is not too bright yet.

Certainly, industry is not what it was fifty years ago. The silk industry has almost disappeared except, perhaps in a few instances where a mother wants to show her children, by example, how it was carried out. Sheep raising, apart from the large landowners, does not deserve mentioning. Good cattle and good horses are still appreciated. The plow continues to be busy and sod continues to be broken. Whether this is for the good of the colony, I will not judge. Should one of the first settlers see our land now, he would be surprised at the expansion and how that could have been accomplished.

It is an error to assume that new and blossoming industry was getting started. Here and there small items were handcrafted and a variety of products appeared on the market but it was only in 1850 that industry really began under the 'sainted' Peter Lepp, Sr. Through applied activity and much planning and with the help of God, he transformed a poor watch making business into a thriving manufacturing industry of farm machinery which he set up in the village of Chortitz in 1850. He died on a visit to Prussia at his brother's place in Tiegenhagen on 30 August 1871. His creation, however, still continues under the name 'Lepp and Wallman'. His heirs were successful in expanding the industry probably beyond Peter Lepp's dreams and it now stands as a memorial to his name. Currently this industry employs about 250 workers. It manufactures all kinds of farm machinery including hydraulic oil presses and complete flour and sawmills. They also manufacture steam engines and steam boilers up to 25 horsepower. Numerous acknowledgements at various exhibitions in Russia (including the National in Moscow in 1882 where it won first prize, in Cherkow in 1887, also first prize, etc.,etc.) which gives witness to the accomplishments of this factory. It did not remain isolated for long. Others, with names like Koop, Hildebrand, Thiessen and Rempel soon followed. Currently about 470 workers of Russian and German nationality are employed in these industries. In one year, a total of 2685 mowing machines, 330 threshing machines, 1000 ploughs, 512 seed cleaning machines (fanning mills), were produced by these firms. The firm 'Lepp and Wallman' alone produced 1200 mowing machines, 220 threshing machines, 500 seed cleaning or fanning mills, 15 steam engines, and 15 steam boilers. And in other villages, such as Einlage, there was the Friesen firm. Agricultural machinery was also manufactured in Neuosterwick and Andreasfeld. This provides

not only our colonies with the necessary machines but the noblemen and the Russian farmers from far and wide as well. The Russian farmer in this area drives in German wagons, ploughs with a German plough and is becoming more and more identified with German methods.

The mass production of wheat in the last decade did not only create extensive markets but soon an increased number of flour mills was required. Numerous Mennonite owned flour mills sprang up in the villages and in some towns (eg, Jekatherinoslaw) a good portion of the grain was converted into flour and distributed in all directions.

Obviously, the market for this product expanded as production increased, especially in Chortitz, Einlage, Schonwiese and Niederchortitz which were located near the Dnieper and not too far from the Losowo-Sebastopol railway.

Naturally the exterior appearance of the villages was advantageously affected by these changes. Chortitz, with its many tall, smoking chimneys and its long row of workers' lodging cabins, took on the appearance of a manufacturing town.

Horticulture has really never played an important industrial role in the Chortitz mother colony. Cornies was never able to bring it to the level it attained, through his efforts, in our brother colony, Molotschna, during his brief involvement here. And where he had started gardens, they suffered through neglect. The cooperative garden Contenius had founded in Rosenthal, which was soon abandoned by the church, was given over to renters who were to provide the colonists with cuttings and seedlings. This also petered out until a recent renter brought it into production again. It can be ascertained that the attitude towards horticulture is alive and well and is now first rate. Some daughter colonies located on crown land and Jasykow are showing interest in this field. The mulberry plantations in the mother colony are gradually and relentlessly going downhill now that the silkworm industry is gone and no effort is being made to prevent this industry's demise.

Even though horticulture may have been treated somewhat off-handedly and has added little to the beauty of the area, there are still natural woods and forests within the boundaries of the Chortitz colony that add charm and beauty to these villages. Along the shores of the Dnieper as well as further inland into the countryside, there are frequent bushes of pear trees and oaks. In the lower, southern and southwestern end of the island of Chortitz, our forefathers found a large forest of beautiful, tall oaks, basswood, elm and poplars and other varieties of trees. Since there was no supervision at the beginning, everyone who felt like it cut down these trees wherever and whenever it suited him and many a forest giant fell under the axe.

Whatever the results of point 8 (already referred to) might have had we don't know: "On the island of Chortitz where most of the trees have been cut and sold, the honourable deputy Jakob Hoepfner shall be the supervisor and mayor and he shall be responsible for everything that occurs on the island and no trees shall be cut without his permission...etc."

"When finally, in 1831 strict supervision of all forests was instituted," reports Peters, a member of the Agricultural society in 1857, to the Odessa Welfare Committee, "the beautiful woods were already almost wasted. Low undergrowth was all that was left. It remained our job to carefully replant, and now you can again see thousands of oak trees throwing their shade over

the ground. The whole forest, the property of the district churches, consists of 49,000 oaks, 1000 basswood (linden), not counting the poplars and willows. Wild pear trees can be found right across the whole island and they could number 4500 of which 2000 can be found on the tree habitat located on the slope in artistic array. The rest of the forest became the property of the island settlers two years earlier through a purchase. And today – nature’s friend would weep if he could see the large stretches of these woods that have been destroyed through mischief by reckless and indifferent hands with not a thought given to any form of rejuvenation. Only here and there can be seen a tall tree standing erect with an accusing and complaining finger pointing up to heaven. Apparently, all efforts by the settlers could not prevent the Russians, who lived across the river on the other side, from depleting these woods. Only at the southern extremity are there parcels of attractive and beautiful trees that gladden the heart.

I feel it would be in place here to mention some of the local, more beneficial, organizations. Of greatest importance is the ‘Orphans’ Society’ [Waisenamt]. Minors who had lost one or both parents were looked after from the very beginning. Already in 1792, August 31, the two elders, David Epp and Johann Wiebe summoned the membership to a meeting following the next Sunday service to discuss “in what manner the inheritance minors should be handled so as to be responsible before God and the world so that we are later not accused (of wrong doing.)” This was the first attempt at forming a “distribution society” and it still serves as a model today and has stood the test of time. It has been accepted by the authorities and if it has not been officially and legally accepted, it’s being accepted as a norm in dealings with the distribution of inheritances. The beginnings of the ‘Orphans’ Society’ for the investment of minors’ inheritance assets can be partly credited to the authoritative “Directive to the director of the colonies, Baron Johann von Brackel,” where point number 6 states: “All funds of orphans and widows accruing from the beginning of the colony shall be deposited in the Chortitzer Office, including and accounting and investment earned by April of this year...”

“These funds cannot be withdrawn without authority. The account is then looked after by qualified men who are elected for this purpose. (This also includes monies received in this office from other sources in the colony). The money that is not required to cover the costs can be lent to responsible persons at 5% interest. The administrators are responsible to see that this money is available when a need arises. Should the administrator or other authority become aware that money is spent irresponsibly, it must be reported immediately and the suspected person taken into custody so that the orphans and widows do not need to suffer...etc.” This is how the Orphans’ Society set up the ‘Orphans’ Treasury’.

The Orphans’ Society consists of two ‘orphans’ administrators’ who have been elected by the church and they receive compensation. Books and minutes are to be kept in the Russian language as well.

Money is lent at 6%, but at 5% to the orphans or widows. This constitutes a difference of 1%. The profit from the investment of these funds has created a reserve of 120,178 rubles 89 kopecs. Of this amount, 40,000 rubles has been allotted to the Chortitzer High School. To

guarantee the security of these funds, the whole colony stands behind this organization with all its assets.

We are mindful of Paul's admonition: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10) According to this, our forefathers set up a 'poor man's' organization to which the poor have access.

The necessary funds are laid on as a tax for the church members to pay (each family pays 1 ruble annually as well as 30 kopecs for a male and 20 kopecs for a female and in addition, donations of grain are expected) and these are all voluntary donations. The administration of this ['poor man's'] organization is carried out by the deacons or a foster person who are responsible to provide an annual report to the church membership; they are under the authority of the church elders. Unfortunately, we have experienced deficits and we have had to appeal to members for further voluntary contributions and support. May these lines motivate many a tardy heart to contribute his mite to help the needy.

