

#14/DE#2

## **Johann Bartsch's letter to David Epp / Riga 1788 Dec 28 /**

**Translation and Notes by Ed Hoepfner, Sep 2004**

Heartily beloved Friend David Epp

If my short letter should find you, your dear wife and children, as well as all your other friends, in good health and in good well-being it would be very pleasing to me. For myself and mine I have great reason to thank God, the giver of everything good, for many benefits, nearly all of us are well except for 2 children who are still sick in bed, so far we are more-or-less all right, just this, we do not like it that we have to pay dearly for everything, whoever wants to live well in Riga will find it expensive, whoever wants to eat good pancakes has to be prepared to give 1 Taler, and to give that plus another Ort [Note 1] for a Scheffel [1.51 bu] of wheat flour, that is as much as 1 C [Courant?] Prussian Gulden [Note 2], other food stuffs are still higher and are too dear for us, But if you do follow us do bring flour, where 1 Scheffel is only 12 Prussian Groschen [Note 3] and as much ground oats along, but I do not want to advise you too much to do so, but it is a bad thing that we cannot have these at all in Riga, and to pour rice into the cabbage or sauerkraut is not very appetizing. Concerning the accommodation which we have at Riga, it is small but dear, it comes to 2 1/2 Taler monthly without all the wood which we have to burn in the strong continuing cold and which costs us over a Rubel per week. I do not yet know the date of my departure; another 6 weeks could pass. Before you begin the journey I advise you to obtain a good letter of introduction or recommendation from Herrn Socolowski, to a Riga Comptoir, if not to Herrn Morrison then it should be to Herrn Zuckerbecker who is also a good gentleman and can provide an advance from the Russian Crown. The Morrison Comptoir will close the account at Old New Year [Note 4] and I believe that they will not want to have any further dealings with colonist matters after that. That Otscakof [Note 5] is now under Russian control is reliable, but 4 generals and approximately 50 officers remained [ie., fallen on the battlefield] and how many common soldiers is not yet known [Note 6]. Of the Turks 5 000 men are supposed to be dead and 12 000 prisoners as well as the Batscha [ie., Pascha, their commander]. Here in Riga they held a great thanksgiving celebration with much firing of cannon [Note 7]. But I beg of you to encourage our good ministers to follow us soon, they need not have any doubt about work, all of us are getting fed up with the man whom we have now because he expounds one matter, that of marriage, in a way which we do not like. I remind you again that before Ohm P. Epp begins his journey he should report that for his own good to Herrn von Trappe, Herr von Socolowski will know where he is. We consider ourselves fortunate at this Russian victory, I wish that things may continue in this way, but since the Prussian Kingdom envies Russia its good fortune, we wish that the King of Prussia may receive, as a present from the other Courts [Note 8], Danzig with all its lord mayors and council members with their big wigs and bellies, only that you and all good friends would first get out of there. All of us at Riga wish dear Ohm P. Epp all well-being and ask that he might honour us with his presence, as well as bringing the substance of his office with him.

With hearty greetings to all dear friends I continue to remain in all sincerity your willing and obliging friend.

Riga the 28th December 1788

J. Bartsch

Notes 1 & 2. Prussian coinage consisted, in the main, of T(h)aler, Gulden, Mark, Groschen, Pfennige, and a number of multiples of the smaller coins, one of which was the Ort(h) (plural brter or Oerter).

Preus. Taler = 90 Groschen (each Groschen = 18 Pfennige)

Preus. Gulden = 30 Groschen "

Mark = 20 Groschen Danzig

Gulden = 3/4 Pruess Gulden. The Danzig Gulden was also called a Florin (fl, plural Floren) and was equal in value to 1 Polish Gulden.

Ort(h) = 18 Groschen

5 Ort = 1 Taler

1 Ort = 1/5 Taler

Since Danzig was a great trading city and port many foreign coins were also in circulation there; one source states that at the end there were 181 varieties of coins in circulation.

Note 3. The copy of the original letter and the handwriting in it are so poor that I am unable to be certain that the Prussian Groschen is meant here - it is my best guess at this time.

Note 4. Old New Year obviously refers to New year in the Old Style or Julian calendar used in Russia, and in the 18th century this would correspond to Jan 12 in the New Style or Gregorian calendar.

Note 5. The correct spelling, in German is Otschakof. This is a port on the north shore of the Dniepr Liman or estuary a short distance west of Kherson. It was taken by storm (assault) by the Russians in 1788 Dec 06 (Old Style) (St. Nicholas Day) after a long siege.

Note 6. Simon Sebag Montefiore, the latest and most thorough and reliable biographer of Potemkin (2000 AD, p. 414), states that 2 500 Russians were killed and 9 500 Turks.

Note 7. Catherine the Great ordered a thanksgiving Te Deum Mass plus a 101-gun salute in major cities for 1788 Dec 16.

Note 8. The 'other courts' would be the other two partitioning Powers, Russia and Austria (or the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation).