

#20/WS#5

## **A Second Letter by the Chortitza Mennonites for the Prussian Church to send an Ältester.**

Translation of the article: "Zur Geschichte der ersten Gemeindebildung in den Mennonite Colonien Sud-Russlands" published in the March, May and July 1856 issues of *Mennonitische Blätter*. A transcription appeared in the January 1938 issue of the *Mennonitische Warte*. The following is a 1992 translation into English by the late *Bill Schroeder* (of Winnipeg).

**Village Chortitza, 27 Meilen before Kherson on the same side of the Dnieper.**

**December 18, 1789 (Julian).**

We want to convey our warmest greetings to our coworkers in the ministry, the beloved Elder, ministers, deacons and to all the members of the church: Grace, love and peace from God the Father through the knowledge of Jesus Christ. "When Christ who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory," Col. 3:4. After this hearty greeting, dear Elder, we want to inform you that we have received your letter of October 10, 1789. We are pleased to learn that you have received our letter as well as the 600 ruble we had forwarded to you. However, the news that the arrival of our dear Elder has been delayed because God has allowed him to become ill saddens us very much. We are deeply grieved by the fact that we have to wander about in this strange land like abandoned sheep for so long. We could lament with the prophet, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Why must we live in this totally abandoned state for so long? There is a great longing for an elder not only from the ministers but from the entire congregation. We have waited almost day and night to hear that the dear man was on his way here, but in vain. We are compelled to console ourselves with the fact that this is the will of the great ruler of this world. But we get the feeling too that there is no one else who is concerned or whose heart is moved by the plight of Joseph. We do not understand why we should be neglected for such a long time. It seems as if there is no solution to this problem. As far as we are concerned, we thought we had done everything possible to solve this problem, but to this point all our efforts have been of no avail. Yes, dear Elder, if you would seriously take this matter to heart and place yourself in our situation, then we would like to ask, "How do you explain this?" We feel that we are treated, so to speak, as very distant and insignificant relatives which is a heavy burden for us and gives us much trouble and sorrow. The young people that are growing up and for that matter all the members of the church feel abandoned because they are denied the privilege of participating in worshipful experiences such as baptism and the Lord's Supper. We fear that if this condition continues a state of confusion and disorder will develop in our church. The conflict with the Frisian Church contributes much to our problems. With the exception of a

few families, they do not want to join us. Instead, they have accepted Franz Pauls [1745-1801] who claims to be a minister and has imposed himself on them. They have also accepted the two candidates, Cornelius Froese [1746-1794] and David Schutz [died 1788 to 1795], whose names were presented to the elders in Prussia, as ministers without any further election. David Schutz has passed away since then. The Frisians have separated themselves from us completely. On top of that they maintain that their elder, Johann Claassen [1731-1796], was sent to them from Prussia. Claassen claims to perform miracles, confuses them with his fables and turns them away from a simple faith in Christ. We have not checked whether he was in fact ordained by the church in Prussia. Perhaps you could check with leaders of the Frisian Church in Danzig to what extent Claassen was authorized to work in the colony. These Frisian ministers who don't seem to know how to lead their church cause much grief for us. Some of our members have said that if we do not get help from our church in Prussia soon, they will look for assistance in other areas and that would cause a nasty rift in our congregation. Now in order to prevent this evil we implore you, dear elder, to help us without any further delay. If help does not come soon, it seems that all of us will go astray like the Children of Israel who when they were without leaders turned away from God. We are in a similar situation. We are in desperate need of competent leaders and directors particularly in spiritual matters.

Dear Elder, we pray that God will protect you and provide your physical and spiritual needs. We, your coworkers in the gospel of Jesus Christ, remain abundant in love and in spirit.

Peter Dyck  
Jacob Wiens  
Bernhard Penner  
Cornelius Friesen  
Gerhard Neufeld  
David Giesbrecht

P.S. In conclusion, dear Elder, we want to inform you that when our deputy, Jacob Hoepfner, who had left Dubrovno during the winter already arrived in Kremenchug, Governor General Prince Potemkin offered him a different location for our settlement. Hoepfner went to the new site immediately and concluded that it was better than the area south of Berislav which he and Bartsch had chosen in 1787. We have made our settlement on that new site. The colony is located 27 *Meilen* before Kherson and on the same side of the Dnieper [on the west side of the Dnieper 230 km north - east of Kherson]. The terrain near the Dnieper is not suitable for village sites but farther inland the steppe is level, the soil rich and several small streams provide an adequate supply of fresh water. We arrived at the site of the present village of Chortitza on Sunday, July 22 (Julian) August 2 (Gregorian), 1789.