Since there are so many poor members of the church who are forced to make their way alone in this world, who have no friends or relatives and who may also be plagued by such physical handicaps as epilepsy and other problems, an institution for the relief of the poor would be very helpful in alleviating suffering. This would be tremendously beneficial in finding a refuge for those members who seem to be superfluous in this world. Obviously, such an institution would have to be under the supervision of an understanding supervisor ["Hausvater"].

Another organization deserving mention is the Mennonite fire insurance. This makes it possible for someone who experiences loss through fire to be compensated in short order so that he can start rebuilding immediately. The past has proved that such precautions are essential. There are many cases in our colony where fire has ravaged many buildings. In the past half century, the following conflagrations can be cited: Rosenthal, 1854, a large part of the village was destroyed. In the summer of 1863, 57 homes were reduced to ashes during a terrific storm including a new schoolhouse and 2 storage buildings containing grain. Damages were estimated at 70,000 rubles. Eleven homes were destroyed in Neuenburg in 1870. Nine homes were lost on the island of Chortitz in 1872, almost the whole village. Neuhorst was almost completely destroyed by fire in 1874 (42 homes), and in Adelsheim, 15 homes were lost in 1880.

Medicine was practiced for a long time only by people who had their expertise from reading books or from other people by word of mouth. Then, in 1859-61, the church sent a Bernhard Schellenberg, who had a great propensity for medicine, for training as a surgeon. With true loyalty and very ably, he served this calling for over 25 years. He died 13 February 1888. Nothing can erase this man's memory from those whom he helped and who learned to know him as a man as well as a doctor.

For a number of years now, the church has had a country doctor, a Dr J. Esau, since 1885. In addition to this, the church, in cooperation with the factory owners, has set up a 12 bed local hospital.

14. The Daughter Colonies

It was evident from the beginning of the settlement that the crown lands on the Chortitzer plan would be inadequate for the government to provide each family with 65 dessiatins as agreed. For that reason, the government made a larger land purchase for the colonists at least to satisfy the colonies' initial requirements.

But only the initial requirements. As the years passed and new villages were built, as the population grew, no more suitable land was available. So, the government felt it necessary to find a new settlement area in 1836 near the district of Mariupol.

By 1852, five villages had been started with an initial 145 young families (this included some from the Molotschna colony): Bergthal (this was the central village), Schonfeld, Schoendorf [Schoenthal], Heubuden and Friedrichsthal. These villages were founded with the understanding that they would be completely independent of the mother colony (Chortitz) in spiritual as well as in material affairs. When, in the seventies, conscription appeared imminent, many Mennonite families chose emigration to America and this new colony opted almost totally to exchange their new homes for new ones in the west. Four villages were taken over by people of the Lutheran faith. The church became a Catholic church, Friedrichsthal.

A call for further moves was made by the Mennonites in 1847 through the Welfare Committee. The government settled Jewish people with hope they would settle into agricultural activities. To give the Jews an opportunity to learn more about farming methods, it was decided to invite Mennonite farmers to settle in among the Jewish farmers to serve as models or examples in this area of Cherson.

At the outset, there were few takers of the government's offer to the Mennonites; only when the Agricultural Society took things in hand did the Mennonite style of agricultural buildings appear within the Jewish villages. These model farms did not work out as the Mennonites and the government had hoped. From an agricultural standpoint it was a poor setup. Usually there were only about 8 Mennonite farmers in a Jewish village of 40 to 50 Jewish ones. They were at the mercy of the Jewish villages where agricultural activities were concerned. These model farms were dispersed among the Jewish farms and everyone knows what happens if to the right and to the left of well-organized farms there is dormant land. The Jews gave their fallow land to the nearby Russian farmers as meadows on which they could graze their cattle. In this open range style, the cattle frequently destroyed the crops of the model farms. It is understandable that under these circumstances that the income from those farms could only be deplorable. So, the goal of developing this Jewish colony with the aid of Mennonite farms remained unattainable; a goal that had been questioned by the mother colony. Only after 39 years and repeated requests by the Mennonites did the authorities allow these model farms to be separated from the Jewish properties. Many of these model farmers were frustrated and lost courage as a result of the inconveniences and improprieties they had endured but when they found they were no longer responsible as models for the Jews, their courage returned. Current

successes in the field of agriculture and the vigour with which they approach their work shows that they were happy to accept the good wishes of the colony.

The second move away from the colony consisted of limited numbers of model farmers and had only a limited effect on the reduction in population in the mother colony. Only the departure of a larger number could help reduce the population. Finally, that happened. Again, it was motivated from the outside and from unexpected quarters. Moritz Schumacher, who was then the administrator of the estates of His Majesty Michael Nikolaiwitsch in the province of Tauris, visited the Chortitzer colony and offered a portion of this land for settlement for a low and reasonable rent. Thanks to the efforts of Peter Dyck, chairman of the Agriculture Society, with whom Schumacher was in contact, this goal was achieved despite some opposition from the other side. The whole plan includes 11,413 dessiatin. Five villages were built on this land: Georgsthal and Olgafeld in 1864, Michaelsburg in 1865, Rosenbach in 1866, Alexanderthal in 1867, and finally Sergejewka in 1868. One farm consists of 52-58 dessiatin.

The first Mennonite renter signed a contract for 15 years [1864-79]. They were to pay 1.25 rubles per dessiatin. The renewal contract that was drawn up for the first four villages was for 12 years terminating in 1891 [1879-91]. Then they were already charging 2 rubles plus 25 kopecs going to the crown per dessiatin. There is no charge for the yard. The most disadvantaged is the last village, Sergejewka, who must pay 4 rubles and 50 kopecs per dessiatin.

The prospects for the future are gloomy. If the purchase of this land becomes impossible, no doubt these villages will have to be removed. The rate of 5 rubles per dessiatin, that is being asked, is prohibitive in the long run.

Villages that have been built on rented land are not acknowledged as legal and as a result have no independent administration; they are considered as part of the Chortitzer district (Wolost). They have a type of self-arranged local administration. The head is the chief supervisor who, by all appearances, is the church's representative to the grand duke. As well, he acts as chief mayor in local matters. He is elected by the village churches and supported by the village mayors.

The post of supervisor was instituted by M Schumacher. In a memo from him in 1866, it says: "To the churches of Georgsthal, Olgafeld, Michaelsburg, Rosenbach, and Alexanderthal! In the interests of order and unity on the Rogatschick land, I consider it necessary that a chief supervisor be put in office." (Because of the faded state of the original, this memo could continue as follows.) "...and should you consider electing Peter Dyck from Schoneberg for this post, whom I consider not only the founder and leader of this settlement, but a man whom I have learned to know and who has the interests of the entire settlement at heart. He has never asked me for any favours."

And Dyck was actually elected as the chief mayor and even though he possessed no legal authority, he performed his responsibilities successfully. He travelled extensively among the villages encouraging the settlers to build and plant, especially to plant fruit trees, for which this soil was well suited. His affirmative action should be regarded with gratitude. It was through

his efforts that this colony progressed as it did. Of course, blessings from heaven contributed to this success as well.

With the settling of the Mennonites on crown land, the matter of land shortage was only temporarily settled. The mother colony was forced to take things in hand to find room and more land. So, this happened in 1868 when 7351 dessiatin were purchased from an earldom for 240,000 rubles. This was only 25 Werst from Chortitz.

Four new villages were built: Nikolaifeld, Franzfeld, Eichenfeld and Adelsheim and this consisted of 147 families with 50 dessiatin each. Straight and wide streets, excellent buildings and well-tended orchards identify these villages and their success. These villages, together with Petersdorf (Petersdorf had already existed there for 35 years) and Hochfeld, which was built later, now have their own administration known as the Nikolaifelder Wolost (district).

