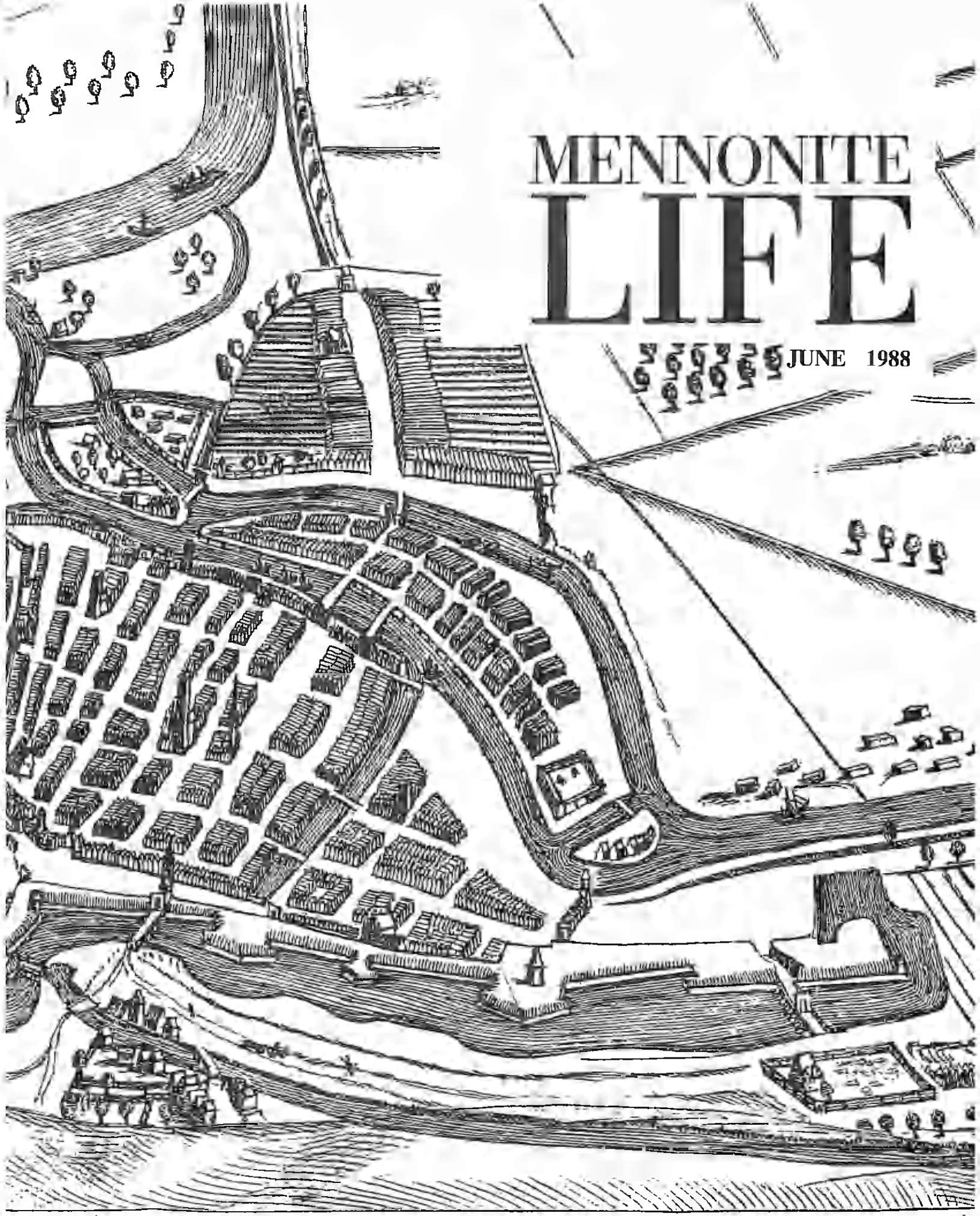
MENNONITE LIFE

JUNE 1988



In this Issue

The June issue again features the Radical Reformation and Mennonite Bibliography. The bibliography contains three sections: 1987, 1985-86, and undated publications. The listed works represent the acquisitions of recently published materials by contributing Mennonite libraries.

This issue focuses on the experience of Mennonites in West Prussia. John B. Toews, Professor of History at the University of Calgary, has edited and translated the memoirs of Abraham Neufeldt, a member of the Danzig Mennonite Church. The chronicle describes Neufeldt's experiences during the Napoleonic Wars, which included the occupation of Danzig by the Napoleonic forces and a siege by the Russian army, which occupied the suburban village of Scharfenort where Neufeldt resided.

The birth and church membership records for Abraham Neufeldt were discovered in the Church Book of the Danzig Mennonite Church, Bound Manuscript #17 in the collection of the Mennonite Library and Archives (see page 8). David A. Haury, Director and Archivist of the Mennonite Library and Archives (MLA), provides a list of the microfilms of West Prussian Mennonite congregational records available in the MLA. While most of the congregations were dispersed following World War II, many of the records were rescued and copied. Those with ancestors from this area may contact the MLA for further details regarding the information available in the surviving records.

Lawrence Klippenstein, Director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, chronicles the emigration of Mennonites from West Prussia to the Dnieper Valley of Russia. While a comprehensive account of these events is not available, Klippenstein lists the pertinent dates as we celebrate the bicentennial of the first Mennonite settlement in Russia.

