

Jakob Hoepfner, Johann Bartsch and an Honourable Ministerial Council 1790-1801

By Edwin D. Hoepfner (1931-2020)

Introduction

Just over two centuries and a decade have passed since Mennonites, emigrating from the city of Danzig and district in West Prussia, founded the first Mennonite villages in what came to be called the Chortitza or Old Colony. This is mainly on the right bank of the Dnieper river, opposite to and on what they and all subsequent Mennonite authors knew as Insel Chortitza, the Island of Chortitza, and which, in Russian, was called Ostrov Khortitsa, located where the Khortitsa River joins the Dnieper. In what follows, the author will use the German spelling “Chortitza” when referring to the colony, but in accordance with what has become usage in more academic works, the term Khortitsa will be used when the reference is to geographic features, and in quotations. Similarly spelling will vary from: Cherson” to “Kherson” for that city and/or province.

The only eye-witness account of the emigration and of salient events in the first decade of settlement which has come to light so far was written in 1836 by Peter Hildebrand, who collected source documents which are now largely lost. Peter Hildebrand’s booklet was first published in 1888 for the centennial celebrations in 1889 of the founding of the colony. Hildebrand’s manuscript was “prepared” for publication by David H. Epp who based his own centennial publication “Die Chortitzer Mennoniten” on it and on other documents in Hildebrand’s collection. In his works, the late David G. Rempel justly criticized these works for sweeping many unsavoury details under the rug. Although much detail appears to have been omitted, it is absolutely critical, for a better understanding of our history, to check the one eye-witness account, on which all subsequent histories are based, for accuracy, to test it in order for its veracity to be properly evaluated. Not only is this necessary on general historical principles, it is more than ever necessary now in order to put writings, which purport to be historical analyses which have appeared recently, in an appropriate context. Some of these recent works are tendentious and attempt to impose an inappropriate interpretation on the historical record. In this article, a number of tests are applied to Peter Hildebrand’s work, and in effect, to D.H.Epp’s longer but still derivative account.

New historical details will be presented, some of which, although they were available to readers of the *Odessaer Zeitung* in 1889, have been largely overlooked by historians, although D.G.Rempel has based some of his conclusions on his knowledge of this material. The material itself has, however, not been incorporated in any works known to the author of this article. The new details will very substantially improve our understanding of some of the events of the period of 1789-1801 and they will also vindicate the innocence of Delegates Johann Bartsch and Jakob Hoepfner. In so doing, the new information will cast a very critical light on the attitude and practice of the Chortitza Flemish Mennonites in that time and place.

A new and original analysis of the real reason for the change of settlement site from Berislav area to the Chortitza/Khortitsa site is presented in summary form.

Finally, some genealogical details of the early Hoepfner family, which are unequally known in the various branches of the descendants will be summarized.

Z. kontra David H. Epp

In 1999 and in 2000 Mennonites in Manitoba celebrated the 125th anniversary of the first settlements in Manitoba of their ancestors who came here from what was then New Russia (southern Ukraine.) Our future here seemed to be relatively secure. About two thirds of the Mennonites in Ukraine remained in Tsarist Russia in 1874/75. When World War I broke out in the summer of 1914 the Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, as D.G.Rempel called that community (Note 1) had been in existence for 125 years – the very first villages in the Khortitsa or Old Colony having been founded in the late summer and early fall of 1789. Their existence at that point also seemed relatively secure. By 1919/20 the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the following period of anarchy had changed their situation dramatically for the worse and by the mid 1920s many, if not most, had concluded that there was no acceptable future for them and their families in Soviet Russia. Approximately 21,000 Mennonites left the Soviet Union to come to Canada in the years 1923/28 (Note 2). In the midst of that period of turmoil and agony an early historian, David H. Epp, then living in Lichtenau/Molotschna, devoted considerable effort to a two-part article entitled, *Jakob Hoepfner. Zu seinem hundertjährigen Todestage am 4. März 1926* (Jakob Hoepfner. For the centennial anniversary of the day his death on 4 March 1926) (Note 3); it appeared in *Der Bote* which had been founded in Rosthern, Saskatchewan and was edited by his younger brother Dietrich H Epp, who had made use of his opportunity to escape the “Workers Paradise” to come to Canada.

The article began with a fulsome tribute to Jakob Hoepfner:

Do they still know who he was, do they speak his name, our young as well as our old ones, this man of unusual energy, inexhaustible enterprise, fearless daring, Jakob Hoepfner of The Nehrung, (Note 4) who served the Mennonites in a manner that was more deserving than any other individual? With the help of God, he created a new home for them in South Russia, opened up for the persecuted a century and more of peaceful development and with that made possible the achievement of the highest general well-being, seldom equalled for other large communities.

Following this, D.H. Epp went on to summarize the background and history of the immigration from Prussia to Russia, with appropriate reference to Johann Bartsch, a fellow delegate (“Deputierter”) of J.Hoepfner. D.H.Epp was well qualified to do so – not only was he a highly experienced and very able teacher, minister, and elder (Altester) of the church in the Old Colony, he was also the author of a history of the Old Colony which appeared in 1888/89 in time for the

centennial celebration of the founding of that community. (Note 5) What follows is made more piquant for us by the fact that he was also the great grandson of one of the earliest elders of the Flemish branch of the church in the first decade of the colony, David Epp (1750-1802), a protagonist of Delegates Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch in the controversy with which all three, and many others, are indelibly associated in our history.

In part II of his article, D.H.Epp continued his summary account of the settlement history with a discussion of the change of site from the fertile low lying land along the southeast or left bank of the Dnieper River, across from Berislav and adjoining the ancient main trail from the river crossing at Berislav to the Crimean peninsula, to the right bank location opposite the Island of Khortitsa. He concludes that this was dictated by policy measures (*“Politische Massnahmen bedingten solches”*-only policy-not political-measures/acts or acts to be undertaken were involved). What is significant here is that this reason for the change of settlement site differs somewhat from the one D.H.Epp gave in his history some 37 years earlier;”...because the location of the Wesche Krimskij Plan (near Berislav) did not appear to be sufficiently secure for the settlement because of the Turkish War...” (Note 6). Following a further summary account of the consequent dissatisfaction and the subsequent unjust accusations heaped on J. Hoepfner, all told so well by D.G.Rempel in his *Mennonite Life* article of 1969, D.H.Epp then states:

“The greatest misfortune was that the attitude of the Ministerial Council became opposed to him. The congregation became divided. Accusations from both sides. Finally, in 1794, Elder Cornelius Regier of Heubuden and Minister Cornelius Warkentin of Rosenort near Elbing, came to the settlers and with God’s help brought about a peaceful resolution. Ministerial Council and Delegates shook hands in a brotherly way. But not for long. The weeks were cut down but not uprooted.”

Then follows a most significant sentence:

“As had happened earlier, the Delegates were provided with a certain executive power by the government (Behoerde) and it was just this which the honourable Ministerial Council could not bring its inordinately ambitious heart to accept (...*nicht uber sein ehrgeiziges Herz bringen konnte*)(Z in *Odessaer Zeitung* 1889)”

“The same charges, the same accusations again from both sides...The Representative of the government, with the title “Director” ruling with nearly unlimited sovereignty and a personal opponent of Hoepfner positioned himself behind the Ministerial Council and finally caused the enemies of Hoepfner to submit a written accusation to a higher level, a charge which, in any case he had composed with professional legal knowledge.”

“...Hoepfner must yield. And the government, tired of the continual wrangling considered it advisable to remove Hoepfner, the rock of offense for the Ministerial Council and congregation in the hope that finally peace would ensue. (Z. in *Odessaer Zeitung*, 1889)

D.H. Epp next summarized the events of Hoepfner being taken into custody, judicially condemned, fined, and his ultimate release, and the change in colony administration and in the government's supervisory administration culminating in the institution of the District Office (Gebietsamt), and

“Very characteristic is the exclamation of the then church minister D. Epp: Praise God, that we have a Gebietsamt, otherwise we would have had a papacy!”

What is going on here? Who is “Z”? What had he said in the *Odessaer Zeitung* in 1889? This will become clearer when we examine the relevant newspaper for 1889.

Recall that 1889 was the year of the centennial of the Old Colony and that D.H. Epp's centennial history had been published in time for the celebration. In his book, “None but Saints”, James Urry refers in Chapter 14 1889 Year of Celebration, p. 266, to an acerbic exchange of letters, in the *Odessaer Zeitung*, concerning Epp's discussion of the treatment of Hoepfner and Bartsch (Note 7).

The first letter is just under four newspaper columns long and appears under “Koloniales. Hoepfner and an Honourable Ministerial Council”, in Nr. 188 19/31 August 1889 issue of the *Odessaer Zeitung* (OZ). It begins:

“Many a decade has passed since the death of the Mennonite Delegate Hoepfner and in all those years not one voice in all the Mennonite colonies has felt compelled to publicly restore his honour and to remove the filth from the memory of the Delegate who has passed from our midst, filth which the mania for slander and the jealousy as well as the inordinate ambition of the spiritual leaders of our congregation had heaped on him. Then the newest work about the Chortitz Mennonites “Versuch einer Darstellung des Entwicklungsganges derselben” by D.H. Epp appeared. I will pass over the shortcomings of this work in silence since these have been briefly highlighted in the *Odessaer Zeitung* as well as in the *St. Petersburg Zeitung*. I had hoped from this work that it would restore fully and completely Hoepfner's honour; but I found myself disappointed in the highest degree in my expectations. When I complained about this to my best friend, an enlightened incisive and thoughtful man, he replied: “It is a sad pity that the abundant material, which D.H. Epp had at his disposal when composing his work, was not available for use by a completely impartial objectively thinking man”, and he is right. The author has let himself to be led astray to do injustice to Hoepfner by his reverence for the Ministerial Council. Here and there he makes a small start with a couched lance for the Delegate, but, because this would constrain him to come into conflict with the Ministerial Council, he carefully withdraws into the snail shell of reverence before it really comes off well, probably in the false premise that exposing the errors of the early Ministerial Council would discredit the current one in the eyes of the community. Who would want to put the blame for the inordinate ambition and lovelessness of the Ministerial Council of 100 years ago on the current Ministerial Council which

is incomparably more highly developed in heart and understanding? This circumspection and also the injustice toward Hoepfner which the author is guilty of was totally superfluous.”

Epp says p. 86 (p.56 of the 1984 reprint):

“The reason for the failure was that differences arose between the Ministerial Assembly (Kirchenkonvente) and the two Delegates, the latter being used by the government Board (Behoerde) to enforce official directives, differences which unfortunately soon degenerated into reciprocal attacks.” From this sentence one gets the feeling that the blame for the disputes which arose is to be found on the side of the Ministerial Council, which is confirmed by the testimony of many old, respectable men whom I have questioned about this. The author is also inwardly convinced of this and implies this, in that he mentions that the Delegates were used by the Behoerde in the enforcement of official directives, but to openly give the right to the Delegates seems too terrible for his delicately strung soul. That the Delegates were provided with a certain executive power by the Behoerde was just what the honourable Ministerial Council was not able to bring its inordinately ambitious heart to accept – it did not want to tolerate another power beside itself. How great is the author’s awe of the clergy’s power shines forth from his taking the liberty of censoring his grandfather in that he arbitrarily shortens the latter’s joyous exclamation at the establishment of the Volost administration. The old honourable D. Epp exclaimed: “Thank God that we have not got a Volost Office, otherwise we would have had a papacy.” The young honourable D. Epp feels called on to censor him a little and thus to cover up the clear picture of the contending parties which the former had sketched with short clear words. How much higher than the honourable Ministerial Council the Delegates were in their entire attitude, thinking nobly, magnanimous, and free of all low vindictiveness, is evident in that they did not sign the accusation submitted to the Governor in which the Ministerial Council was accused of embezzlement of 1129 Ruble, whereas the honourable Ministerial Council excluded the Delegates from the spiritual fellowship of the congregation and in addition brought an accusation of the Senior Delegate Hoepfner before the Governing Senate and with the help of the licentious Director von Essen brought him into prison. Let no one be deceived that the action against Hoepfner was initiated by the worldly power. In this case, the latter was constrained to act in accordance with the principle that the individual must be sacrificed for the benefit of the whole. Proceeding against the Ministerial Council would have shaken the whole (community) therefore it seemed to the Government that it would be advisable to remove Hoepfner, the Rock of Offence for the ambitious Ministerial Council.”

It was more than acerbic and the letter to the editor continues for more than one column. Near the end,

“...finally I will give the same consideration to a former Ministerial Council with my veil of forbearance. How necessary this is for them would probably be proved by the letter of accusation (signed by 18 brothers, among them the Delegates) to the mother congregation in Prussia, but which most likely no one will ever get to see.

And to the grave mound on the island?

The grave mound of the honourable Regier, who came here as a messenger of peace from far off Prussia is adorned by a large memorial stone; the place where the bones of the great Hoepfner rest is desolate to this day, but that notwithstanding, we must confess, “See, here is more than Regier!”

Z.

In a later issue of the *Odessaer Zeitung* Nr. 227 7/19 Oct. 1889, D.H. Epp reposted; it is only fair that his complete letter follows:

Koloniales.

In Nr. 188, I am accused by Herr Z. of being biased in my formulation of “Die Chortitzer Mennoniten”. He represents the former Delegate Jakob Hoepfner as a victim of my injustice. Probably Herr Z. will not want to believe me, but instead will regard it as “still more sugar on top of the honey” when I assure him that I personally am filled with the greatest respect for the man who has deserved well for what he did for our communities in such an extraordinary manner. Therefore it was not my object to throw filth on Hoepfner but much more to remind us about the good that he did, to bring his name into remembrance, and, as much as I am capable, to strive to ensure that he is held in honoured remembrance. However, if, dominated by prejudice one reads between the lines, and attempts to impose a meaning into my words, concerning Hoepfner, which I did not put into them, then I must only remain silent.

Furthermore, Herr Z. regards me as biased because, on the basis of insight which I have had I have merely presented facts without placing myself on the judgement seat and passing judgement. Does not Herr Z. himself become a biased judge, when, without closer examination of the facts, he breaks the rod over one side (condemns) whereas he idealizes the other side just because his “incisive thinking friend” condemns my humble self because of bias?

Furthermore, I am supposed to have censored my grandfather, Minister David Epp because of sheer “Awe of the spiritual power.”

Just how I could come to want to censor a church minister (Geistlichen) because of his “spiritual power” and that because of my “unbounded reverence for his class”, remains unclear. To do that did not occur to me in the slightest precisely here – That my grandfather, on hearing the first report, about the imminent establishment of an orderly district administration which would deprive the Ministerial Council of its worldly power, exclaimed, “Praise God that we have got a District Office otherwise we would have had a papacy” is quite true, but this was not denied by me. Where I quoted only a part of this exclamation, it was not intended to “picture the contending parties”, but simply to state that even then our spiritual leaders had, at least partly, arrived at the insight that the legal power of judgement which demands strict punishment of the guilty, is incompatible with their office which is to preach love, and that due to this insight the new institution was joyfully welcomed by the people affected. This is sufficiently proved by the joyful, “Praise God” of a “church minister”. Therefore, there can be no talk here about “cover up” and “censoring.”

The letter of accusation, signed by 18 brothers (among them the Delegates) has not been included for the simple reason that nowhere was I able to find a copy of it. (Note 8)

David Epp

Superficially, one might think that this would have sufficed. However, in Nr. 257 *Odessaer Zeitung* 12/24 Nov. 1889, Z. returned to the duel with an indepth analysis of what both he and David Epp had said so far and with reference to his own reading of the same document David Epp had seen. This analysis, with his own research into archival material, proves his contention convincingly and puts on record details of early Chortitza Colony affairs which seem to have been overlooked by many historians to this day. Substantial portions of his last letter follow:

Z. contra D. Epp

Skipping the equivalent of the first column:

It is presumptuous in the highest degree when you accuse me of prejudice without proving your statement in any way. Thus, you have on the “basis of your insights merely presented facts” whereas I “without closer examination of the factual circumstances break the rod (condemn) the one side?” You have looked at various documents but did not want to see correctly; that is why you have left out many facts which you must have had before your eyes black on white in the documents you yourself refer to. If you really do believe that I “make a judgement without a closer examination of the facts”, then you

are again asserting something into blue vapour (ie. thin air) as we say. I have come to my view of the contending parties through careful examination of the identical documents which you had in front of you and which confirm the testimony of several credible men whom I questioned about the matter. If one compares these testimonies with the documents referred to, one arrives at the firm conviction that Hoepfner was trampled underfoot by gross arbitrary action and that the Ministerial Council, whose duty is to preach reconciliation, relegated this to the last priority. Is it not known to you that a certain Minister Giesbrecht was placed under the ban because he reconciled himself with the Delegates and gave them a written declaration that injustice was being done to them? I have a copy of this declaration in my possession and it reads: "I the undersigned confess that I have wrongfully accused the two men, Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch; and henceforth regard them as upright honest men and members of the congregation and beg them to forgive the lapse. Minister of the Flemish congregation David Giesbrecht. 1790 the 2.Junius." (Note 8)

In the bill of indictment of the Delegate Hoepfner, it was written that in addition to other acts, Hoepfner had provoked fist fights and even disobeyed the order of Director Brigontzi. How this accusation was included in the bill of indictment is described by a completely credible man who wrote down what happened according to the accounts of many contemporaries of the Delegates, as follows: "In 1797, we were given a third Director named Brigontzi. Soon he approached the Delegates and gave them to understand that one could give something too if one had filled one's pockets before. Naturally, they had nothing to give him since they had withheld nothing for themselves from the moneys already advanced, which would have been quite impossible because the moneys were paid out by the authorities with the greatest care to each one individually and the receipts always had to agree with the paid out amounts. (Note 9) Shortly thereafter he demanded from Hoepfner his grownup daughter for satisfying his carnal lust, which immoderate demand Hoepfner rejected most decisively. In order to have revenge on Hoepfner, the Director now made common cause with the Ministerial Council and the latter found nothing offensive in joining with this fraudulent and immoral person against the hated Hoepfner. Now Brigontzi composed the Bill of Indictment against the Delegate Jakob Hoepfner and his brother Peter Hoepfner, in which it was especially mentioned that the Delegate Jakob Hoepfner had disobeyed the orders of the Director in the month of August 1797. – With the fistfight provoked by the Hoepfner brothers, it was this way: in Rosenthal, the building of a certain Martin Friesen was to be erected and the Hoepfners were also invited. Now, five or six men had agreed to drink until they were tipsy and then they would give both brothers a good thrashing. The six ninnies drank until they were quite drunk and Peter Hoepfner was a very strong man; thus, it came about that the brave knights-errant received the loveliest thumps.- In 1798, the elder David Epp and Gerhard Willms were sent to Petersburg in order to receive the promised

Privilegium, and on this occasion the splendid Bill of Indictment, signed by the Elder and three ministers of the Flemish Congregation and eight Village mayors (Schulzen), was handed in to the Governing Senate. The village of Neuenburg had strictly forbidden its mayor to sign the Indictment, but when he was threatened to be washed in the same lye solution with the Hoepners and to be treated as a disturber of the peace, he signed. The mayor of Kronsweide had not signed but still his name appeared at the end of the Indictment. How it got there, God alone knows. – When the judgement came down from Petersburg, Hoepner was asked to please appear Saturday morning at 9 o'clock in Chortitz. Unsuspectingly, he made his appearance and was immediately taken into custody and taken off to Jekatherinoslav. On the way, he encountered his married daughter coming from Kronsgarten for a visit. Through her, he was able to have his wife informed of what had happened and urgently requested that all his papers must be kept in a safe place so that no one could steal them for they might serve to vindicate him. – The authorities delayed the execution of the sentence as much as possible. He was bailed out by Christians of the Lutheran faith and accommodated by a friendly bookbinder name Hennig. At this time Paul I died and Hoepner received his freedom through the Manifest of Alexander I. Now Hoepner wanted to vindicate himself, and since just at this time the Military Governor of Cherson, Duke de Richelieu was spending the night in Schoenwiese on his through trip, he drove there and discussed his concern with the Duke. The latter advised him not to launch a complaint in law but rather to endure injustice instead of taking revenge, and Hoepner followed his advice. The five orders [actually 6], of the Guardianship Comptoir of the Foreign Colonies, to the Elder Johann Wiebe surely, Herr Epp, lay before you too? These make a right strange impression on whoever is familiar with the story of the Hoepners, is that not true? In the first one (Nr.161), Elder Wiebe is “earnestly” commanded to send in a detailed report of the crimes, infractions, unjust acts and frauds of the Brothers Hoepner, “which for eight years have reduced the congregation (community?) to bitter tears (Sic!). It is furthermore demanded that adequate evidence must be provided against whom Hoepner had instigated beatings and in what way he had disobeyed the orders of the Director Brigontzi; all the punishable actions as a result of which Hoepner was excluded from the church fellowship must also be included in the report. In closing, it is also commanded that as a sign of truthfulness and as a statutory declaration, this special listing, authorized by the signatures of the elders, ministers, mayors, be submitted to the Guardianship Office as soon as possible.”- That the requested report would have to turn out to be vague in the highest degree is self-evident, and therefore the second order, Nr. 180, soon followed to submit a more precise report to the Comptoir “without delay.” Thereafter, the third and the fourth, and finally the fifth order followed, in which Elder Johann Wiebe was commanded to set out on the road at once, and if necessary to drive throughout the night, so that he could appear in person at the Comptoir without fail Monday morning the 7th of January at 9 o'clock

(Note 10), - As a result of this demand, Elder Johann Wiebe was probably also “reduced to bitter tears’, for he himself reported sick---.

Hopefully, you have now been cured of the view that I attacked the then Ministerial Council without a closer examination of the factual circumstances, if not you may continue to remain with your opinion; now I want to come back to “cover-up” and “censoring.” You say, “How I could even come to want to censor a Minister because of ‘reverence for his spiritual power’ remains unclear.” Either you have used quotation marks frivolously or the printer’s devil has played a small trick on you, or you wanted to make the readers believe that I said you had censored your grandfather out of reverence for “his” spiritual power. However, I did say that you had censored your grandfather out of reverence for “the” spiritual power, and that is a difference. The individual minister has no power with us; we see that in the one referred to, Minister Giesbrecht, who lost his position after all when he took the liberty to act contrary to his fellow ministers. The “Kirchenkonvent” represents the spiritual (clerical) power, and everyone, you excepted, has understood that this is the one I meant. – Although you maintain that it did not occur to you in the slightest to censor your grandfather out of reverence for the spiritual power, you do admit that you quoted only half of his exclamation, because you were not concerned in portraying the contending parties, but instead in establishing that already at that time the spiritual leadership had arrived at the insight that legal judgmental power was incompatible with their office, which preaches reconciliation, which was sufficiently substantiated by the joyful “Praise God” from the mouth of a minister. – The one “Praise God” merely proves that your grandfather was happy at the establishment of the District Office, but you wanted very much to demonstrate that many of the same (ministers) were happy as well, and this you could not do if you presented the complete exclamation of your grandfather; that is why you had to censor your grandfather here. What impression must the reader get when in your work on page 121 (p. 76 of the 1984 reprint) you say, “The court jurisdiction was initially in the hands of the Director, who, together with the Church Elders, had to decide whether guilty or innocent. This unification of unmerciful vengeful justice with the office which preaches reconciliation may not only have been quite difficult for the affected spiritual leader, but was surely also one of the causes of the early entanglements.” Well, first he (the reader) will think that the clergy was compelled to practice the office of unmerciful justice, and secondly, he will believe that it was very difficult for the Elder at any particular time to administer this official function. To mislead the reader to this view is to deceive him and to mask the true facts; that was your object, and that is why the second part of your grandfather’s exclamation did not accord with your wares. That is why it was left out; that is why you also left out Point 11 of the order from the Jekatherinoslav Governor, in which, among other items, it is stated, “These Mennonite ministers shall mix their services in police matters no more, or will be punished by being deposed, but (shall) rather conduct their worship services plus good

economic management.” - From this it can be seen that the servants of the church illegally interfered in civil matters, otherwise this reprimand from the authorities would not have been issued and with that it appears doubtful that it was difficult for the spiritual leadership to practice judicial decision making in civil matters. For the same reason, you purged the following passage from Point 14 of the order referred to: “The mayor must read out (the order) to the village and on receiving it, each mayor [must] give a relevant receipt, with the date countersigned, to Jakob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch; these receipts must be delivered to the office (of the Commander of the German colonies)” - - From this, the intention (Will) of the government with reference to the civil administration can clearly be seen! At the top the Director, below him the two Delegates, and directly subject to them, are the mayors, but the clergy shall administer only the office which preaches reconciliation. Now, if we take not just half but the whole of your grandfather’s exclamation, we come to the following conclusion: the clergy strove, with all the means available to it, for a unification of unmerciful vengeful justice with the office which preaches reconciliation. This objective for the clergy was difficult because to bring two men like Hoepfner and Bartsch, who enjoyed the complete confidence of the government, into total discredit, that really requires much effort. It is precisely this effort which your grandfather identified with his exclamation; but you were interested in deceiving the reader. That is why you had to cover-up the real factual content and to censor your grandfather. He who knows the history of the establishment of our District Office, knows also that even after this measure by the government, the clergy did not lay down its weapons for a considerable period of time, but took action against district mayors and assessors (Beisitzer) with the ban, etc. –For a few less important events, you were quite prolix (detailed) but an event such as the establishment of the District Office, you brush only peripherally, in order as it seems, to be able to quote only half of your grandfather’s exclamation and thus to prove that the clergy perceived the “office of unmerciful justice” as a terrible burden. But we will in turn now draw “the veil of forbearance” over the offenses by the then Ministerial Council against Christian brotherly love, and if you won’t lift it again, I will ventilate it no more.

Z.