In 1870, the Seifart land was purchased. This was located in the Jekatherinaslaw district. It was purchased for the purpose of locating 5 new villages: Steinau, Blumenfeld, Hamburg, Neubergthal and Hoffnungsort. Each farmstead had 50 dessiatin. For the first 10 years, the annual rent was 2 rubles per dessiatin. The second contract expires next year. Should these villages be allowed to remain, a new contract will have to be drawn up. Hopefully, this will happen.

In 1871, the mother colony purchased 3644 dessiatin of land in the district of Werchnedjepro in the province of Jekatherinaslaw from the duchess of Repnin for 120,252 rubles. This was for 2 villages, Neuchortitz and Gnadenthal consisting of 74 farmsteads. Settlement of this land took place the next year.

In 1872, 1500 dessiatin were purchased at 47 rubles per dessiatin from the landholder Jewgenija Morosowa on which the abovenamed Neu Hochfeld was located with 30 farmsteads. In December of the same year, another 4187 dessiatin were purchased in the Werchnedjepro district from the landholder Stepan Michailowitsch Schlachtin for 167,480 rubles. Here the two villages, Grunfeld and Steinfeld, were located with 40 farmsteads. The Baratower and Schlachtin villages were located in Russian Volosts [administrative districts].

Finally, the mother colony purchased a larger piece of land in 1888 from the duchess of Ignatjewa. This is located in the Bachmut district, province of Jekatherinaslow and consists of 14,159 dessiatin. Eight new villages were located on this land and it cost almost a million rubles. Settling on this land will begin in the spring of 1889.

In addition to the above described settlements, numerous small villages were located at various places. This included a number of renters, private owners and numerous large landowners. Many of our fellow Mennonites live in and around the surrounding towns such as Jekatherinaslow and have for many years.

V. Mennonites and General Conscription

15. The Efforts by Mennonites to Preserve Their Freedom of Conscience.

It was in 1871 when we first heard the reports of the impending introduction of conscription from the capital city through the newspapers. Naturally this information created shock and fear in most settlers because implementation of this law would mean the yielding of the special privileges regarding conscientious objection. Could it be possible that the recognized privileges guaranteed by Czar Paul and his successors would now become null and void? It seemed impossible that the loving heart of our sovereign could desert his Mennonite children so suddenly and demand duties from them that were completely contrary to their conscience? These worries were not so easily shrugged off.

Our brethren in the Molotschna thought as we did and when they received a directive that they had full permission to pursue continued preservation of freedom of conscience with the authorities, our fathers knew immediately what course to take. Conferences of spiritual and secular committees met time and again in many places. The result of all these efforts was: dispatch a deputation to St. Petersburg and, if at all possible, appear before his majesty Alexander II. These frightened children turned to their father to find reassurance and consolation.

From the Chortitzer church, Elder Peter Dyck and Reverend Heinrich Epp were sent but before they left they went to see the governor-general in Odessa as well as the lord governor in Jekatherinoslaw to let them know of their intentions. Our representatives left for St. Petersburg 16 February 1871. Their trip led them first via Jekatherinoslaw and Pawlograd to Losowaja. From here, they could take the train. This winter the snow was heavy and for the train to get stuck in the snow was not a rarity. Our travelers reached the capital on the 24th. When they arrived, they immediately went to the hotel Demuth. They were aware that the president of the Odessa Welfare Committee, Mr. Ettinger, was also registered here. He was not at home and they were asked to call again the next day. They received a friendly welcome the following day. He told them that the Molotschna brethren had already seen him and that he had arranged an audience for them with the minister of estates, Selenoi. He advised them to join the Molotschna people and together prepare a petition to present to the minister. They were also told that for the time being an audience with the czar would not be possible. The Molotschna representatives were Elder Leonhard Sudermann, Reverend Peter Gorz and Reverend Frank Isaak as well as the district secretary, Hermann Janzen. Together they prepared a petition in Russian and made their way to the minister.

Reverend Epp writes about this meeting; "We were taken up in a stone stairway to the reception hall where several gentlemen were already gathered. It took a good while before the minister arrived. Before he arrived, we spoke briefly with Baron Medem. He agreed that we had an excellent case and acknowledged the validity of our petition. We had come just in time, he

said, to bring this matter forward so that we might achieve our freedom of conscience. Baron Gern-Gross, whom the Molotschna had already located, had intimated that surely they would not refuse sanitary service, something that would not hurt their conscience. Baron Medem knew very well the difference between being conscripted for service and volunteering.

Almost surprisingly, the minister entered through a side door and made the rounds with all the petitioners. He took each paper, read it and said a few words. Finally, he reached us. Elder Sudermann had been chosen by us to hand over the papers. The minister took the petition, read it and asked where we were from. Baron Medem responded, “From the Molotschna and Chortitz” and introduced the brethren Dyck and Sudermann as elders with the remark that they could not understand Russian. The minister regretted this and he could not promise us anything prematurely and that this matter depended on higher authority, that it would take time and added that he could remember the service the Mennonites had rendered during the Crimean war. He promised to give the petition to the minister of war so he could consider our rights and petitions. He further remarked, after he had recognized the progress the Mennonites had made, that it was unfortunate that after a sojourn in Russia of 70 years, they could still not speak Russian. I said we would be making every effort to rectify that situation which our fathers had neglected. “But it is a little late,” he said. This was in short, what our conversation consisted of. Although his eyes had a serious look, he appeared friendly and full of goodwill towards us. Baron Medem approached us and said: “You can be quite happy and content with your reception.” Well, we were satisfied; it was grace from God that this audience with the minister met the expectations of so many.

After the Baron von Medem had recommended they lay out the basis of their pacifism in a statement that could be presented to the higher authorities, they took their leave. Two of them proceeded to the lord president Ettinger to give him a report of their meeting and the rest reported to senator Hahn. They received a friendly welcome from this high official and were assured of his full participation and cooperation in this matter. Ettinger confirmed that the deputies had made a good impression on the minister and advised they should strike while the ‘iron is hot’. He too requested a written statement relating to the Mennonites’ position on pacifism so they have something specific and concrete to show when they went to the ministry.

This request was immediately acted upon by the deputies and their statement reads as follows:

“An inscription regarding the position of the Mennonites on pacifism.

Our highly honoured Saviour, Jesus Christ, is our king of peace. He has been proclaimed as such in the Old Testament by the prophets, Jes 9:6 as well as by the angels at his birth, Luke 2:14. The kingdom he came to set up was a kingdom of peace Jes 9:17; Ps 72:7; John 18:36; Jes 26:3&4. His messengers are messengers of peace. Jes 52:7; Nah 2:1; Romans 10:15; and they have the important commission of spreading the evangelism of peace and to urge all children of peace to consider this important question of leaving

the darkness and to face the light; to tear themselves from the grasp of Satan, to receive forgiveness of sin and receive their inheritance together with the saints; Acts 26:18.

These children of peace put off the old mantle of their former self Eph 4:22 that contain the dark deeds of the flesh that Paul draws to our attention in Gal 5: 19 & 20. They know our former self has been crucified with Christ so we no longer serve sin, Rom 6:6. They put on the new man in the image of Him who created us Col 3:10 in righteousness and holiness Eph 4:24 and who has the fruit of the Spirit in his followers. These fruits are love, peace, joy, patience, friendliness, benevolence, faith, meekness and modesty Gal 5:22. Love is the first and greatest of the fruits of a living faith through which the important transformation of the human heart can take place. This love convinces the children of peace that they should be loyal to their glorious sovereign and prince of peace who has given them this commandment of love John 13:14 and in Matthew 5 where the holy law of the Old Testament is specifically separated. It makes the children of peace aware of their responsibility in the Kingdom of God which consists of practicing the love of God, Mark 12:31.