Our December 1987 issue contained stories of "growing up in faith communities." Laura H. Weaver, Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Evansville (Indiana), provides an additional account, describing her upbringing in the Old Order (Wenger) and Lancaster Conference groups in Pennsylvania. Adapted from an article in the *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, this sketch portrays the meaning of "plainness" in a conservative Mennonite community in the 1930s and 1940s.

Indexed with abstracts in *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, American Theological Library Association, Chicago, available online through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Services), Latham, New York and DIALOG, Palo Alto, California.

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Cover

Map of Danzig, 1617, from P. Simson, *Geschichte der Stadt Danzig*, 1918.

Photo Credits

Mennonite Library and Archives, pp. 5, 8, and 13-15; C. Morris, *Famous Men and Great Events*, p. 6; *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, p. 12; W. Dorn, *Competition for Empire*, p. 17; V. Cronin, *Catherine, Empress of all the Russias*, p. 17; Lawrence Klippenstein, p. 18; and Laura H. Weaver, pp. 21-23.

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A Prussian Mennonite Experiences the Napoleonic Wars. The Account of Abraham Neufeldt.

by John B. Toews

The dawn of the nineteenth century gave forth no hint of the political upheavals which would soon confront the Prussian Mennonites, especially those living in the vicinity of Danzig. There had been moments of discomfort. In 1780 Frederick the Great demanded an annual payment of 5,000 talers for his military school at Culin in exchange for exemption from military service. Not even a decade later his successor, Frederick William II, prohibited all further land acquisition by Mennonites living in Prussia. By then the first families had left for Russia. For the next decade the vast Russian steppes would provide settlement sites for a landless Mennonite population.

Pressures exerted by the state generally did not dampen the optimism of the Mennonite population in Danzig, at least judging from the renovation of one or two Mennonite churches in the city. The ambitious parishioners even installed a new organ which became operational on July 20, 1806. Less than three months after its dedication, Prussia declared war on Napoleon, only to be defeated at the Battle of Jena on October 14, 1806. The triumph of the Grand Army naturally brought military occupation by the French. The governor of Danzig decided to resist and prepared for siege. All buildings within 800 feet of the city walls were to be demolished, and so by year end, the newly renovated church was a pile of rubble. The French siege of the city lasted from March 11 to May 25, 1807. While Danzig ostensibly became a free city under French occupation, its inhabitants, including the Mennonites, were burdened with heavy war taxes. The French presence had one beneficial effect. Frisian and Flemish Mennonites in the city, long alienated by ethnic and religious differences, now met in the Flemish church located in the inner city. With the collapse of Napoleon's Russian front the city again found itself under siege from January 1813, until its capture by Russian and allied forces early in 1814. In the interval artillery bombardment virtually reduced the city to ruins. The casualties included the only remaining Mennonite church.

The memoir focuses on the experiences of two young Mennonite entrepreneurs, of which Abraham Neufeldt is one, who seek a livelihood by operating a small store in the village of Scharfenort, located just outside of Danzig. The account not only provides a sample of the Prussian Mennonite experience during the Napoleonic wars but also furnishes an eyewitness account of the military blunders of both the French and the Allies. Ox-drawn supply wagons which are destined for Russia don't even leave Prussia because the French use harnesses instead of traditional yokes. This might well constitute one of many factors related to Napoleon's defeat. Similarly the Russian troops who utilized the cover of night to fortify themselves with alcohol and then attack Danzig in broad daylight can hardly be credited with deploying superior military strategy.

The account was apparently brought to Russia by the author's son, H. A. Neufeldt. It was then serialized in the Russian Mennonite periodical, *Der Botschafter*, Vol. 7 (1912), nos. 95-102, under the title, "Ein Blatt aus der Haus-Chronik Abrahams Neufeldts in Danzig." The translation is rather free and seeks to reduce the complexity of the long sentences used in the text and to simplify the somewhat convoluted German style.

A Page from the House Chronicle of Abraham Neufeldt in Danzig. His Experiences during the War Years 1812 and 1813.

The following interesting information comes from the son of the author, the minister H. A. Neufeldt. In order to clarify the circumstances at that time he [the son] adds the following observations:

"My father was a member of the Danzig Mennonite Church and a citizen of the City of Danzig for some 45 years—from November, 1815 until his death on March 21, 1861. Prior to this, during the years 1812 and 1813 he lived in the village of Scharfenort, about a mile south of Danzig. He was 23 years old at the time and together with his older brother owned a *Hackenbude* as they call it in that region, that is to say a store in which most of the things needed for an agricultural life could be found. During my childhood in the Danzig Mennonite Church there were really only two businesses [open to Mennonites]: a distillery with a retail outlet and a shop with silk, wool and the like. This was probably due to the previous centuries when the Anabaptists were suppressed or barely tolerated, and excluded from most of the trades except these.

Since my father and his brother possessed no extensive working capital in order to stock the expensive silk and woolen goods—rather they had to begin with only meager means and gain [their] wealth through the rapid turnover of easily moveable wares—they were obliged to keep a broad range of stock in their store. Therefore they stayed with the sale of coffee and sugar, scythes and plough shares, paper and slate. The presence of the warring peoples were very conducive to such sales. His reports remind us of those very troubled and sad times. Thank God those situations under which our father still suffered have ended. Today in Danzig there are Mennonite doctors, gymnasium teachers, city aldermen, architects—all unheard of thirty years ago.

Danzig Mennonite Church.

The following portrayal of his experiences, which father wrote down for the remembrance and instruction of us children picture his participation in the general misery of that war period. The dear reader will not be able to read them without a sense of participation.---

Abraham Neufeldt's Account.

The French troops which left Danzig for duty in Russia in the winter of 1811-12 were replaced with newly arriving troops. This resulted in marches which mainly went through our village (Scharfenort) and fostered the sale of our goods. We, my brother and I, were both young and healthy and naturally did not hold our hands on our lap but worked as hard as we could. [We did this] without increasing the personnel in our house, which consisted of only one male and one female servant. In addition a horse and wagon were of great help to us. French, Dutch, Spanish, Polish, Neapolitan and Italian troops of every type constantly passed our place, later to be followed by the war god [himself], Napoleon. He passed near [to where we were standing] in Scharfenort one morning accompanied by an adjutant and riding in an open wagon surrounded by Polish lancers. He returned our greeting insofar that he raised his hand and touched his forehead with his fingers. Only this once did I see the conqueror face to face. He really did not look as though a continent should tremble before him. Therefore I consider a description of his person superfluous. I only want to observe that, as is the case with Friedrich II, most pictures of him are accurate.

This imperial troop movement lasted many months. We had seen most of the nations of Europe. Then followed an extraordinary baggage train, which consisted [both] of horse-drawn wagons carrying parts of pontoons and of oxen-drawn wagons carrying provisions. The members of the latter were legion, for the wheel-wrights, smiths and painters near St. Catherines church had worked on the construction of these wagons for a long time and built several hundred. The purpose of the oxen-drawn, provision-laden wagons was to supply the large French Army in Russia, with the oxen [eventually] supplying the meat. Since the oxen here were used to pulling with a yoke and the French, following their custom, placed a type of [breast] harness on them, the Danzig conscripted oxen drivers did not know how to drive the oxen and found themselves in great difficulty. Many wagons were broken and many oxen drivers hurt. The expensive undertaking totally failed. One experienced joy and pain observing the unregal [wagon] train: joy when one saw the mistreated oxen trying to free themselves by breaking the wagons;

Napoleon Bonaparte.

pain when the accompanying cavalrymen, driven to tears of dispair, mistreated the oxen handlers.

During 1812, when the French fought for their lives in Russia and were forced to retreat thanks to Rostopchin's burning of Moscow, our situation improved. At the end of the year we had a considerable inventory which we could call our own, though we still possessed relatively little cash. Then, for Danzig and many [other] cities came the terrible year of 1813.

It began in a curious fashion from the very onset. At eight in the morning on January 1, amidst the grim cold, three suns stood in a row on the horizon. They looked almost like the constellation "Jacob's staff" and shone majestically on the new fallen snow.

The outlying area of the city had not yet been destroyed and the Mennonite church still stood in the city. In spite of the intense cold I made my way from Scharfenort to the [church]. It was nevertheless so cold that at times I had to run and was glad to find the church was heated. On my way there I passed many Frenchmen who were fleeing from Russia to Danzig. They slowly passed by, presenting a most lamentable sight since their limbs had been afflicted in varying degrees by the terrible frost. Frozen ears, noses, hands and feet were commonplace, some had obvious wounds and almost all were covered in rags and possessed no weapons. One saw officers with rags on their feet and with women's skirts instead of a coat over their shoulders. They were only recognizable by their caps, but many had lost even these and were wearing kerchiefs. Generally it was mainly officers who had saved their lives; one rarely saw ordinary soldiers since most of these had died from hunger and cold in Russia.

When I came out of the church both side suns had disappeared, but the remains of the large French army still filled the streets. Their almost uninterrupted flight to Danzig lasted for another three weeks, from January 1-23, 1813. About 30,000 refugees from all European nations gathered in Danzig, remnants of the so-called invincible French army. About 7,000 of these unfortunates died in the hospitals. A battalion was formed out of the many remaining officers.

Earlier many of these foreign people had made themselves hated in Prussia by their insufferable arrogance, but hunger and cold and enemy weapons had made these once proud victors so humble in defeat that they generally aroused and found sympathy.

After a segment of the French army heading to Danzig had passed through Scharfenort in its deplorable condition between January 1-23, 1813, it was followed by Russian cossacks. Since we had anticipated this and feared plundering, we made provision to hide whatever was possible. At night we buried a box filled with cheese, a pot of lard, a barrel of tallow, a quarter barrel of honey and a large crock of syrup in the driveway. In the attic we stored a half a load of oats, some wheat, rye, barley, soap, candles, almost a barrel of salt, as well as some clean laundry. In the room between the living room and the *Grutzhaus* (groats shed) we placed 24 Scheffel oatmeal, some peeled barley and peas, hams and sausage as well as tobacco and chicory. We also placed our best clothes, beds, and bed curtains in there and then pushed the large clothes closet in front of the pantry door in such a way that nothing could be seen of it. We buried the little money we had, but placed the counterfeit ducats then in circulation in our pockets and laid a number of them in the drawer of the writing desk, leaving it unlocked. We also left a few clothes hanging in the closet without closing the door. Only in the store were there still various wares, namely brandy, while in the attic of the groats shed there were 3 or 4 loads of grain, mostly oats. The horse and the cow, as well as the feed for the winter, all remained on location since we could not hide these anywhere. In this fashion we awaited the Russians as enemies who would [first] plunder us, then move towards the city. How greatly we erred. They came as friends and did not plunder. They nevertheless remained [with us] and caused us much grief.

On January 23, 1813, we saw our first Russians. They were two cossack officers who stopped [at our house], ate dinner, then fully clothed and with hands on their sabres laid down to sleep. Towards evening they left.

The next day, January 24, however, we boarded 20 cossacks of lower ranks including a wounded man. Later seven infantry men also came. Their twenty horses were tethered in front of the door. The large living room was taken over by the 20 cossacks, the small front room by seven infantry. Our oats and hay were fed to the horses and consumed at our expense from January 14 to May 16. Only then did we experience some relief, but more of that later.

The Russians had taken possession of our house and, while they did not plunder, used our supplies as they wished and so we saw our hard-won possessions vanish. With respect to food supplies we found ourselves in dire straights. Though both rooms were being heated we did not have access to them but were restricted to the unheated room in the store. A large chest in the attic had to serve as our bed. The lack of warmth was very hard for us, but the most difficult thing was the lack of warm food, since the Russians used our stove constantly. At other times they would rid themselves of lice. We only had opportunity to cook for ourselves at night. Even then the Russians sometimes took the food away from us. We were therefore forced to live on water, bread and brandy. We did not think in terms of mealtime. Whenever we were hungry we ate a piece of bread and had a sip of brandy or drank water if we were plagued by thirst. We were fortunate insofar that we could still obtain bread and [especially] brandy, which was much in demand. We made considerable profit from these items.

This situation had only lasted a short period of time when an unexpected event caused us many worries and concerns. The former employer of my brother, Johann T. in Schidlitz, whose wife had fled to Ellernitz, sent a worker there to inquire about her well-being. He was unaware that Ellernitz had already been occupied by the Russians. These thought the worker a spy and took him captive. This man now recalled that my brother knew him and so cited him as a man who could attest to his innocence. General Loewis nevertheless demanded a guarantee from us that this worker would not return to Schidlitz, still in French hands. We were too soft-hearted to resist the tears of the unhappy worker and guaranteed his nonreturn. With this we placed a new burden upon ourselves. His desire to see his loved ones—he was married—daily caused us to fear that he would return to Schidlitz, in which case we would have to pay. The affliction and suffering endured during his captivity ruined his health. He became ill and succumbed to a nerve fever. During his illness we nursed him with the little milk [supplied] by our surviving but emaciated cow. We would have gladly drunk it ourselves. His illness affected his mind and one day he vanished in this condition. What fear the fact that we could not locate him caused us. We hardly dared think where he might have gone to. Since we had 20 cossacks in our home we promised them as much brandy as they could drink if they mounted their horses, rode through the district, found him and brought him back. It happened. They found him on the Ohra field and brought him back. Following this flight his illness worsened and after several days he died. After the Russian general was assured of his death we were freed of our guarantee and received permission to bury the body. But distress and suffering, hunger and cold had claimed so many of our neighbors in a short time, that the only carpenter in our region could not make enough coffins to bury all the dead. We therefore gave our village mayor a few new boards which he nailed together into a coffin. Wrapped in a clean sheet he [the worker] was placed into the coffin and buried in the Scharfenort cemetery by four neighbors.

January and February had passed and March 5 was approaching when rifle shots mixed with hurrahs filled the air and awakened us from slumber in our little shelter. We stepped out in amazement and hurried down the stairs. We found the house empty and the horses gone. We looked at each other in bewilderment not knowing what was happening. The shooting and 'hurrahs' seemed to be coming from the direction of the city and we soon realized that the Russians had organized a sneak attack on Danzig and, without arousing the suspicions of the inhabitants, had broken camp at night in order to take Danzig by storm. That was exactly what took place. The Russian commanding general Loewis had learned that he was to be replaced by Prince Alexander of Württemberg and now made an attempt to capture Danzig before his arrival.

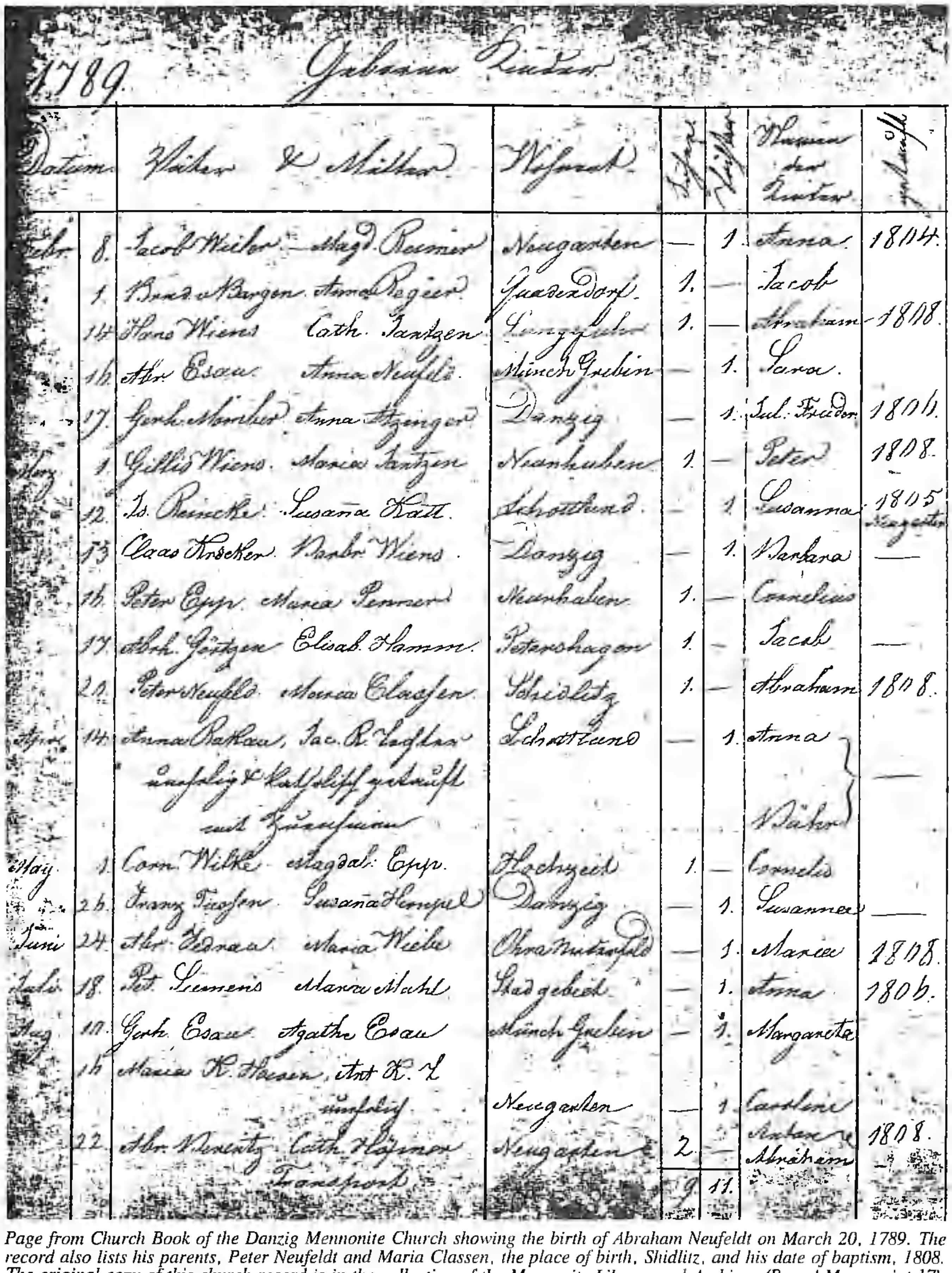
The Russians, however, behaved unwisely. Instead of nearing the fortifications as silently as possible they made such a loud noise that the French heard their approach and had time to ready themselves. Instead of advancing without stopping they fell to plundering the houses in the suburbs. They also robbed the distilleries and liquor stores located there, became drunk and lay about, and so wasted time in mounting the attack. They arrived at the doors of the fortification by daylight and naturally could no longer take it by surprise. After an abortive attack which cost many human lives, they retreated and returned to their former quarters.

Through this episode we gained a few hours to check on our hidden inventory and possessions and to restock the missing items. How surprised we were when we removed the closet which we had placed in front of the door. The rats and mice had wrought chaos among our wares and inventory. The paper had been torn from the tobacco and chicory and holes had been gnawed in the lid of the grain chest. Bedding and curtains had been shredded by the sharp teeth of these uninvited guests. Feathers, grain, chicory and tobacco were spread all over the floor and we found nests containing young broods of rats and mice in the remains of the bedding. Our losses were considerable but from the new open shed we were able to restock our store with some of the items which had run out. We managed to place the large closet in front of the shed door before the Russians returned and once more occupied the room.

Though the unsuccessful attack on Danzig had cost the Russians many men and horses, all of those quartered [at our house] returned, with the exception of a drummer who had been shot. The cossacks also brought back all their horses. Only one horse belonging to a cossack officer quartered nearby, an arabian white and grey, had been shot out from under him. This officer came to us, and although he knew little German, tearfully told us of his irreplaceable loss. He added that if the bullet had struck his brother he would not have cried as many tears for him as for this horse which had become so indispensable for him. Its swiftness had saved his life in many battles. Even if he gave half of all he possessed he would never again find such a horse. There was probably never a horse that was so tearfully lamented as this arabian stud.

On this day we had the opportunity to have something warm to eat for lunch, and subsequently we found it all the harder to do without. I became ill. The Russians, fearing an attack from the French, took turns being awake day and night. Because there was less activity during the night (hence less taxing), I stayed in bed during the day and worked at night. The nights, however, were long and cold and the door was open. One night, driven by illness and cold, I came into the living room to warm myself but I was barely inside when one of the cossacks jumped up and struck me in the face with his clenched fist. I felt the pain for three weeks. The next day this fellow came, fell on his knees, crawled towards me on all four and called "be merciful?"

Because of the lack of nourishment and warmth, my illness intensified but necessity demanded that I had to be up at night so that my brother did not become ill as well because of extreme exertion. I spent a number of nights in this sad condition. When everyone was quiet and seemingly asleep, I left the store and went to the adjoining shed where I laid down on my stomach upon a pile of straw and listened for footsteps. When these became audible I sprang up in order to be at my job, then afterwards lay sick without care and warmth and struggled for my painful existence from one day to the next. I often wished for death and yet I was not to die. I have experienced what it means to be sick and still remain on the go and that in severe cold without any heating, living only on brandy and bread. I would not want anyone to experience that.



1789. Geborene Kinder

Datum		Väter & Mütter	Wohnort	Söhne	Töchter	Namen der Kinder	getauft
Febr.	8.	Jacob Weiler — Magd. Roemer	Neugarten	—	1	Anna	1804.
	1.	Bend. Bargen Anna Regier	Quadendorf	1.	—	Jacob	
	14	Hans Wiens Cath. Jantzen	Langfuhr	1.	—	Abraham	1808.
	16	Abr. Esau Anna Neufeld	Münchengrebin	—	1.	Sara.	
	17.	Gerh. Martens Anna Ahzinger	Danzig	—	1.	Jul. Friedr.	1806.
März	1.	Gillis Wiens. Maria Jantzen	Neunhuben	1.	—	Peter	1808.
	12.	Jo. Reincke Susana Katt.	Schottland.	—	1	Susanna	1805 Neugarten
	13	Claas Kroeker Barbr. Wiens.	Danzig	—	1.	Barbara	—
	16.	Peter Epp Maria Penner	Neunhuben	1.	—	Cornelius	
	17	Abrh. Jantzen Elisab. Hamm.	Petershagen	1.	—	Jacob	—
	20.	Peter Neufeld Maria Classen.	Schidlitz	1.	—	Abraham	1808.
April	14.	Anna Rathau, Jac. R. Tischler unehelich & katholisch getauft mit Zwillingen	Schottland	—	1.	Anna } Väter	—
May	1.	Corn. Wilke Magdal. Epp.	Hochzeit	1.	—	Cornelius	
	26.	Franz Tiessen Susana Hempel	Danzig	—	1.	Susanna	—
Juni	24.	Abr. [illegible] Maria Wiebe	Ohra Niederfeld	—	1.	Maria	1808.
Juli	18.	Pet. Siemens Maria Mahl	Stadtgebiet	—	1.	Anna	1806.
Aug.	10.	Gerh. Esau Agatha Esau	Münch Grebin	—	1.	Margaretha	
	16	Maria R. Hansen, [illegible] unehelich	Neugarten	—	1	Caroline	
	22	Abr. [illegible] Cath. Hepner	Neugarten	2.	—	Anton & Abraham	1808.
		Transport		9	11.		

Page from Church Book of the Danzig Mennonite Church showing the birth of Abraham Neufeldt on March 20, 1789. The record also lists his parents, Peter Neufeldt and Maria Classen, the place of birth, Shidlitz, and his date of baptism, 1808. The original copy of this church record is in the collection of the Mennonite Library and Archives (Bound Manuscript 17). (Additional information on West Prussian Mennonite Church Records is located on page 13 of this issue).

This period of my unknown suffering was nevertheless a time of harvest for us. The size of the occupation army had increased considerably and therefore our turnover was greater as was the profit on the goods [sold]. When I left my bed half dead and went out front it was not unusual to hear: "Storekeeper quickly give me a bottle of rum and a pound of sugar!" Since these items were difficult to obtain we charged a good price for them. A female Russian sutler and the Jew W. were the only ones who could supply us with these items. The streets were far from safe and if one did not have a pass from general headquarters, one hardly dared to travel to the next village. Such a pass was difficult to obtain, for Prince Alexander of Württemberg who commanded the occupation army issued very few passes. We had not obtained one.

The most desired articles at that time were rum, sugar, coffee, brandy, vinegar, tobacco, salt, candles, soap, hazelnuts, whitebread and butter. It was easiest to make profit from these. But nothing produced as much revenue as the exchange of the many currencies then in circulation. The main measure for the currency in circulation was the 52½ coin *(Duttchen)*, reckoned as one *Taler*. As a result all small merchandise was priced according to *Duttchen*. Because the Russians only had gold, silver or paper money, we had to give them change in *Duttchen* if they purchased something. One would therefore have to reach an agreement with them how many *Duttchen* one piece of gold was worth. We accepted the *Taler* at 45; the rubel at 45; the five-frank at 50; the *Laubtaler* at 60; the *Konventionstaler* at 55; the blue *Polmaschky* at 50; the red at 100; the white at 250 *Duttchen*. The other merchants in our region all paid somewhat less, hence if the Russians wanted to change something they preferred to come to us. Usually they also bought something so we doubled our earnings. There were times when we earned 15 *Duttchen* on an item which cost ten. When, for example, a Russian bought a half a bottle of brandy it cost us 10 *Duttchen* and we sold it for 15. If he gave us a *Laubtaler* for payment we gave him 60 *Duttchen* for it, and so we gained 5 *Duttchen* on the item and 10 on the currency. In this way it became possible to recover everything which we had lost through the war.

Our suffering and our difficulties lasted until May 26. The trees and the meadows were green and the air mild. Only now the cossacks moved out and erected a camp near Schonfeld. In place of them we now quartered the chancery of the sixth regiment. This consisted of five secretaries and nine orderlies, all of whom became our charges. The latter were not housed with us but were rotated daily so that we were only burdened with the maintenance of the five secretaries. This brought considerable relief, but commerce decreased and our income declined considerably. Nevertheless, we felt very relieved. One of our first tasks was to dig up the buried cheese and other essentials from the driveway. How shocked we were when we found everything spoiled except the well-sealed jug of syrup. The horses had stood on the spot and their excretions had soaked into the ground and saturated our wares. The loss was not insignificant for us.

With the concentration of the troops in the field camps, the roads were once more freed from roadblocks and the traffic increased. Even I dared to make short journeys in order to obtain such wares as we were missing. Salt was most critically needed. I therefore hired a driver and went with him to Dirschau where the salt depot was located in order to get several barrels of salt. The journey went well. Since my driver had obtained a travel pass from the Russian commander I decided to also go to Tiegenhof to buy other wares. In consultation with my driver, who possessed a travel pass, I tried to determine if I could accompany a load of wares on his pass, especially [in order] to cross the heavily guarded Vistula [river]. We decided that he would entrust me with his travel pass and give his son as a driver, while he himself remained behind. So in God's name I drove to Tiegenhof and crossed the Vistula at Schoeneberg without difficulty. Upon my return the guard in the Schoeneberg guard house stopped us and asked for our pass. I showed him the entrusted pass which he read to the rest of the guards, and with the words "Proceed in God's name" returned it to me.

We reached home safely and my brother was very pleased with the results of my journey. I had not only bought the goods cheaply, but had got [a higher exchange] for my money than was possible [in our district]. Because of this cheaper purchase, we were now in a position to discount our wares and so our turnover increased. I had to make the trip two or three times a month. Even now I often thank God who kept all dangers from me. All my acquaintances who like me got their wares from Dirschau and Tiegenhof experienced some misfortunes. I, the vicissitudes of roads and weather notwithstanding, always journeyed safely. Though I was completely covered with dirt when the wagon once rolled over before sunrise, I escaped unhurt. Once when I got stuck in the proverbial Werder mud a sympathetic farmer took his horse and brought me to dry ground. [My] thanks to this brave man whom I did not know and to the man who offered me his travel pass near Schoeneberg and secured me safe passage [over the Vistula]. I was comforted by their generosity, for in those days of terror, empathy for a stranger's plight was seldom in evidence.

During this time we had the following experience. One day the cossacks brought a suspected spy to our house and had him guarded by the resident orderly. He was a man of about thirty, dressed in torn clothes and very wild in appearance. His care became our responsibility. He was daily interrogated by the adjutant of the sixth regiment, but he only spoke nonsense. Once the colonel of the regiment came to us to convince himself of the innocence or guilt of the prisoner. After he had seen him and asked several questions to which he replied with a chattering of teeth, he ordered thin willow branches to be cut from our garden. The orderly was commanded to whip him in Russian style. The suspected spy was thrown on his stomach. One Russian sat on his neck and another on his feet. On each side stood a man with a thin willow branch and upon the signal from the adjutant mercilessly began to beat the prisoner so that he let out a loud cry and exerted himself to the utmost in order to escape from the hands of his tormentors. But the more he screamed the harder they beat him. From time to time the colonel shouted "Who are you man?"

After several sticks had been broken on him and he had not answered the repeated questions, he was raised up and interrogated in Russian, Polish and French. Since he still refused to answer he was locked in our front room and guarded by an orderly. After several days a poor, old woman came by and

complained that her deaf son had escaped and that she had been searching for him for many days without finding him. We showed her our prisoner. With tears of joy she rushed to him, called him her dear son and rejoiced that she had finally found him. He only grinned at her and no sign of happiness came over his face. She went to the colonel and pleaded for the release of her son, which she obtained and then happily took him away. Within me the scene induced a sad response for I had never believed that a man could be so unfeeling to the bonds of blood relationship as this one was.

A truce was now [initiated] between the Allies and the French. In concluding the armistice it was agreed that the beleaguered fortresses would be provisioned by the surrounding army, and so Danzig was provided with food supplies by the Russians. Only the army was looked after, however. The citizens received nothing, and, as a result, famine caused many of the city inhabitants to leave. Even the Danzig public institutions, of which I want to mention the children's house, almshouse and the city hospital, suffered from hunger. Fortunately the commanding general Loewis in St. Albrecht was a very humanitarian individual. He, together with the brewery owner Jantzen, allowed the almshouse director, Gert, together with the inhabitants, freedom to leave. They, as well as other people, came over. St. Albrecht and the [immediate] region became heavily populated and used far more food stuffs than usual. As a result I was required to visit Dirschau and Tiegenhof more often than usual. For us this was the best period during the [entire] siege of Danzig for our sufferings were bearable and our profit reasonable. But the duration of this period was too short for us to derive any real benefit from it.

Seven months had passed without a word from our mother, our sisters or our other relatives. They were all with those under siege and none of them succeeded in sending us any news as to their fate. One day during the armistice my mother's brother Jacob C. arrived. He had managed to get past the guards and brought us news of our loved ones. He stayed with us. We learned from him that our loved ones were all right but were experiencing a shortage of essential food supplies. Amidst the steadily intensifying scarcity of provisions they faced starvation if not death from famine. At that time we possessed plenty of foodstuffs but were unable to get these to them on account of the double sentries which allowed none of us to reach them without being arrested as spies.

Meanwhile the truce continued. Almost every day one saw long rows of wagons loaded with provisions drive via Scharfenort to the city in order to feed the besieged soldiers. None of this reached the starving citizens, who longed for an end to the armistice in the hope that peace would come and the occupation end. During the second half of August the truce expired, but no peace came. Hostilities again broke out and with far greater violence than before. Meanwhile in Prussia the Institute for Homeland Defense *(Institute der Landwehr)* had been organized and the Russians besieging Danzig were strengthened by several battalions of young troops. I saw such a battalion accompanied by the mothers, brothers, and brides of the young warriors stop in Praust. I heard the heartrending cry of the next of kin when they bade a last farewell. I will never forget the deep impression which this scene made upon me. This young contingent, poorly drilled and poorly trained in riflery, now advanced against the Danzig fortifications in order to aid the besieging Russians. During the truce, cannons and mortar came down the Vistula from Graudenz to Dirschau. Here they were loaded and with great effort transported to the mountains (hills) surrounding Danzig. I personally saw how 24 horses barely moved a light wagon loaded with cannon, while the gun carriage which belonged to it followed, drawn by 18 horses. Danzig was now bombarded with this heavy artillery. More than 100,000 shells, grenades and bombs were utilized. Horses for several square miles in the district were used for this [transport]. So it happened that the main road was littered with so many dead horses that one could hardly travel to Dirschau without shuddering.