On first reading, it is difficult to know what to make of the story of Ivan Brigontzi and his incredible request of Jacob Hoepfner. Historian Roger Bartlett has written that Brigontzi became Director of the New Russian Colonies in 1797 and then joined the Guardianship Office on its formation as Deputy to Samuel Kontenius, and that although he “appears in the files of the Board as an honest and efficient administrator, de Castres, for whom he served as interpreter in

1798, gave him a very bad character.” (Note 11) The Duke de Richelieu was involved with the settlement of foreign colonists in New Russia from 1803 when he was appointed as Town Commandant of Odessa; then he was promoted to the Military Governorship of Kherson Province in 1804 with responsibility for the other two provinces of New Russia (which would have included the Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies). It must have been in about 1804 or shortly thereafter that Jakob Hoepfner, in his interview with him at Schoenwiese, was advised by him to let sleeping dogs lie. This author gets the impression that Richelieu was covering up for and protecting his underling, Brigontzi. Roger Bartlett has pointed out that an 1812 enquiry uncovered embezzlement and maladministration in the Odessa office which caused Richelieu unpleasantness in Petersburg. (Note 12)

The problems associated with, and/or contemporaneous with, the 1793 Sept 03 letter of accusation of Elder David Epp were sorted out, peace was established and reconciliation took place in 1794 with the assistance of Elder Regier and Minister Warkentin from West Prussia as described by Adolf Ens in “The Tie That Binds” and by D.G.Rempel in his works. As we have seen in the “Z. kontra Epp” letters, friction developed anew thereafter culminating in what appears to have been a conspiracy against the Delegates by a sordid, not to say unholy, alliance of an honourable Ministerial Council, a majority of village mayors with recalcitrant individuals compelled to join in by threats of similar treatment, and a Brigontzi whom we now begin to see as someone who could not be trusted with the ladies, to put it mildly, and perhaps with much else besides. Peter Hildebrand writes, “What raised doubts in my mind at the time whether excommunication was right was the fact that secret meetings were frequently held in the villages. (Note 13)

Z. wanted to see that letter of accusation of David Epp. It was dated 3 Sep 1793 in Chortitz and was received in West Prussia in mid-October. Historian David H. Epp was unable to find a copy. Two copies are known to the author and a copy of one of them has been in his possession since 1977. It was originally intended to include a translation of it here, but since Adolf Ens has given a digest of it in his “The Tie That Binds”, its inclusion here would displace other material (Note 14). It and a few other letters will be dealt with at some later time.

Returning briefly to D.H. Epp’s article of 1925 in *Der Bote*, we now know what was going on. David H. Epp with two quotations from Z.’s letters, personally never in robust health, having reflected on Z.’s informed criticism of 36 years ago, observing the shrinking horizon for his doomed community after a 136 year history, was stretching out his hand to Z. in acceptance and fellowship while simultaneously imploring the refugees in Canada and elsewhere to honour the memory of the Delegates – “removing the filth.” In 1934, D.H. Epp died at Rosenthal in very reduced circumstances due to persecution by the Red Regime. We need to keep his memory alive too. One wonders did he know, or guess, who Z. was? Was Z. still alive, and if so, did he escape to Canada and read *Der Bote*? From, Z.’s letters, we can deduce that Z. was a well-educated man who knew the descendants of Peter Hildebrand and was given access to the Hildebrand Nachlass (Note 15). His command of German was formidable and he could be sarcastic. It would appear that he knew the descendants of the Hoepfners who were still living

on “De Kaump” after 1875/76, and many “credible older men.” D.G. Rempel thought that Z. might have been Johann Toews, editor of *Odessaer Zeitung* and translator (Russian into German) of Alexander Klaus; *Unsere Kolonien* (Note 16). Quite possible his, and D.H. Epp’s letter(s) provided the impulse for the erection of the Bartsch and Hoepfner monuments. These monuments have been in Steinbach since 1968 and the early 1970’s respectively. Now the graves of the Delegates are desolate again!

Testing the Only Known Eye-Witness Source

In writing his history of the Chortitza Colony, D.H. Epp took his material largely from the Hildebrand Nachlass, the basis of which was Peter Hildebrand’s manuscript written in 1836. A version of this was published at Halbstadt/Molotschna in 1888 after the manuscript was “prepared” for publication by a friend of the family; D.G. Rempel believed that this was D.H. Epp. (Note 17) It is obvious from Z.’s last letter that some passages in that manuscript were suppressed – they did not see the light of day in the published book – eg. The story concerning Brigontzi and Jakob Hoepfner’s grownup daughter – the sentences immediately before that incident and also immediately after it appear unchanged in the version *Zwei Dokumente* p. 40 (last paragraph). The director who replaced the Baron (von Brackel) is referred to as “einen abgefeymten Italianer” (a skimmed off Italian) – this was Director Brigontzi who is described by Roger Bartlett as being of Italian parentage (B. p. 206; Note 18) and significantly the published version of Hildebrand’s book states (p. 41), “Der Direktor was ein seht gewissenloser Mensch dem es um Geld, um Befriedigung unsittlicher Begierden zu thun, und dem gemass, wo es ihm paste zu Rache geneigt war.” (The Director was a person with no conscience, out to get money, whose object was to satisfy his immoral cravings, and accordingly inclined to get revenge where it suited him.)

Hildebrand’s manuscript history and the published book are our only primary source by an eyewitness who experienced the immigration and early settlement years in person. This makes it vitally important that Hildebrand’s “Erste Auswanderung” and the additions from Z.’s letters, is/are tested against independently verifiable facts in order to establish its credibility or otherwise. The reader will note that at least one test has just been applied and the book passed it. Several others follow: the *Zwei Dokumente* version is used here.

1. Page 12. Kirchdorf Bohnsack. Kirchdorf is a term signifying that a village had a parish (Lutheran) church. There was a Lutheran church there and its church record book is held in the “Evangelische” (Lutheran) Church archives in Berlin. In 1977, the author was permitted to examine that Bohnsack record and discovered the birth of two of Jakob Hoepfner’s children – daughter Maria, born 1783 Sept. 25, and first son, Jakob, born 1786 Jan 05. (Note 19). This first son died during emigration in 1788, probably at Dubrovna, probably in December.

2. Page 12. Danziger Nehrung. The term “Nehrung” is frequently misunderstood – some works equating it with “Niederung” as does D.H. Epp, and most recently the Toews/Ens translation into English where it is erroneously translated as Narrows. Nehrung is a geographical term in German used to designate a long, narrow strip of land which separates two bodies of water, usually a Haff (coastal lagoon) from the open sea. A prime example is the Frische Nehrung which separates the Frische Haff from the Baltic Sea. Danziger Nehrung identifies a relatively narrow strip of land with somewhat elevated sand dunes extending westward from the Frische Nehrung along the south coast of the Danziger Bucht to the city of Danzig, and north of the Vistula (Weichsel) River from near Einlage/Weichsel, and also north of the Elbinger Weichsel eastward from Nickelswalde to Stutthof. The Danziger Nehrung does not have a substantial body of water south of it – if the Toter Weichsel and the Elbinger Weichsel are discounted – nowadays, but prior to the middle ages much of what is now diked and drained area of the Werders was a shallow sea, and the Danziger Nehrung actually did separate two bodies of water. That geographical/geological feature retained its name even after the Vistula delta had grown and was drained. The term “narrows” is entirely opposite in meaning – it is a narrow channel of water, or strait, separating two bodies of land. It is less than helpful to translate geographical names – (ie. Liverpool = Leberteich!), and the European Union agreed quite some time ago that this would not be done on maps and road signs – and it would be best to do the same in our publications.

Niederung – low-lying land particularly along a river or near a sea coast.

Werder – a river island or a drained Niederung between two rivers (arms) or lakes.

Kamp(e) (plural Kampen) – A German dictionary defines it as an enclosed field, from the Latin campus, or an enclosed level field. The concept “enclosed” suggests a hedge or even a dike. In the area of the Vistula delta, “Kampen” has a very specific meaning – After the (Teutonic) Order had directed flood waters into fixed channels by the construction of dikes, the sediments which were transported down (river) by the large mass of water now began to be deposited just beyond the mouths of the river which, in conjunction with the simultaneous action of unusually strong plant growth resulted in the formation of new river islands which were in local usage designated as “Kampen”. The entire complex of river islands in the area of the secondary deltas of the Elbing Weichsel were called the Weichsel Haffkampen; in the area of the Nogat, they were called Nogat Haffkampen. So, Kamp(e) = secondary delta island associated with the Vistula River (Note 20)

3. Page 12. Neuendorf eine Meile von Danzig. There is a Neuendorf about 7 km. southeast (SE) of Danzig. The Danzig Meile is equal to 7.560 km. (Note 21)

4. Seiner Durchlaucht Reichsfurst Potemkin. (His Serene Highness Prince of the Empire Potemkin). In 1776, Catharine II persuaded Kaiser Josef II of Austria (ie. of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation [HRRDN] to grant Potemkin the title of Prince of the HRRDN or “Reichsfurst”. The correct form of address in German is “Durchlaucht” – usually Your (or His) Serene Highness in English, sometimes given as Serenissimus; in Russian, it was Svetleyshiy Kniaz (Note 22)
5. Page 18. Russisch-Kaiserlicher Collegien-Assessor (Imperial Russian Collegiate Assessor). Class 8 in the Table of Ranks introduced by Peter the Great – Civil title Collegiate Assessor-military equivalent Major. (Note 23)
6. Page 20. Grossfurst (Grand Prince). The title or rank of a son of the reigning Tsar(ina)
7. Page 21. Werdel (auf Danziger Grund...in unserer Nahe) The author has found no place name Werdel-but there is a Wordel, within about 3.4 km east (E) of Bohnsack within the boundaries of the Danziger Stadtgebiet in 1785. Possibly the copyist who copied Hildebrand’s manuscript for publication made an error. Wordel is certainly within easy walking distance of Bohnsack (See Danzig map).
8. Page 22. Der Konig von Polen Schutzherr uber Danzig...zu der Zeit. The City of Danzig plus its rural area (Stadtgebiet) had its own government which was directly subordinate to the King of Poland – under Polish Sovereignty, till 1793 Jan 01. On that date, Kingdom of Prussia seized Danzig and its troops occupied it 1793 Mar 03 (Note: Staats-und Verwaltungsgrenzen in Ostmitteleuropa Historisches Kartenwerk II Das Preussenland, Gottinger Arbeitskreis, Munchen 1954)
9. Page 23. Hoepfner wohnte zwei Meilen von der Stadt in einer Hakenbude. (That is a store where the essential goods for farming people are sold.) It is about 11 km. from the parish church at Bohnsack to within Danzig’s built-up area as the crow flies. (see #3 above) (Note: Erich Keyser; Danzigs Geschichte 1928 p. 284 – Masse und Munzen)

Hakenbudner – a rural merchant [sometimes] with a small inn (or restaurant with license to sell alcoholic beverages), frequently with a groats mill and bakery (Note: Menn. Geschichtsblatter, Neue Folge Nr. 22 1970 p. 57 (Horst Penner)) – a rural store in which the farmer can cover all his needs (Note: Die Menn. Ostwanderungen, p 234, B.H. Unruh)
10. Page 22. “Riga mit dem Herrn Obrist Trappe nach Warschau.” Obrist is a somewhat antiquated form of Oberst = Colonel. In the table of Ranks, this corresponds to Class 6 – Kollegienrat or Collegiate Counsellor – a promotion of two grades from collegiate

assessor (Note 24). The author has not (yet) discovered when Trappe was thus promoted but Roger Bartlett refers to an April 1798 recommendation by the Board of State economy that Trappe "...should be reinstated at the higher (VIth) rank of College Counsellor..." (Note 25). This reinstatement might suggest or imply that Trappe had been promoted to the rank at some earlier time – and Peter Hildebrand's statement seems to suggest that this had already occurred prior to the departure of Trappe and the Delegates from Petersburg in the autumn of 1787. It is significant that the *Mennonitisches Lexikon* refers to Trappe as "Kollegienrat".

11. Page 23. "...1786/87... It happened that this year the sea often washed amber (Bernstein) up on the shore..." This has been happening in the Baltic Sea, and to a somewhat lesser extent, the North Sea areas since pre-historic times and there is substantial literature on the subject. East Prussia was the world's largest source of amber – and still is. It is not apparent what gave rise to the totally wrong and inappropriate explanation in footnote 19 on page 15 of the translation "From Danzig to Russia". That footnote and the translation of *bernstein* as "ambergris" (a different kettle of fish!) must be discarded (Note 26).

In a way it is a pleasant thought that amber is significant, although in quite a different way, the Mennonites who emigrated from Prussia to Russia and their descendants, and the Mennonites who came to Ontario via Pennsylvania (Note 27)

12. Page 24. "General-Consul v. Sokolovskii." According to the Compact Edition of the Oxford Dictionary, a "Resident" is a diplomatic representative inferior in rank to an ambassador residing at a foreign court. In Cold War days, we became aware that the Soviets (internally) designated as "Resident" the member of the embassy staff who directs espionage activities in the host country.
13. Page 25. "...im Russisch-Kaiserlichen Gesandtschafts Palais auf Langgarten." A good German-English dictionary translates "Gesandter" as envoy and "Gesandtschaftsposten" as post of an envoy or of a "Resident". The Compact Edition of the Oxford Dictionary defines envoy as "a public minister sent by one sovereign or government to another for the transaction of diplomatic business. Now applied especially to diplomatic ministers of the second rank as distinguished from those of the highest ambassadors, and those of the third rank, *charge d'affaires*". Hence, Gesandtschafts Palais would translate better as "legation" or as "Consulate-General." With reference to the map of part of the City of Danzig of 1822, there is an important public building labelled "Russisches Haus" near the east end of Langgarten Street – on later maps it appears as "Russisches General-konsulat." (Note 28)
14. "...brachen wir den 22 Marz 1788 auf...am Ostersonntag..." Here Hildebrand is slightly in error – as is Hildebrandt's *Zeittafel* – Easter Sunday fell on 23 March 1788 – which date

is correctly noted in the Toews/Ens translation of 2000 in footnote 2 on page 18 – but the incorrect date is retained on page 17. Much more seriously, footnote 2 errs in stating that the departure date must have been 3 weeks later, when the ice on the Frisches Haff would not be thick enough.

It was established by Father M.R. Klysh/St. George's Romanian Orthodox Parish/Winnipeg in 1977 for the author that the date of Easter Sunday in the Orthodox rite was 1788 April 16 (Old Style = Julian cal.) or 1788 April 27 (New Style = Gregorian cal.). From March 23 to April 27 is 35 days or precisely 5 weeks, and so Easter Monday, the day of arrival in Riga was 1788 April 28. Other sources confirm the occurrence of thick(er) ice on the Frisches Haff which, as its name suggests, has a much lower salinity than the Baltic Sea which itself has a lower salinity than the oceans. Thick ice is no rarity on the Frisches Haff.

15. Page 30. "...ungefahr drei Wochen vor Ostern (1789)..." Easter fell on April 8 (Old Style)/April 12 (N.S.) Therefore the advance party departed Orsha about the beginning of the third week of March 1789 – when strong thawing conditions would not be unusual.
16. Page 31. "in Barken nach Krementschug..." Dictionaries, German (Barke)/English (bark) universally define a bark as a 3-masted sailing vessel. Such a vessel would not be in use on inland rivers. However, it turns out that there was a type of river boat known in Russian as "barka" which is described as "Built of rough-hewn timber, a barka was little more than a rectangular box with a flat bottom, straight sides, square corners and a pitched roof. On the Vyshnii Volochek System, such a boat would measure 108 to 116 ft. in length and 25 ft. in width, although larger versions were in use elsewhere." (Note 29) "Rough-hewn" planks means that the planks were hand-hewn from logs although in later times sawn planks were used in order to save timber. It is not surprising that a barka tended to leak and that freight, in the lower layers of the cargo, would spoil. So, the term "Barken" used here in German by Hildebrand is appropriate and the translation into English, barge, is too.
17. Page 20. Graf Nikita Panin. Footnote 2 is in error. The Nikita Panin who was involved in Tsar Paul I's foreign policy is not the Nikita Panin who was the "Erzieher des Grossfursten Paul." The "Governor" of Grand Prince Paul and responsible for his education and upbringing died in March 1783. It was the latter's nephew, son of Peter Panin, ie, Nikita Petrovich Panin who became foreign "minister" for Tsar Paul. He also was part of the plot to murder Paul.

18. Page 32. "...Tscherngow (Chernigov)...bis Njeshin (Nezhin) gefiel es mir." Page 33 "...bis zum halben Weg bis Krememtschug...gut gefallen; aber von da an bis Chortitz...immer schlechter..."

Both the map introduced by Victor Peters in *Zwei Dokumente* and in the Toews/Ens translation are in error because the point on the itinerary, Nezhin south of the Desna River, has been overlooked and the route drawn directly from Cherigov to Kiev. As is indicated on D.G. Rempel's map, the logic of the shorter route would suggest Nizhin-Priluki-Piryatin-Lubni-Kremenchug. Furthermore, the flooding encountered at Chernigov would surely include the lower Desna lowland and the Dnieper lowland south of the junction of the Desna with the Dnieper – it would have been physically impossible to travel by land along those rivers. Those maps must be revised.

Hildebrand points out the increasingly bare nature of the landscape from half-way between Nezhin and Kremenchug. This is the location of the transition zone from the forest-steppe to the "treeless" steppe zone. (Note 30)

19. Page 33. "...war der Reichsfurst Potemkin nach Olgopol gereist...(Hoeppner musste) per Post hinzufahren." It took a long search for the author to locate this place – it is located on a right-bank tributary of the Ingul (Inhul) R.; on recent Ukrainian maps it appears as the Hromokliia River, about halfway between Kirovograd (Kirovohrad) and Nikolayev (Mykolaiv) on the Bug (Boh) River. It is correctly located to have been the location of Potemkin's military field command centre for the beginning of the 1789 campaign to cross the Bug into Turkish territory. From a travel itinerary of a west-European traveler in the very early 19th century, it appears likely that Jakob Hoeppner's route from Kremenchug would have been via Alexandria (Oleksandriia)-Nova Praha-Adzhamka-Kirovohrad (Yelysavethrad)-Bobrinets'-Ketrysanivka-Ol'hopil' (Olgopol) and return. It is not surprising that this took three weeks. The Ukrainian spelling of Ol'hopil' probably explains why D.H. Epps gives the name as "Alepoll."

It has been demonstrated that by and large, Peter Hildebrand is a reliable, credible, reporter of the events he personally experienced. In translating historical documents, it is important to get it right – and in his case, when in doubt, take his at his (German) word!

From what has been revealed thus far, it should be obvious that the trumped-up charges against the Delegates were merely a pretext to break the Delegates because, as upright honest men with an understanding of their responsibility to serve their community, they were perceived as a stumbling block by the Ministerial Council which saw its role as the arbiter of (its limited view of) moral behaviour as above civil government. In its struggle to dominate the community, the Ministerial Council did not even hesitate to stoop to designate Jakob and Peter Hoeppner's

defence of themselves when wantonly attacked by a gang of inebriated thugs as “initiating beatings.” What more needs to be said?

Why Chortitza?

The author has studied the reasons for the site change for many years. It will be discussed appropriately on another occasion. To begin to understand this problem, it is necessary to study Catherine II's Second Turkish war, 1787-1792, and also the pre-history of that war as well as the history of settlement policy in New Russia, particularly the administration of Potemkin. Potemkin and his role have until recent decades been seriously misunderstood; this has been compounded by misrepresentation by contemporary observers who were hostile to him, and by historical analyses based on very incomplete documentation as well as on the hostile witnesses alluded to.

As much as the author admires the work of D.G. Rempel, it is not possible to concur with Rempel's perception of Potemkin and of his financial situation. A partial list of authors whose works must be studied in order to understand the problem is given in the notes (Note 31). There is now evidence available which makes it reasonable to conclude that Potemkin and Catharine II – The Great were secretly married and remained devoted to one another. This is not to say that they were “a nice respectable couple!” – their personal arrangement eludes our understanding – and their sexual mores are repugnant to us. What is important is that Potemkin's power depended on his relationship to Catharine – and he never ever was in any trouble about that - and the financial resources of the state were, in effect, available to him. This was perceived by contemporaries in the know - and his opponents in the administration hated him for it and envied his success – hence, the hostile press. So, Potemkin did not have to raise funds by diverting 228 Mennonite families to Chortitza and selling the estate at its increased value to the state. In his settlement policy in frontier areas, Potemkin invariably settled peoples who were prepared to give military service when required. Chortitza area and its approaches from the south ceased to be regarded as a frontier area with the acquisition of territory after the end of the First Turkish War in 1774, the abolition and temporary dispersal of the Zaporshian Cossack Force, and the acquisition of the Crimea and adjacent land north of the Sea of Azov in 1783. With Chortitza now “interior” territory, it now became possible to consider non-military settlers in that area – bingo- along came the Mennonite Delegates in 1786 and the ensuing story is history. However, the Crimea was inhabited by a Moslem population whom the Russians had treated with hostility, humiliation, and contempt – but this did not seem to matter, at least to the Russians, in time of peace. Then the Turks attacked in late August 1787 and the second war was on. Potemkin, although wanting to provoke hostilities, was not yet ready, and was seriously surprised. The Crimea was filled with a hostile Moslem people – and it was the intention of the Turks to land there and instigate an uprising. The Russians did not have nearly enough troops there to cover the entire coast and still defend the other endangered frontiers. At this time, a storm in the Black Sea seriously damaged the Russian Black Sea Fleet based at Sevastopol. With a non-operational sea force, and an insufficient land force, it seemed the Crimea was open to Turkish landings. It is a matter of record that at this point, Potemkin despaired and had what might be called a nervous breakdown and attempted to resign his command and withdraw from public life. He was persuaded by Catherine to continue where he was and with the storming of Ochakov 06 Dec

1788, the initial danger to Kherson and to the Berislav area was past. It should be mentioned that at the height of his despair, Potemkin wanted to evacuate all Russian forces from the Crimea and give up the naval base and harbour at Sevastopol. The main route from the Crimean peninsula is through the Perekop Isthmus to the Dnieper River crossing at Berislav. In Potemkin's thinking, with the Crimea at risk – and it would remain so in Russian government thinking as reflected in harbour policies for some years, due to the presence of an apparently quiescent but potentially dangerous Muslim populations – the Berislav area was once again a frontier zone. Only military settlers would do for a frontier zone and would be of service in maintaining a land route to the operational headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol. It was this fleet which was the most powerful weapon of the Tsars in exerting pressure on the Turkish capitol, Constantinople. Pacifist Mennonites near the Berislav-Perekop road were not what Potemkin wanted now and in the foreseeable future (recall "*politische Massnahmen bedingten solches.*") It is described as "not safe" because the Russian government regarded this area as "not militarily secure." It is surely significant in this context that with the onset of this Second Turkish War, all further settlement by native, ie. Russian, state peasants in southern areas, including the Caucasus and Yekaterinoslav vice-royalties and the Crimea was stopped in 1788. (Note 32) Potemkin ordered all foreign consuls in Kherson to leave that city and directed them to reside temporarily in Novomirgorod (Novomyrhorod), northwest of St. Elizabeth (Kirovograd (Yelysavethrad)) under the pretext that this was for their personal safety in response to a letter from Catherine II dated 1788 Jan 13 in which she authorized Potemkin to do so for the reason that Kherson was not a city for trade but a strategic military fortress until a peace treaty would be concluded. (Note 33)

Thus, there really was some truth in the statement, attributed by Peter Hildebrand to Potemkin, for not settling on the "Nischni-krimische (Plan) because at this time it was still to insecure (=unsicher) for the Mennonites" – but the real reason would appear to be that it was too insecure for strategic reasons for the peace of mind of the Russian administration. (Note 34)

It is also likely that Hildebrand referred to the left (southeast) bank of the Dnieper River, across from Berislav as Nischnikrim because the entire mainland area south of the Dnieper and the Korskaya (or Konka) River to the Sea of Azov constituted part of the Crimean District (see Gebiet Taurien on map) – it literally was the lower (or the upper depending on view point) Crimea, and the site across from Berislav was meant - not the Molotschna area- in this statement. (Note 35)

With Berislav and the other southern areas, where under-populated land was more readily available out of the question, empty crown land, near a river and/or major travel route, well-removed from the frontier area was not plentiful. Potemkin's mostly undeveloped estate, at Chortitza, on the Dnieper, on the main land route north met all these conditions.

Some thoughts About Johann Bartsch

Heeding the counsel that the emigrants should form one unified congregation, Bartsch, a Frisian member, left that church community and joined the Flemish congregation at Chortitza. Once having taken this step and having been critical of the Frisians who separated, it surely would have been very difficult for him to reverse that decision at a later date. A new convert tends to be anxious to prove himself loyal to his new congregation. His noble generous

personality shines forth from his act of making boots for his Elder Bernhard Penner. Bartsch was also a versatile man – in addition to his skill in dairying. Perhaps it was he who taught Hoepfner the art of cheesemaking [this is speculation]. Bartsch and his family, in a group totalling 20, emigrated from Danzig territory 1788 Nov. 12 as D.G. Rempel tells us. His party, as did the others who went to Riga overland, passed through Koenigsberg, East Prussia, having left Danzig clandestinely, apprehensive that the Prussian Resident Lindenovskii and his delegation in Danzig would exert its influence to prevent his departure (“...since the Black Eagle in Danzig was ill-disposed toward him and he feared it could still inflict serious wounds on him in Koenigsberg...” (Note 36) This is a reference to the flag of the Kingdom of Prussia under Frederick the Great and his successors till 1806. The flag is centred by a crowned black eagle clutching an upraised sword in one claw and a thunderbolt in the other. Possibly Bartsch had heard about the treatment of the Anton Hoepfner group in August or he feared having to pay an exit duty on his assets.

Peter Hildebrand tells us that the “repentant” Bartsch was re-admitted to the Flemish church membership between two repentant adulterers. D.G. Rempel tells us that some time later, that church leadership ordered him to destroy his musical instruments. This author has the distinct impression that the “inordinately ambitious (ehrgeizig)” church leadership was determined to continue to humiliate Bartsch after the Flemish Ministerial Council had broken him by excommunication and the consequent inevitable loss of his farm property [there is no evidence of this]. His only wrongful act was to admit to a non-existent commission of one. The Ministerial Council’s failure to break Jakob Hoepfner and its resultant frustration may have made it even more determined to have at least a partial victory by not only breaking Johann Bartsch but to continue to humiliate him. Whoever, in the light of the historical record as now amplified by the Z. letters, can maintain that “...Johann Bartsch...acknowledged his fault and was taken back into the Flemish Gemeinde without further consequences and has vindicated him by the monument to his memory.