The divine destiny of man in time and eternity is communion with God; his singular purpose is to do the will of God, and God has revealed His will through His Holy Word that man will be directed to that kingdom of peace which Jesus and his disciples have prepared; the kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit Rom 14:17 and of whom the prince of peace himself says Luke 17:21 that no man shall say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" because the kingdom of God is within you. "Listen, my dear brothers! God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the kingdom which he promised to those who love him." James 2:5

Although wars occurred in the Old Testament with God's express command, as for example in Samuel 15, Christ, our Saviour, emphasized in the New Testament what we and our forefathers accept as our guide: "You have heard that it was said 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, Love your enemy, bless those who curse you, do good unto those who hate you, pray for those who offend you, so you can call yourselves children of your father in heaven (Matt 5: 44 & 45. And again, I say: But I say unto you, do not resist evil Matt 5:39. These words clearly teach us that we shall not take vengeance on our enemy, but love, suffer and accept. All of Jesus' teachings are full of love for his friends and his enemies. Paul teaches: Compare not evil with evil, be honourable in every way, be at peace with all men as much as it is in your power. Do not avenge yourselves and avoid anger. It is written, "Vengeance is mine" saith the Lord, "I will recompense." Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him to drink for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:17-21. We shall follow our Saviour who, when reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously 1 Peter 2:23

In those words, we see that all vengeance has been forbidden us and so we cannot use a sword or gun against our enemy. Paul says in 2 Cor 10:3&4, “Even though we walk in the flesh, we do not fight in fleshly ways for the weapons of our knighthood are not flesh but mighty before God.” And when the Lord Jesus commanded Peter to put his sword back into the scabbard, it is not for us to pull it out again in protest against our enemies or to meet force with force; we would rather suffer and accept our fate. But we must not only avoid the sword of war but our heart and mouth shall not seek vengeance. “We must follow the Lamb wherever he goes or compare evil with evil and curse with curse, but quietly bless and we shall inherit blessings.” 1 Peter 3:9 (This is the article 6 of the Mennonite Confession of Faith.)

These are the words of God on which our witness of faith is built and which our fathers have constantly used to distance themselves from the sword; they have always defended the poor and because of their belief in the freedom of conscience have encountered many obstacles here on earth from time to time and have had to leave house, home and country because of our faith in the promises of the Saviour. Matt 5: 5&9. “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God”; or “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.”

And the Lord has revealed this word to us even though our fathers suffered much. Without any effort on their part and to their surprise, He opened the door to an asylum in Russia whose high sovereign he has continued to bless with favour and grace of which we were the benefactors. He blessed the faith of four fathers and us, his children, as well. He also blessed us in material ways in our new country. We also have faith now that the Lord will lead our sovereign and lord in his majesty so that we will in no way be pressured or prejudiced because of our faith and conscience. His will be done--Amen.”

Signed: Church Elder: Gerhard Dyck & Leonhart Sudermann
Church Ministers: Franz Isaak, Peter Gorz & Heinrich Epp
Church Member: Hermann Janzen

St. Petersburg 2 March 1871

Elders Dyck and Sudermann were introduced to the president of “The Commission for the Composition and Elaboration of General Conscription”, Earl Heyden. They took the opportunity to hand the above Confession of Faith to him. He informed them that it had been their intention all along to recognize their Confession of Faith. “At any rate, you will not need to carry weapons but rather apply yourselves to sanitary service and this only 25 years from now.”

The following day, the adjutant of Earl Heyden, captain of the horse guards, Earl Medem, brought our deputies a directive for them to appear at his superior’s house next day at 3 o’clock. Punctually at the designated hour, according to Epp’s report, they met at the home of the Earl of Heyden, who was a member of the general staff at that time. His honour had been called to the

minister of war and they were obliged to wait until 4:45. Then he arrived. He had an earnest look on his face and asked them what they had decided. Elder Sudermann led the conversation. He explained the Mennonites' position on pacifism and pointed out that according to their church constitution, they could not serve in the sanitary service if it was organized on a military principle. It would threaten their church discipline. Earl Heyden became somewhat angry and said that the Mennonites would probably have to find a country where they would have no responsibility to the state. He questioned them further whether they recognized no state organization at all. Elder Sudermann, who had misunderstood the question, replied, "No." It might have created a greater misunderstanding had Sudermann not immediately added that the Mennonites recognized (state) authority and that they obeyed them and prayed for them. Asked what they would do in case of war, Sudermann replied: "I would be reconciled with my enemy and meet him and put my arms around him, I would not kill him." The earl smiled and said, "But if no one was prepared to take up weapons, no state could exist." Sudermann was silent so Epp spoke. "If we followed that example to its natural conclusion, there would be no war." Earl Medem smiled and said that if all people were Mennonites, there would be no war. Earl Heyden explained to the deputies that they could do nothing about this whole matter, and it would be best if they went home. The commission would probably take another year and half to two years of work and they could then resolve the problem together. However, he could assure them that only those born following the confirmation of this law would be liable to serve in this sanitary service, perhaps not for another 24 to 25 years.

This ended the mission of our authorities. They had not been successful in laying their petition at the feet of the sovereign, but they had found friendly consideration from high authorities, and their hearts were full of hope. But they still wanted to see their czar and sovereign, so they made their way to the summer garden where he was wont to promenade. Together with many others they lined up at the garden entrance. Several times, the official guard asked them if they intended to present the czar with a petition, but on their assurance they only wanted to see him, they were left unmolested.

Finally, he arrived on foot; the coach was empty. Bareheaded, they all waited for him. He greeted them with a military salute and proceeded into the garden.

When he came back and the valet had placed the mantle over his shoulders at the gate, he turned unexpectedly to the Mennonites and asked if they were from Taurin. "From the province of Taurin," replied Isaak. "You are Mennonites?" They all replied, "Yes." "Why have you come here?" "Because of the conscription law and we are fearful that we will lose our religious freedom." "Oh," said the czar, entered the coach and away they went.

In the fall of 1872 while his majesty was in the Crimea, the governor general from Odessa hinted to the Molotschna Mennonites that now might be an appropriate time for a delegation to approach the czar. Naturally, the authorized men (Elder G. Dyck from the Chortitzer church as well as Reverend H. Epp) immediately made their way to Yalta. Upon arrival, they found the governor general ill and the doctors had forbidden him to do any kind of work. Yet our men received a friendly reception from this suffering official, and they were

entertained on the verandah of his hotel. The governor general regretted he would not be able to help them a great deal but, he added, he was fully familiar with the wishes of the Mennonites and that the following morning, when the czar planned to visit him, he would lay their case before his majesty. The deputies thanked him and left. Then they wrote and thanked him again next day wishing him a speedy recovery and then they left for home.

When the deputies had stayed in St. Petersburg, they had found a noble friend in pastor Hans of the Brethren church there. With great energy he participated in this affair of the Mennonites as much as he could. His advice and assistance was of immense help to the deputies.

A letter from this man in Feb 1873 resulted in another trip to the capital by our deputies. It was reported that a new conscription law was in the hands of the senators of the country for their perusal and that it might be possible for the deputies to gain an audience with the grand duke Konstantin Nikolajewitsch, president of the senate, and to enlist his cooperation in gaining protection for the freedom of their conscience.

Following is a summarized report from the deputies:

“On the 26th of February, we arrived by the grace of God in the capital in good health, and without further ado we went to see pastor Hans. He showed us the usual cooperation and had the same concerns we had about this matter. He provided us with additional papers authorized by the Brethren on the Volga and Wolhynian but he personally did not believe there was much hope of success getting the release we were seeking. Even the free years we had been guaranteed, he felt were in jeopardy. He doubted our success in getting a personal audience with the grand duke to hand him our petition. Yet he gave us a few friendly hints so the following day we set out to meet the chief of staff, earl Heyden, who had told pastor Hans it would be better to hand the petition over personally than to send it by mail. Earl Heyden gave us a friendly welcome, but he also thought we would not get complete release and asked us to come back in two days and he would look at our petition. The second reception by the earl was cooler. He looked at the petition and said it contained nothing new. He pointed to a Hutterite brother who was present, Josef Hofer and told us to ask him. He already knew the assessment of his petition. The Hutterites had handed in their petition as well, but it did not even reach the grand duke; a secretary received it from them and later handed it over to the minister of the interior. We found later that the duke had advised we should deal with his aide-de-camp. We did this and he promised he would try to get an audience with the duke but could not promise he would be successful. On March 6, it was the duke’s turn to entertain at court. On this day, we went to the marble palace, the home of the grand duke, to give him our petition. The aide-de-camp met us, took us to the white hall and asked what we wanted, our names and where we lived. We told him. He gave the petition a fleeting glance and asked us to wait, he would tell the grand duke we were here. But, he added, it might be difficult to arrange a meeting. After about half an hour during which time each one of us prayed to the Lord for support and blessing, the adjutant came out of the grand duke’s great creation, beckoned us to come to the other end of the hall and to wait there, the grand duke would soon present himself. His royal highness soon arrived. He was

