

#16/DE#4

Letter from Johann Bartsch to Ältester Peter Epp of Danzig and others.

Translated by Ed Hoeppner (with his commentary) 1 Oct 2004 – from MHA microfilm #69

Danzig Stadtgebiet

His Reverence Herrn Peter Epp

This is to be opened by Himself

Beloved and esteemed and valued Friends [note 1].

After my departure from Riga I arrived at Dubrovna on the 28th of March old style [note 1], but had a very bad journey in the thawing conditions [note 2] en route, but even so I am in good health although my dependents [note 3] are sick by turns, in Riga I had much trouble with my travelling companions, in that it came so far that we parted company, and I journeyed on, and the two people well-known to you, namely Abraham Froese and Penner wanted to travel back, they are basically very stupid people and so I permitted this even though I have much loss because of these people, but still have the insight that the high Crown has more than enough useless bread-gobblers and here in Dubrovna sends many good-for-nothing people back across the boundary; those who get back to Germany will spread a veritable rainstorm of bad tales, but one can imagine that such people who are not wanted in this country will bring out little that is truthful. Concerning your departure from Danzig, if there not many families, provision will be made for them, if they are in a position to travel to this location, there is no longer any help for them in Riga [note 4], and when we leave Dubrovna it won't be much better here, but we will, as far as possible, ensure that some money remains in Dubrovna, in order that if more travelers arrive and report to Herrn Baron von Marklohsy [note 5] they can be helped. Do write me the gist of what the returnees are saying about Russia, I imagine it will be bad enough, for the two that left me were, I think, half crazy. Our circumstances are such that we will soon continue the journey, with the beginning of the month of May those who have no vehicles of there own by water, the others will travel to their destination by land. Hoeppner left long ago for Kremenichug [note 6], his brother has been removed from the building commission [note 7]. I'll stop and wish all of you all well-being, above all I beg you, if you follow [us] and if it is possible bring our Ohm Peter Epp with you; more about that will be reported by our preachers, and I beg you to pass on my greetings to Ohm Epp and all good friends, remaining in sincerity your dear sincere friend [note 8]

Dubrovna

8th April 1789

D und J. Bartsch

On the 30th March, old style, we held a general assembly at Dubrovna and confirmed our ministers by the proscribed method. We have had a remarkable event, they have appointed an Oberin[spektor?] for us and ??????. However, since we do not like this man and do not want him, this has been reported to Herrn von Trappe who confirmed him [note 9], if our wishes are not fulfilled we will have to write to Her Majesty at Court and make a presentation, for they must not force [someone] on us in accordance with our Privilegia. We also have this [note 10] that we are sure about that ... [this last section is nearly impossible to read]

Ed Hoepfner's Notes:

Note 1 – Apparently the original envelope that contained this “third” letter of Bartsch had written on it:

Siener Ehrwürden

Den Herrn

Peter Epp werd Dieser

Zur eigenhändigen eröffnung

Danzt bei Stadgebiet

Although this seems to indicate that this letter was written by Bartsch to Ohm Peter Epp, however later in the letter Peter Epp is repeatedly referred to in the third person, and the general tone of the letter makes me think that it was intended for David Epp, as were the two previous ones. Perhaps this letter was externally addressed to Peter Epp because: (1) Bartsch may have thought David Epp had already departed from Danzig, and/or (2) this letter was intended *also* for a wider audience, perhaps to be read publicly in church or other meeting(s). The salutation is to “Beloved and esteemed Friends” (ie. In the plural). I treat this letter as also basically intended for David Epp.

Note 2 – These thawing conditions between Riga and Dubrovna were the same conditions encountered south of Dubrovna by the advance party of Jacob and Peter Hoepfner (including Peter Hildebrand) who departed Dubrovna about two weeks prior to Bartsch's arrival on March 29 old style. Since Bartsch was writing this letter on April 8, and since Easter in 1789 occurred on April 8 (old style) or on April 12 (new style), it seems reasonable to conclude that Bartsch's date of April 8 refers to the new style and that the letter was therefore written on the Wednesday before Good Friday in the Western Calendar.

Note 3 – Bartsch's reference to his dependents alone seems to confirm that just his family was left of his original party of 20 (D. G. Rempel 1969 p. 17) after two families separated from him to return “to Germany”.

Note 4 – This confirms that the “Morrisson Comptoir” in Riga closed the colonists account at “old new year”. It also suggests or confirms that even further Mennonite immigration was stopped by the Russian Government by the end of 1788 pending the end of the war with Turkey. All other immigration to Southern “New Russia” had already been stopped earlier in 1788.

Note 5 – This is a signal to us that Potemkin’s manager at Dubrovna, Lt. Col. Stahl, was replaced by early 1789 by Baron von Marklohsy. Any historical writings on the Mennonite immigration to Russia in 1789 and thereafter which refer to Stahl (or Staal) at Dubrovna therefore require correction accordingly.

Note 6 – “Hoeppner left long ago for Kremenchug” – we have established that the party must have left about 23 Mar 1789 (new style).

Note 7 – “... his brother has been removed from the building commission” – this removal of Peter Hoeppner must have occurred at Dubrovna *after* that party left in the week of March 23, or else Peter Hildebrand would have (likely) noted this removal. From other sources (Gerh Wiebe) we know that Peter Hoeppner, together with others, was entrusted with funds to obtain the building lumber. Perhaps he was reinstated.

Note 8 – Since we have tentatively established that Bartsch wrote this letter on the Wednesday before Good Friday it may explain why he ended his letter so abruptly – perhaps he was called away then to help prepare for Good Friday and the Easter celebration and/or he wanted this letter to go in the departing mail collection.

Note 9 – In this post-script we now have new historical information that the colonist’s new Inspector and Commander of the Colonies was appointed already at Dubrovna, where he must have been personally present, by the beginning of April 1789.

Note 10 – Bartsch’s enigmatic statement here to “... we have this (the “Privilegium”)” suggests to me that he is referring to the fact that he also had his copy with him, as Hoeppner had his with him on his way to Kremenchug.