The Hoepfners – Already Found Completely Guilty

D.G. Rempel writes, and surely this would also be accepted by anyone with legal expertise, “...it...is very disturbing that both officials during 1798-1799, ie. two years before the actual trial of the Hoepfners, repeatedly use the expression “...as already found completely guilty”...” The two officials were Brigontzi and his superior Kontenius. Kontenius has always had an excellent reputation but presumably the “evidence” he would get to see would first pass through Brigontzi’s hands.

The missing lumber was obviously stolen by people, more or less native to that area – and they also stole settlers’ horses, who intimidated the guards, also Russian. In not providing better security for the settlers and their possessions, the Russian authorities broke another contractual obligation to the Mennonites. All this must have been known, or could easily have been established by elementary means, to Brigontzi and Kontenius and should have been pointed out to the court. The Hoepfners did not initiate a fist fight as everyone on the spot, including the Ministerial Council knew – it was still known scores of years later by the men whom Z. questioned. The Ministerial Council chose to interpret it as “instigating beatings” when the 2

Hoeppners declined to tamely accept a beating by a gang of 6 drunken men. Did the church ever discipline these men – or were they perhaps connected to the Ministerial Council? There is no record of financial mismanagement by the Hoeppners or Bartsch. The delegate protected his daughter as would any father worthy of the name. This is described as disobeying orders!

Where are the records of that trial? Perhaps a researcher fluent in both Russian and German may yet find those documents. We may also hope that a researcher fluent in both Polish and German may yet find some record, of the visit by Trappe, Bartsch, and Hoeppner to Warsaw, on their return from Petersburg via Riga and Warsaw to Danzig in the fall of 1788, in the Polish National Archives. (Note 37) Then, possibly our translators and mapmakers will be persuaded to revise appropriately the map of the delegates' return in 1788.

The Early Hoepner/Hoeppner Family

It is a family tradition, and by now widely known, that three Hoeppner brothers, Jakob, Peter and Anton, emigrated from the Danzig and West Prussia area in 1788.

Jakob (1748 Dec 22 – 1826 March 04) left Bohnsack 1788 Mar 23 with a party of 47 with wife Sara (Dueck) H. (1753 Nov 17–1826 Feb 27) and three daughters: Helena (1775 Mar 11), Anna (1777-?), Maria and one son, Jakob (1786–Jan 05-1788?). This little Jakob died, probably at Dubrovna at the age of three years. He will not be the only one of the immigrants who died at Dubrovna in the 8-10 months more or less, that they waited there. There must be Mennonite burials on a cemetery plot at Dubrovna – if it still exists – or perhaps in an Orthodox cemetery. It was this Jakob and a first Maria whose birth records were discovered by the author in the Bohnsack Lutheran parish church book in May 1977. In combining data from several sources, the author came across another Maria who was born in 1787, so the first Maria must have died prior to 1787 – and the same source, the Isaac Hoeppner Family papers, also states that the births of two children are missing: the first Maria must be one of them. After the second Maria, (1787 – 1851 Jan 09), these papers list a Katharina born 1789 died 1789, followed by a second Katharina (1789 July 15/ Kremenschuck (sic) – died 1804 aged 15, with the notation that a mistake has crept in here. Were there twins born at Kremenchug with the first dying very soon and the name transferred to the surviving one? Is this the “missing” second birth record referred to above? Significantly, there is a death/birth linked to Kremenchug – where a very critical time for father Jakob began in 1789! After this there was an Elisabeth (1792-1804 at age 12 years). Then finally the surviving son, Jakob, (1797 Mar 24 – 1883 Sep 19), born the same fateful year for the Delegate when he collided with Brigontzi; as we have seen, in about 1804 or thereabout, likely the year of his fruitless interview with Richelieu, he lost two daughters. He had a prior marriage to his first wife of 42 weeks – it is presumed that she and a child died in childbirth and her identity is not known.

Anna (1777) married a Heinrich Penner (1776 Mar 03 – 1854 May 31). Jakob (1797 Mar 24 – 1883 Sep 19) married Anna Brandt (1801 Jan 04 – 1877 Jan 4). Photographs of these two couples, brother and sister, children of the Delegate, are the nearest pictorial data to the delegate. Look at those hands! Both Jakob and his sister, Anna H. Penner, have a decidedly determined expression – but so do their spouses. This Anna (1777) would have been 20 years old in 1797,

ie. a “grown-up” daughter and so, it must be she who caught the eye of a certain “B”! The Penners did live at Kronsgarten – as we know from Schapansky’s book, but the time given there does not fit with Anna coming home to visit in about 1800. Anna and Heinrich Penner had a daughter, Elisabeth Penner, who married her cousin, Peter Hoepfner, son of Jakob (1797)—and the author is one of many who trace their descent from this union.

Jakob (1797) had a very large family, 9 sons (including the Peter just mentioned) of whom eight reached adulthood plus three daughters. Of these ten, six sons came to Canada – five in Waldheim alone, and two daughters as well. One of these sons, the eldest, Jakob, became the father of Altester Jakob Hoepfner. John was the second son. The third, Peter, became the author’s great-great-grandfather. One of the younger sons, Abraham (1831-1855), according to my father, was involved in the transport service provided by the Mennonites at the time of the Crimean War where “he caught a cold, became seriously ill and died.” This might have been pneumonia – or perhaps cholera- of which there was a lot in the Crimean War theatre. Isaac P. Klassen, in his book, “Die Insel Chortitza” (1979), p. 8 mentions Abraham as a schoolboy learning Russian in the village school “Op de Kaump” in about 1844/1848.

Gerhard, another of Jakob’s (1797) sons who came to pioneer at Waldheim in 1876 later moved to Saskatchewan. *Preservings* No. 17, Dec. 2000 has a photograph, on p. 60, of Gerhard in his coffin at the time of his funeral in 1916.

Another son, Bernhard, (1840-1913) is believed to be the only son who remained in Tsarist Russia after 1874/1876 and so he must be the progenitor of the Hoepfner who moved to Ignatjewo (Oscar H. Hamm; *Memoirs of Ignatjewo*); a descendant died in Leamington, Ontario in about 1974.

The Delegate’s powerful brother, Peter, (1752 -?) married a lady, Anna, some 12 years older. They had two daughters, Konkordia, who married a Jakob Breil (or Braul) and a younger daughter, Anna. Peter appears to have emigrated from Einlage, near Elbing but no date nor other data has turned up so far. There is a story, unconfirmed, that he and his wife rescued, and/or took in a young girl, who had been kidnapped by gypsies, and brought her up as their own child. This was Regina Hoepfner who figures in the ancestry of Altester Abraham Doerksen, the first Sommerfelder elder. Peter was also imprisoned with his brother, and presumably bailed out by the Lutherans at Josefstal and/or Kronsgarten. Peter disappears from the historical record after about 1801/1802. It would be very gratifying to find out more about his life and descendants.

Brother Anton (1762?-1806?) married a Katharina (1760) and they had a family of six. Anton and his family moved to Danzig territory and then emigrated from Danzig via ship in early August 1788. Although that ship was bound for Riga, it stopped at Koenigsberg, East Prussia where “...the Prussians were quick to list and interrogate the prospective emigrants. The local police wanted to arrest them on the spot, but inquired at higher levels about it. The word came back, however, that the Mennonites could leave...” Adalbert Goertz has found that the Zentralarchiv at Merseburg holds two lists of such emigrants. The first one, dated 12 August 1788, includes an Anton Hoepfner, Kleinmausdorferweyde, 37 y., three S(oehne), one T(ochter), six (total in family). (Note 38).

Anton’s son, Jakob, (1792 Mar 03 – 1857 Jan 15) was an Anwohner in Nieder Chortitza; it was he who discovered and recovered the body of his cousin, Helena, daughter of the Delegate, wife of Peter Hildebrand, from the Dnieper River in the morning following her

mysterious disappearance and death during the night of 1833 June 18/19. It appears that “world class” tenor, Ben Heppner, is descended from Anton.

The current state of our knowledge suggests that the father of the delegate and his two brothers lived at Kleinmausdorferweide, not Kleinmausdorf, Henry Schapansky notwithstanding. The 1776 census of West Prussia lists, in Kleinmausdorferweide a Jakob Hoepner with a family consisting of one man, one wife, one son, two daughters; also, in the same village is a Peter Hepner with one man, one wife, and one daughter. (Note 39)

In 1776, the delegate and his family had long since left home and were living presumably at Bohnsack/Danzig and so would not appear in this census. The delegate’s brother, Peter (1752), at age 24, would likely be married and on his own and so he must be the Peter H. in Kleinmausdorferweide.

That leaves Anton (1762?) at age 14 still at home – ie. the one son of the elder Jakob. Two daughters remain to be accounted for. In B.H. Unruh’s “Ostwanderungen”, there is a Catharina Hoepner (1760?) married to Jakob Janzen (33 yr.) who emigrated to Rosenort/Molotschna in 1803 (p. 350). On page 337, we find a Helene Hoepner (1773?) married to an Abraham Claassen (1765) who emigrated to the Molotschna in 1803. So, all the children of that Jakob in Kleinmausdorferweide, if they are really his, are accounted for. However, firm proof is still to be found.

The family name, however it is spelled, Hoepner, is the low German or North German form whereas the South German is Hoepfner – and they all denote a grower or seller of hops, used in the brewing of beer and in yeast for baking bread. Beer brewing and bread baking are skills that would be in a sense related to the occupation of operating a Hakenbude – the delegate held the licence for this in Bohnsack (die Hakenbuden Freiheit) where he operated an inn/restaurant/pub and sold bread and all the supplies a farmer would need, and where he also held the lease from the village for the right to fish in the adjacent Vistula River. A very similar arrangement at the Berislav site was promised to the delegate, actually both delegates, who were both very much aware of the need for a location near a well travelled road and near an urban market, not only for themselves but for the whole community.

The author first heard the following story, “op gout plautdietsch”, related by Victor Peters at the “Grosses Dnjeprtreffen” at Camp Assiniboia 1976 May 30. The story goes that following their presentation to the Empress Catherine at Kremenchug 1787 May 13 (New Style), Potemkin asked Hoepner and Bartsch what they thought of his great Empress. Hoepner replied to the effect that yes, she was a great lady...but you know...she is a bit cross-eyed! Whereupon Potemkin is supposed to have said that he had never noticed that to be the case. Well, Hoepner replied, the next time you see her, take a closer look! Knowing what we now know about the relationship between Catherine and Potemkin, it would seem Potemkin would be about as familiar with her physiognomy as anyone could be! When the author asked his father about this story, he replied that, oh yes, he had heard that story as a boy when the old folks were conversing.

Conclusion

The account of the immigration to Tsarist Russia by the only eyewitness who actually “was there” has been tested fairly rigorously and found to be very reliable.

New details concerning the conflicts between the delegates and the Chortitza Flemish Mennonite Church leadership, presumably supported by a majority in the community, which have not appeared in the historical literature before, have been presented. This information from the pen of Z., possibly Johann Toews, was tacitly, and consequently implicitly, accepted as valid by David H. Epp when he quoted from Z’s letters to the editor of the *Odessaer Zeitung*, in his article in *Der Bote* in 1925.

The “new” information gives strong support to the thesis that neither Johann Bartsch nor Jakob Hoepfner were guilty of the offenses they were “charged” with.

The new information confirms that the Flemish Church leadership made a practice of using, or attempting to use, governmental administrative machinery to enforce its concept of church discipline. When the church leadership was thwarted in this endeavour by the ethical responsible conduct of the delegates, the Honourable Ministerial Council, in order to achieve its objectives, made common cause with, and allowed itself to be used as “front men” by a totally unscrupulous succession of Directors – the last of whom was worse than the first. Those charges were initially brought by the church leadership; Brigontzi added a couple of his own and drafted the Bill of Indictment in proper legal format. Contrary to the claim “that the charges against Hoepfner were not brought by the Flemish Gemeinde...”, it has been adequately demonstrated that the Gemeinde did in fact bring those charges – using a conspiracy to bring mayors and others, who were disinclined to cooperate, to heel.

The harsh unloving and dictatorial practice of that early Chortitza Flemish Ministerial Council, as documented by Z. and by Peter Hildebrand, fails to convince this author that the Flemish Gemeinde was an example of a church community to be emulated. We have seen what exactly that kind of church environment can do closer to home than the steppes of southern Ukraine! We are all the poorer for it.

A new perspective on the real reason for the site change from Berislav to Chortitza has been opened up.

Q.E.D.

Endnotes

- Note 1. D.G. Rempel / The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia – A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance 1789-1919, in; Mennonite Quarterly Review (MQR) XLVII (Oct 1973) and XLVIII (Jan 1974).
- Note 2. D.G. Rempel / MQR XLVIII (Oct. 1974)/ An Introduction to Russian Mennonite Historiography p. 438
- Note 3. D.H. Epp / Jakob Hoepfner/ *Der Bote*, Mittwoch, den 28.Juli 1925 p. 5/6 and Mittwoch, den 4. August 1925 p. 5/6
- Note 4. See 2. Nehrung in Section Testing....Source.
- Note 5. D.H. Epp / Die Chortitzer Mennoniten, 1889 – reprinted Steinbach 1984
- Note 6. D.H. Epp 1984 p. 45.
- Note 7. James Urry/None But Saints, 1989; p. 266 note 3.
- Note 8. This must be David Giesbrecht “...relieved of his office because of strife caused by him in the congregation.” Adolf Ens / The Tie That Binds / Journal of Mennonite Studies (JMS) Vol.8 (1990) p. 38.
- Note 9. Peter Hildebrand / Zwei Dokumente / 1965 p. 41
- Note 10. The Office of the Guardianship Bureau was in Yekaterinoslav.
- Note 11. Roger P. Bartlett / Human Capital – The Settlement of Foreigners in Russia 1762-1804 / 1979 p. 206 and n.147.
- Note 12. Bartlett / Human Capital p. 207
- Note 13. Peter Hildebrand / Zwei Dokumente p. 43
- Note 14. See Adolf Ens / The Tie That Binds p. 134/51.
- Note 15. D.G. Rempel / MQR Oct 1974 p. 420
- Note 16. D.G. Rempel personal communication to the author 1988 Aug 31

- Note 17. D.G. Rempel / MQR Oct 1974 p. 418
- Note 18. Bartlett / Human Capital p. 206
- Note 19. Pauline Heppner / The Heppners in Prussia, Russia and America 1997/2000 p. 43.
- Note 20. Rudolf A.H. Nordmann / Die Entstehung der Sekundären Deltern der Elbinger Weichsel und der Nogat – nach archiavalischen Quellen kartographisch dargestellt/ Danzig 1937 (Published dissertation Doktor rer. techn) p. 10
- Note 21. Peter Hildebrand / Zwei Dokumente p. 12
- Note 22. Isabel de Madariaga / Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great / 1981 p. 345 / See also Simon Sebag Montefiore / The Life of Potemkin / 2000.
- Note 23. James Hassell / Implementation of the Russian Table of Ranks During the Eighteenth Century, in Slavic Review Vol. 29 No. 2 June 1970.
- Note 24. Hassell / Implementation of the Russian Table of Ranks
- Note 25. Roger P. Bartlett / Her Imperial Majesty's Director and Curator of the Mennonite Colonies in Russia: Three Letters of Georg Trappe, in JMS Vol. 12 (1994) p. 53.
- Note 26. Patty C. Rice / Amber: The Golden Gem of the Ages (1980). See also Willy Ley/ Dragons in Amber (1951) Chapter 1.
- Note 27. Blodwen Davies / A String of Amber (1973)
- Note 28. Erich Keyser / Die Baugeschichte der Stadt Danzig (1972)
- Note 29. Robert E. Jones / Getting the Goods to St. Petersburg: Water Transport from the Interior 1703-1811, in Slavic Review Vol. 43 No. 3 Fall 1984
- Note 30. Encyclopedia of Ukraine / Vegetation
- Note 31. Isabel de Madariaga / Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great (1981)
- Isabel de Madariaga / Catherine the Great – A Short History (1990)
- John T. Alexander / Catharine the Great – Life and Legend (1989)

Simon Sebag Montefiore / The Life of Potemkin (2000)

Theresia Adamczyk / Furst G.A. Potemkin – Untersuchungen zu seiner Lebensgeschichte (1936 Neudruck 1966).

Hans Auerbach / Die Besiedelung der Sudukraine in den Jahren 1774 – 1787 (1965).

Robert E. Jones/Provincial Development in Russia – Catherine II and Jacob Sievers (1984).

Donald F. Lynch / The Conquest, Settlement and Initial Development of New Russia (The Southern Third of the Ukraine): 1780-1837 (Unpublished PH.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1965)

Note 32. Bartlett / Human Capital p 302 note 116.

Note 33. Johann Philipp Balthasar Weber / Die Russen oder Versuch einer Reisebeschreibung nach Russland und durch das Russische Reich in Europa (Innsbruck, Hans Halm 1960) p. 99/100. Weber arrived in Kherson in 1787.

Note 34. Peter Hildebrand / Zwei Dokumente p. 32

Note 35. Peter Hildebrand / Zwei Dokumente p 32.

Note 36. D.H. Epp / Die Chortitzer Mennoniten (1984) p. 38

Note 37. Peter Hildebrand / Zwei Dokumente p. 22

Note 38. Adalbert Goertz/From Prussia to Russia in 1788-1789 (Mennonite Family History, Vol II, No. 3, July 1983, p. 92/93).

Note 39. Karl-Heinz Ludwig / Zur Besiedelung des Weishseldeltas durch die Mennoniten (1961) p. 189/190.