friendly and condescending and to our astonishment spoke to us in German while everyone had advised us that he preferred to speak Russian. He asked about our homes and the villages we came from. He said he had visited our villages and we said we remembered. He said he was aware of the affair that brought us to see him and he would accept our petition but would read it later. He also said that we could not be excluded from general conscription but because of our confession of faith and that we could not carry arms or take part in war, the government would be kind to our conscience and allow us to serve in hospitals and other work places. We had been in Russia 70-80 years, had enjoyed protection and kindness and so now they expected us to do our duty and do something for the country out of gratitude. When we replied that we had the deepest gratitude to our sovereign and ruler and that we would be prepared to prove it, we did not wish to come into conflict over this matter, he said; "You are good Christians and as such it is your responsibility to help and care for a wounded soldier." When we explained to him that we would be required to do this under military law and that it was different from doing this voluntarily and from our own motivation, his countenance darkened somewhat. He soon broke off the discussion, personally accepted our petition and dismissed us. His appearance and words were friendly enough, but his manner was precise, specific and decisive. Baron Meden said later we could be thankful that the grand duke had received us personally."

Inexorably the legislation went its way. In the Mennonite colonies the unrest rose steadily. Despite the friendly assurance from the authorities and despite all promises that nothing would be required of us that would hurt our consciences, many of our fellow worshippers raised the question of emigration to America.

Then it was decided to make one more attempt and to seek an audience with his majesty and lay before him all our fears, hopes and petitions. In the fall of 1873, the third trip to St. Petersburg was made. Elder G Dyck, Reverend H Epp and church member H Heese were the members of this delegation. Their first meeting was again with pastor Hans. Friendly as ever, he still could not give them any hope or encouragement. His efforts to get them an appointment with the czar had been in vain and if they expected to meet with the czar through duke Schuwalow before the law was confirmed, they would have to do it soon. In any event, he advised them to enlist the help of the country's minister of estates, Walujew.

They immediately took the necessary steps, but it still took several days before they had the opportunity to speak with his excellency, the minister. Reverend Epp writes the following in his report: "Today 5 December (1873) at 12 noon, we, Gorz and I again went to the ministry. This time we did not have long to wait before we were taken into the minister's reception hall. In a little while, he appeared and after speaking to several petitioners, it was our turn. After we had responded to his questions where we were from, he began to speak to us in Russian but then switched to German. Then brother Gorz said we were here again on behalf of the military law and to ask for his excellency's advice on how and when we would be able to approach the czar with our petitions.

The minister explained that the laws of the land were very changeable, not only in Russia, but also in countries like Germany, Sweden and others where frequent changes in the

laws occurred. One thing he asked us to keep in mind; his majesty had commanded the authorities to give the Mennonites every consideration and that he, the Czar, was aware of their wishes. He could receive no deputations at this time since this would give rise to many other requests for such meetings in the future. Petitions would not stop the implementation of this law.

In reply to our statement, that an audience with the czar would do much to reassure the church members, he asked if we had spoken to the minister of war. When we said no, he advised us to take our petition directly to this minister; in the meantime, he would be meeting him and then we should call again. We thanked him and left.”

After many fruitless efforts to arrange a meeting with the minister of war, our authorities again went to the minister of estates. When they told him their efforts to meet with the minister of war had been of no avail, he embarked on a lengthy speech in which he reported the progress of the implementation of this law could not be stopped, that its forward move was as unalterable as the earth’s orbit around the sun. That on a number of occasions, his majesty had condescended to give consideration to their wishes in order not to offend the consciences of the Mennonites. Indeed, he said, it would be impossible for them to get by ‘scot free’. Obviously, the people in other countries had duties and responsibilities to perform as well. He alluded to the emigration to other countries and he portrayed a scenario for them, indicating it would be quite daring to leave a country where they had lived for almost a hundred years, a country they knew and to move to a country where everything was uncertain. He finally advised them, in the name of God, to go home and patiently await the results of the passing of the conscription law. But because of their fears, he would speak to the minister of war himself on their behalf.

Our deputies assured him that the majority of Mennonites preferred to stay here rather than emigrate. “I believe you,” he said, “because you are good people. Yet I know there are people among you who spread fear, but fear mongering won’t help. You understand me, don’t you?” Then he left.

Finally, December 17, the deputies were honoured by being introduced to the minister of war. He confronted brother Gorz first and asked what his concern was. Gorz asked for permission to speak in German. “Ja ne geworu po nemetski!” (I don’t speak German.) Then the delegates expressed themselves in Russian. The minister then said he was accepting no deputation from the colonies, they should see the minister of estates. They were dismissed.

The next day several of the deputies again went to see Walujew, the minister of estates, to report the result of yesterday’s meeting. He again advised them to wait patiently and pointed out what he had already said earlier, that the czar had only 24 hours a day just as they had. His majesty had told them to give consideration to our view of the faith and that we would not be required to serve with the troops but that we need serve only in hospitals. The governor general had also made representation on behalf of the Mennonites to at least allow them to have several years of grace so they could get used to the idea and become reconciled to it. When the deputies replied that an audience with the czar would contribute greatly toward some reassurance for the church membership, the minister answered: “You have given me the pleasure of seeing you three times now and my time is also limited but I know you as valuable citizens who have proved

useful in the past, for example, during the Crimean War. There are people among you who are spreading fear and I remind you of what I said earlier: 'Spreading fear us if no value.' You have the choice between following the law or moving to a strange land. But you should consider carefully the consequences that other churches encountered when they moved to other parts of the world. They think things will be better but they become worse. You may go and see the minister of the interior and then come back and speak to me again." When the deputies saw that they could get nowhere they explained they would leave off seeing him. This explanation visibly improved his demeanor. In conclusion, he stated that he was prepared to receive them again. The deputies thanked him and left.

The next day Heese had gone to see his majesty's baffling adjutant on the chance that he might gain an audience with the czar. He said he could accept no petitions for the czar and that no petitions were accepted in the palace. But he suggested they might be present outside the entrance to the palace and when the weather was good the czar usually went for a walk and it happened from time to time that he would accept petitions there.

This advice did not sit well with the deputies; they were convinced that this was not the way to approach their sovereign. Pastor Hans also advised against this; he felt this could only harm their cause. Legally this approach was not allowed but from time to time it was done anyway. These petitioners were usually beggars who had no other recourse and were usually kept under surveillance by the police. They were advised to do this the proper way. Should this be impossible, they could still appear before the church membership and claim they had done everything possible. The only recourse left open to them was to see Earl Schuwalow. But to arrange a meeting with him was also impossible. Every effort failed. In the meantime, the St. Petersburg newspapers carried the article that the conscription law had passed and that public proclamation would occur at the New Year. Earl Schuwalow's adjutant told them that everything possible had been done for the Mennonites. Indeed, they had received from 6 to 10 years grace (the adjutant had forgotten the exact number of years) and they should think about this before they considered emigration. Because this came from the earl, through his adjutant, they considered this important information.

Since all hopes of gaining an audience with the Czar had now faded, the deputies decided they would try to have their petition passed to the Earl by the adjutant with the hope and request he pass it on to the Czar. Pastor Hans thought this was a good idea. Surely the earl would see that the Czar receive their petition at an early date.

When they had given the adjutant the petition to give to the earl Schuwalow, they went home. They had failed to meet with the czar personally but hopefully their petition would now reach the ear of the czar and move his heart. This petition read as follows:

To his Royal Majesty
All Merciful Czar and Lord!

It is with troubled hearts yet happy anticipation that we come humbly and reverently seeking to appear on the step before the throne of your Royal Majesty.

Invited by the high government into this country, provided with important letters of goodwill which assured us of the full freedom of faith and conscience and freedom from conscription and civil service for all time, our fathers found here an asylum that we, thanks to your imperial Majesty and his venerated predecessors, we have enjoyed unhindered until now.

But due to the consideration of a general conscription law, which we have found shall soon be proclaimed, our hearts are very disturbed that we may be forced to forfeit an important section of our confession of faith, the article on pacifism. We have not only placed our concerns regarding the proposed law before the highest commission of that time, but we also had the honour of placing our petition before his royal highness Konstantin Nikolajewitsch, president of senate at the beginning of the year.

This is an important and earnest matter for us; it is a question of the survival of our church, so much so, that we feel pressed to approach our czar and sovereign and before his majesty himself with our strongest plea to help us to preserve the freedom of our conscience that we have enjoyed until now. We come humbly and in deep reverence in simple faith to the paternal heart of his majesty that he might have a sympathetic ear for the cry of distress from a small and insignificant group of children within the country.

In the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ who has given us his message of peace through our fathers, who asks through his holy Word to follow his footsteps on the path of suffering, and to endure, but not to follow the ways of war and anything related to it. We plead with your majesty to keep us free from conscription and we will not cease to pray to our Lord to richly bless and pour his grace on the anointed head of the most honoured and highest head, and to protect our fatherland from all wars and misfortunes and that all shall prosper forever under the wise government and their dear monarch and that peace shall endure. In deep reverence, humility and loyalty we remain your humble representatives of the Mennonite Church.

22 December 1873

(the signatures follow)

The Adjutant-General Von Todleben's Mission

The efforts by the Mennonites to bring their worries and concerns before the czar had not been without some success. Their simple petition had found its way to the sovereign's heart. The Adjutant-General von Todleben's mission provides the best proof of this.

Reverend Epp writes in his report: "Upon the request from the Adjutant-General, the Chortitz ministers reported to Halbstadt where they had the honour to meet his Excellency on the 20th of April 1874. He asked each one of us who we were and told us that he was here upon the request of His Majesty, the Czar, to meet the Mennonites and to assure them of the royal favour and grace and that he would look after our consciences and our confession of faith and if possible, to discourage an emigration to America. He pointed to the benevolence of his Majesty that he had demonstrated by providing us with freedom from conscription when the military law was proclaimed and that there would be no requirements to carry arms and we would only be required to serve in hospitals, army work camps and marine resorts.

But since the Mennonites saw this as active Military service too, and that the sanitary service was in reality also military service and that they wished to emigrate to America for that reason in search of a refuge where they could practice their faith, his Majesty was prepared to release them from any participation in the military service. Instead they would try to find other duties that could be helpful to the state. He considered us his children whom he loved, and was concerned about their uncertain future if they emigrated to America. The duties he would have for us should not offend our conscience. There was no mention of taxes and under no conditions could we be exempt from all duties. His Majesty had no other choice if he was going to treat all his subjects fairly and he loved all his subjects.

Since we could not participate in the military either directly or indirectly, none of our duties should have anything to do with any aspect of war but we should be concerned with peaceful matters only. And since we wanted to protect our young men from this danger, we wanted them to stay together, perhaps at two locations, so they could better be instructed in our faith and confession. We could then provide them with a spiritual leader who would supervise them with the necessary spiritual guidance. Neither would we be under the minister of war. A special regulation regarding our duty to the state would be instituted. We should continue with our activities as usual including our school programs. Peacefully we were to continue with our faith, raise our children as usual in a Christian faith with the assurance that nowhere else would we find the favours and considerations we found in Russia. The czar had confided in him that he did not wish to invade our faith and that those people who were true to their faith would result in God being true to the czar. We had voluntarily helped the fatherland during the Crimean War by helping the wounded and he would never forget that. Again, his Majesty reminded us of the

insecurity and uncertainty of our future in America and said, among other things: it is said that in America there is freedom of conscience but if a war breaks out, Mennonites will have to be conscripted because of a great shortage of people in this new country. This happened during their civil war. You are looking to the north; good! But a war is looming on the horizon in England and you would be right on the firing line. Do you not have freedom of conscience here? Have your ministers and teachers not taught that your confession of faith requires freedom? Do you not have Katherina's protection? Under Paul? Under Alexander? Under Nikolai? Under Alexander II and does the past not prove the security you are seeking, that the Russian monarchs will protect you in the future? His Majesty loves you as much as any of his other subjects and it hurts him when you want to discard what your fathers have achieved with tremendous effort and that you should be considering leaving the country because of freedom of conscience. Nobody will rob you of that here. "When his Majesty called me," continued Todleben, "and gave me this challenge and I saw the concern and love he had in his heart for the Mennonites, I was deeply moved even though I was personally not involved in this affair. So think it over well what your duty is to your God, to your sovereign, to your country and to yourselves before you come to a decision and remember where you found hospitality. Think of the special royal benevolence that has been shown you by the czar.

Now go home and talk it over with your brethren and discuss it with your wives who have great fears and concerns for the future of their sons. Thursday, I plan to be in Chortitz and Friday I will see you all again to hear your decision."

The tone of his speech was benevolent and well-meaning. We could feel his concern for us. It was hardly noticeable that he was filled with emotion, but he had tears in his eyes.

Yes, this was a solemn and important moment; we ourselves were overcome with emotion by this unexpected benevolence and grace from our dear sovereign and tears flowed over many a cheek.

His Excellency had departed, and we had not even thanked him. Then two of us (Elder G. Dyck and Rev H. Epp) went to his room and had ourselves announced. When he answered, we said: "Your Excellency, in the name of our church members we feel urged to offer you our deepest thanks for your benevolence and generosity from his Majesty. Even though we have always had faith in the grace and mercy of our sovereign, we still believe that circumstances are such that we will be subject to the military law, and so, to remain true to our faith, we wish to leave our fatherland despite the loss of our property which we love and for which we worked so hard. Yet we would dearly love to stay should a change in this law be considered."

Von Todleben was moved and replied: "I will share what you told me with his Majesty. He will be happy to hear from you." We shook hands and left.

The suggested duties of our young men would be as follows:

1. Service in hospitals, not in army hospitals but in civil hospitals in such that would be large enough to accommodate our boys and keep most of them together.
2. In factories and workplaces such as Nikolajew, Odessa or Tagenrog where only non-military items are manufactured. Here the boys could work together in greater numbers.

3. We would find nothing offensive in the forest service, an occupation we know well. Here, however, the boys could not remain near their homes but would be located in the Kursk area or in the rich forests of one of the provinces.
4. In the city fire-brigade, the purpose of which is to extinguish fires and save property.
5. On the railroads.

If a war breaks out involving the area where our boys are working they shall be removed from the theatre of war....etc.

At the appointed date the Adjutant-General arrived in Chortitz and personally attended to the wishes of his Majesty, the Czar. The Molotschna brethren had already made a petition to his Excellency which the Chortitzers fully supported and signed.

Here follows the wording of the petition:

To His High Excellency
The lord Adjutant-General Von Todleben,

Your excellency has given us and many of our other brethren repeated assurances while you were here that we can continue to depend upon the benevolence and grace of his Majesty as we have in the past. We appreciate his Majesty sending your Excellency as a special envoy to reassure us that he will honour and fulfill our request for general exemption from military conscription according to our confession of faith and that through his grace we will be free of all and any duty to carry arms within or outside the theatre of war and that we are assured we will have no connection with wars.

We express our deepest thanks for this assurance and consideration of the fundamentals of our faith. His Majesty's response to our concern about the duties as they relate to military conscription allows us to declare, in the name of the majority of our brethren, that we are prepared to accept personal service duties.

We are, however, not fully acquainted with the content and the practical application of all of these service duties, so we humbly request that we may express our situation in a written memo following the study of this matter and in which we will relate our preferences regarding the various methods of service. At the same time, we feel the need to express our warmest gratitude that your graces have condescended to deal with us in a fatherly and friendly manner and add our most humble plea to personally thank his Majesty's translators and we ask him to list our following recommendations:

1. That, if in the future any changes are made in the military law that might result in the loss of our privileges, we will be allowed emigrate.
2. That our schools, which until now the benevolent monarch of the Russian kingdom has allowed us to administer and supervise, continue under these conditions and that they be in keeping with other schools of the nation, that we will learn the language of the country in the best way we can.

3. That the placement of our boys be made in such a way that they can be trained and supervised in the ways of our church and that these may be closed groups so that the training and supervision of our confession of faith may be clearly and efficiently carried out.

With our heartiest wishes and heartfelt prayer: “God keep and protect his Majesty, our most benevolent czar and lord as well as her Majesty, the Czarina, his Highness, the Successor to the throne as well as the whole court for many, many years.

Your Excellency – we are your humble servants.”

(Here follow the signatures of the Chortitzer and Molotschna representatives.)

The Chortitzer Mennonite Church forwarded the following note of gratitude:

Your Imperial Majesty

Most Generous Czar and Lord

With deeply moved souls we venture to humbly give a heartfelt thanks to your Imperial Majesty.

Even though we have never lost faith in your Majesty and even though the conscription law was not aimed directly at us, and we received high and special assurances, yet we saw that present circumstances point to a situation where we would be required, even though indirectly, to participate in wars if we remain here. We feel that God wishes to fulfill a cleansing and disciplining within His church.

Consequently, we feel pressed within our conscience to look around for another asylum where we can practice our faith unhindered. We cannot suppress the feelings of loss of the property acquired through our labour and industry and that of our forefathers. We can already feel the parting even before it occurs, from a country where we have found good fortune, hospitality and a country we have learned to love as our home. We shall thankfully remember the benevolence and the protection of your Majesty and those around you.

Then came his Excellency, the adjutant-general von Todleben, in the name of your Majesty and raised our spirits. As an able interpreter of his Majesty’s sentiments, he came to offer us, your insignificant children, service duties we could legitimately accept, so we could remain removed from wars so that it would not affect our confession of faith.

Majesty! Father! We cannot adequately find words to express our gratitude. That comes from the Lord of Lords who sees the love and cooperation your Majesty has had for us. A mountain of heavy concerns has been lifted from our hearts and we view our new acquisition as a renewed gift through your Imperial benevolence, a sacrifice you have made so we can hold fast to the faith of our fathers. With renewed joy, we look at our homes we received as a gift from Russia. We look at the mountains that surround us, at the churches and schools where we hear the Word of God and where our children are instructed, at the cemeteries where our dear ones are resting. Our souls are deeply moved when we raise our eyes to the mountains from whence

cometh our help and we pray: “Lord, you, who have seen the suffering of your children and turned it away, bless our sovereign, bless his heart with your Spirit of grace, prosperity and peace; bless him with much paternal joy and the serenity of his family; protect and keep the life of your anointed! Bless and protect the dear wife of our sovereign. Bless with your Holy Spirit the successors to the throne, our future sovereign. Bless and protect our dear Fatherland!

May we never need to reach for the sword according to the perception of the evangelical truth and show our Fatherland our service through that. We pray that we may use prayer as our weapon and call on our King of Peace, Jesus Christ, continually, that He may protect our Fatherland from all danger, that peace may be the destiny of all the people through the efforts of your Majesty; bless all the people living under your mighty scepter that it might result in righteous humility, love, reverence and devotion.

Humbly submitted to
Your Imperial Majesty

In the name of the Mennonite churches in the province of Ekaterinoslaw

(Signatures of the church elders and the district elders followed.)

Chortitz 26 April 1874

17. Conclusion

So the heavy stone of concern had been lifted from the hearts of the hard-pressed Mennonites. They were to perform the duties for the Fatherland and to continue to live undisturbed as before. But not all Mennonites were appeased. Many decided to turn their backs on their homes and move to America. A period of 7 years had been given in which they were free to emigrate. One train after another made its way taking Mennonite emigrants to seek spiritual and material freedom and security.

The following dates will provide an overview of the dimensions this emigration of the Chortitzer Colony took:

1874 – 21 families	= 49	males	43	females
1875 – 294	“	= 900	males	764 females
1876 – 159	“	= 455	males	404 females
1877 – 32	“	= 100	males	69 females
1878 – 42	“	= 135	males	125 females
1879 – 25	“	= 70	males	87 females

1880 – 7	“	= 24 males	15 females
<hr/>			
580	“	= 1733 males	1507 females [total = 3,240]

In the spring of 1875, the ‘St. Petersburg Newspaper’ had the following article regarding the Mennonites’ resistance to military duty and how they were affected by the new military law. It appeared in the number 131 issue:

“St. Petersburg 19 May 1875. The code number 40 contains the decree of the managing senate concerning the performance and obligations of the Mennonites as it applies to the Mennonites. It states: Those Mennonites who belonged to this sect before the proclamation of the military law and who had settled in Russia will find themselves under the following regulations when the time granted to them in guaranteed privileges expires:

1. To perform the active service, they will be provided with designated areas within the boundaries of New Russia and the neighboring provinces. These will be performed a) in work places like marine resorts. b) fire brigades c) in mobile forest resorts that look after forest development in Russia
2. In this service, the same terms apply as they apply in the military.
3. The Mennonites in these services will be placed in special groups to make it possible for the boys to be instructed and supervised more efficiently in their prayers and the constitution of their faith.
4. After the expiry of the term of their service, they will relate only to article 1 of the service act in case of war.

On May 12 of the same year, his Excellency, the governor of the province of Jekatherinoslaw, Durnowo, accompanied by the chief of the secret police, commander Baron von Nolde, came to the Chortitz where they spoke to a classroom full of people in the high school, to the spiritual as well as to the secular authorities and also to representatives from farther away. They explained the terms of the duties and services that his Majesty had confirmed.

By now, all doubts had disappeared. The frightening uncertainties had given way to challenges and duties that could be reconciled with faith and conscience.

Yet, the Mennonite church members felt, in the fall of 1875, the need to send a deputation, this time directly to the adjutant-general, von Todleben, regarding questions about the future of the Mennonites’ position and how it related to the state. They wanted to consult with him on this matter.

This important person gave them a friendly welcome and asked them into his room. He felt this could be more private.

And here, the Mennonite delegates poured out their hearts to their paternal friend; would our schools be allowed to retain their ‘church school’ character in the future? This was a life and death question for them. Would we be allowed convening districts when our young men are

drafted? Would we have any say in the duties or consider preferences and qualifications of the candidates?

Todleben asked them to remain calm regarding these matters and stated that the Mennonites should take into consideration what privileges had already been confirmed and that this should contribute to some extent towards a faith in the government. They should report back home to their brethren in his name and tell them they had nothing to fear. So, these questions remained in limbo. The time for the first draft came nearer and no one knew for certain how this service would be applied within the terms of military parameters and how those Mennonites on duty would be able to receive the necessary spiritual instruction.

Finally, a ruling came.

Already in June of 1875, the 'St.Petersburg Newspaper' had shared the following:

“As reported, the Mennonites are to organize work associations instead of doing military duty which will see to the reforestation of crown lands in the New Russian district. The 'Moskau Newspaper' now finds that the minister of estates has sent a specialist in forestry to Odessa who is to study and organize this affair.”

This specialist, controller of forestry affairs, state counsellor Bark, came to the Molotschna Mennonites in June 1880 with the following suggestions from the government: the government intended to draft the Mennonites specifically for the purpose of reforestation and to organize 6 commando units (Cod wuschnija Komandu) in the provinces of Jekatherinoslaw, Cherson and Taurin and where the minister of estates expected the full cooperation from the Mennonites. This minister suggested to the Mennonites they should build and maintain these forestry barracks. The government, on the other hand, would pay 20 kopecs per day per man. The government would also be prepared to advance support money should this be necessary, but it would be considered an advance on wages still to be earned. Should the Mennonites not agree to this, the government would be unable to guarantee that the young men could stay together in a group or groups on crown forest lands. They would be sent to various parts of the country in small groups.

It would be impossible to maintain church instruction and discipline among these Mennonite workers if this happened. It could entail lengthy periods of absences from home and could try even the most faithful. The first ones to decide to provide full support for the Mennonite reforestation units as a result of a church meeting 25 June 1880, was the Halbstadt district. Following are listed only the most important points of a fairly long church decree:

1. That the number of commando units remain at 6 as stated by the state counsellor Bark.
2. That a Mennonite elected director be stationed at each commando unit to be an indispensable helper and who would be responsible for the Mennonite workers during their free time and assist in the leadership of the post.
4. That the agreed upon sum of 20 kopecs per day by the minister of estates be paid to the Mennonite director at the end of each month.

5. That, if possible, 100-200 Dessiatin of land be set aside near and around the commando units to be seeded either voluntarily or for pay and the proceeds to go for the upkeep of the barracks.
7. That the construction of the barracks over the first three years be done with advance funds from the minister of estates of 800 rubles annually, repayment of which would be one third yearly for three years and the funds taken from the wages of the Mennonite men.
8. That in case, after the expiration of 20 years, the government should take another direction with the Mennonites, the barracks built by the Mennonites should be assessed by authorized appraisers.
13. That special convening centres be set up for the Mennonites.
14. That the Mennonite men be given the opportunity to learn to speak and write Russian in their free time.
15. That the constitution covering the mobile commando units, that has found agreement with the main leadership of the Mennonites, that is, the Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld, Chortitz and Schonfeld Mennonites, also include those living in the Cherson, Samaria, and Wolhynian provinces. This also includes Mennonites involved in special industry, living in Taurin and Jekatherinoslaw provinces.

The original contains the required signatures witnessing the Mennonites involved in this work.

The Chortitzer Mennonites have not been successful in setting up convening centres even though they have the required number of people. They turned in vain to the vice-governor of Jekatherinoslaw for direction when the governor himself was absent.

1880 was the first year of the draft. The men are obliged to serve a four year term and this was at the suggestion of the minister of estates and accepted by the ministry (of war?). At the same time, it was taken for granted that the Mennonite workers would not get leave as the military, based on 6 year service.

Naturally, construction of the barracks was to begin at the first opportunity. The barracks in the Anadol and Asov forestry units, in the province of Jekatherinoslaw were built in 1881. The Anadol barracks, of wooden construction, were destroyed by fire just a few years later and had to be rebuilt. The barracks in Wladimir and Razin in the province of Cherson, were built in 1882. Finally, the barracks for the new Berdjansk commando unit were erected in 1883 in the province of Taurin but instead of the required six barracks, a dwelling home was erected at the wishes of the government for use by the chief forester. In place of the sixth barrack, a crown building was furnished in old Berdjansk. The Mennonite workers had to live in temporary, wooden buildings until the barracks were completed.

The total cost of all the barracks, counting those destroyed by fire as well as the barns and the smithies and other outbuildings came to approximately 165,000 rubles. The 24,000 rubles advanced by the government were never claimed.

At each commando unit, there is a minister who has been entrusted with the spiritual guidance of the young brethren. At the same time, he is the steward and manager (okonom) of the unit.

The total number of Mennonite workers is around 500 men, with those from Chortitz about 150. The annual cost to cover the expenses runs from 60,000 to 70,000 rubles. The supplementary food from the fruitful and healthy crown land adjacent to the commando units (except for New Berdjansk) must not be underestimated.

The representative for the Mennonite churches for the affairs of the Commando units, the chief leader of all of the economic matters concerning the barracks, is a man appointed for three years. He is fully authorized by the district elders of Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld, and Chortitz (Wollosts). Currently, this is Peter Rempel from the Chortitzer district.

Let us throw a look backward at the development of our Chortitzer Mennonite colonies and what they have encountered during the past century, and we must thank God that He has carried our churches with such special patience and forbearance.

A hundred years ago, when our ancestors in Prussia were at their wits end, when they were desperately looking around for a way out of their oppression, it was Russia's great Czarina whom God, the Merciful, chose to provide a solution and bring to reality the thoughts and deliberations of his church. Something happened that no one expected: Russia extended its hospitality, opened the doors of its empire and asked the oppressed Mennonites into the country. Here they were invited to make their homes on the vast plains of southern Russia. Here, on these wide steppes, where formerly only the horses' hooves of the warlike Tatars and Kossacks had broken the sod, they could settle peacefully, develop their own prosperity and become useful to the country. But this government offered them much more than material advantages; they assured our church freedom to practice our faith for all time.

Then they came, in long trains – these new children who had been called to this country through imperial benevolence, depending on full support from God.

The settlement started off, but not where the deputies had first inspected the land, nor in the way many of the well-disposed newcomers had wished nor imagined. A time of distress arose. Hate and enmity took hold. Disorder and confusion raised its head. Total material ruin as well as morality was threatened. Then, the Most High again grabbed the spokes of the wheel and stopped the wagon, the church welfare, from rolling headlong into the abyss; our government had insight and patience with these inexperienced children who had wandered from the correct path. Qualified men appeared on the scene and put their shoulders to the wheel; they advised, they led, they helped the split church to be reconciled and again find strength and unity to move ahead on the true path of righteousness and duty.

What about the past 100 years where we have arrived at a great milestone? It is an earnest message that the past century confronts us with. It has an urgent and admonishing word for those who want to listen and understand. This past era demands our gratitude, gratitude to God for all the benevolence and loyalty he has demonstrated, but also gratitude to the Imperial House and our fatherland. What Catherina II promised the Mennonites was confirmed by Czar Paul and granted and guaranteed by his successors. In peace and tranquility, our people have been allowed to develop, expand and to live. Yes, and when the clouds of general conscription passed

over the church, we were destined to learn to know our sovereign Alexander II who offered us the opportunity to give to the czar and to the country that which we, as loyal and obedient subjects owed, and yet be able to live according to our confession of faith and give to God what was His. And we still enjoy this benevolence under the grace of his most Imperial Majesty Alexander III. In consideration of so much grace and benevolence, who could be unthankful? What hearts could remain unmoved?

But our love shall find expression not only in words but in deeds. And this can best happen when we see to it that these emotions and feelings directed at the Czar and the fatherland as well as at God are passed on to our descendants. And where best to begin to exert the leverage than in the schools? It is our duty to raise these as high as possible.

It is a fact that our whole school system received too little attention during the first three quarters of the past century. No one will argue that point. It is also true that this attention, this upswing in quality of our schools occurred in the last quarter of the previous century. (This has also been acknowledged by our Russian school authorities) but that is not to say that we did everything we should have done. There is still a lack of interest in schools in some areas. There is not enough cooperation between the church and the teachers in many cases. Here and there, we see much hanging on to the old times, the old customs and the old traditions.

To improve these conditions, this failing morality of our church, it is necessary that we start with the children. The development and education of our children is our biggest and holiest duty. The future destiny of our people depends on the proper education of our children and that depends partly on our schools.

Should these take up the great challenges, to become the nursery-beds of a true Christian training where mind and intellect may come into their own, then the welfare of the church will be assured; will those schools, however, not meet these challenges, evil spirits that seek to bury the destiny of the church, will have their sway. Only in well established schools, under good leadership, will true Christians evolve and become good subjects. We owe this to God, to our country and to ourselves.

But we must set the lever within the church as well. All intelligent and judicious members should take part in cooperating and setting examples, as a model, by advice and deed, to help, to support, to improve where it is required. Truly, this is often a thankless job, yet it is our duty to our fellowman. So let the holy light of truth clearly shine for your ego and you will adapt and accommodate yourself to your fellowman, accept them as they are, not as you think they should be and then try to avoid cause for displeasure. Unfortunately, there is dissension, discord and conflict still today and we stand accused before God and the world. So, listen, you pacifists, and let these weapons rest, that are so often used, brother against brother, weapons that do not necessarily draw blood, but they often wound and sometimes kill. Leave hate and discord and you will enjoy earthly as well as eternal good fortune. Learn from the past and allow the spirit of peace and unity and brotherly tolerance move in; only then will you be able to call yourselves true pacifists; then, God's blessing will not stay away and the light of our churches will shine in His honour and the benefit of our fatherland!