In vain the Russian chief of staff, Prince Alexander of Württemberg, pled with the Danzig citizens to rise up against French tyranny; they remained calm. In vain he urged the Poles and Germans under Danzig occupation to join the Russians. And so the siege of Danzig ran its course.

Now a struggle for the villages Ohra and Zigankenberg near the city began. They were repeatedly captured by the Russians during the day, abandoned during the night and retaken by the French. Finally the villages were burned by the Russians. The village of Ohra was burned during the day. It was a touching but sad sight to see how [long the] beautifully decorated [church] tower endured. How it stood in the flames and then while burning, slowly and majestically sank to the ground. I have not seen anything like it before or after. Zigankenberg burned late in the evening, and I could see the flames from Kremokenberg (a high hill near Scharfenort).

The French, who found themselves even more tightly encircled in Danzig, undertook an expedition to Praust in order to obtain food supplies. For this they utilized some French, some German, and some Polish troops and were certain of their success. The Russians, without engaging in battle, quickly withdrew behind Praust. Then, once the French had advanced to the village of Praust, they hoped to cut off their retreat. Fearing this the French turned back and began to plunder the houses in St. Albrecht and Scharfenort, even though they had to break into many a home. We had prepared ourselves for this. We buried our money and hid a portion of our wares. With fear and trembling we awaited the things which were to come. The plunderers also came to our house and entered it. Many had already received or taken foodstuffs and there was little in our store of any real value. A German cavalry man came to me and tried to force me to show him where our money was. God gave me the idea to pretend that I did not understand him. I therefore told him to take what he desired even without paying money, since the others did not pay either. He repeated that he did not want to take anything without paying: he wanted money and I should show him where we kept it. I reiterated that I did not want money from him. He should simply take what he wished without paying. [In this fashion] I argued with him for a while while others came, took, and went. Finally the chap became angry. "Just wait [you] dog I will teach you not to understand me," he shouted and pulled his saber and wanted to slash me. What could I do? Show him where the money was and plunge me and my brother into poverty or give myself to the brutality

of this German barbarian. I prayed quietly and chose the latter. God sent me his angel in the guise of a French officer who at that moment burst in upon this saberswinging cavalry man. He had to flee and so I escaped him. Outside I heard the cry "Kosaki" and so these once more became our deliverers. My brother had not been in the [same] danger I was, but the thought of giving away our hard earned money caused him great anxiety. The loss which we suffered through this plundering scarcely amounted to 100 *Taler*, however, only the person who has found himself in similar circumstances can appreciate our fear. After their ill-fated expedition, the French barely managed to get back into the city without being cut off. Shortly after, they undertook a new expedition in the vicinity which succeeded beyond all their expectations and as a result of which they drove large numbers of slaughter cattle into the city. They kept these for themselves. Consequently the famine of the citizens was not alleviated.

Around this time the Russians completed their preparations for the siege and bombardment of the city. After the siege army had been substantially strengthened and Prince Alexander of Württemberg had moved his headquarters from Sullmen to Pietzkendorf, the bombardment began during the night of October 1-2, 1813. I had already experienced what it means to be in a besieged city bombarded by the enemy in 1807. I was not inside, but close enough to hear every shot and the feel of earth reverberating under my feet from the bombardment. The necessary artillery material was in good supply. Determination was also not lacking and so they fired day and night without interruption. They were still too far from the actual walls of the city to inflict substantial damage on them. Therefore, they directed their fire on the not-yet-totally-destroyed suburbs and upon the forward defenses of the French. An English contingent which fired Congreve rockets on the city set the Dominican monastery on fire with one of these and burned it, as well as the cloister, to the ground.

The French desperately defended every foot of land, but had to yield to superior power and gradually retreated to their fortifications. The French-held centers which cost the most blood to recapture were Reicher's Forest (now Hoehnes Forest) in Ohra, Schoenfeld road, Schidlitz, and Uphagen's garden. Uphagen's garden was stormed by Russians, the Schoenfeld road and Schidlitz mostly by the Prussians. In the battle along the Schoenfeld road, many Prussian officers were killed. Those of the highest ranks were buried in a common grave on a hill near Schoenfeld.

The capture of the suburb Schidlitz cost even more [lives] because as much as the Russians shelled it, they were not successful in completely destroying it. The French flung themselves behind the houses which were still standing and fired from the windows and the rooftops at the charging Prussians, so that each house had to be captured individually. Sixty Prussian officers died in the process. One can easily imagine how many lives the capture of this city cost collectively. This event had important consequences even for me since my ancestral home went up in flames, set on fire by the French who could not hold it. My mother, who lived in the house with my two sisters, lost virtually everything she had when they set fire to a mortgage-free house. They did not even allow her time to collect her papers.

My bosom friend, Henry W., had his right lower arm smashed by a cannon ball in a neighboring house of this unfortunate suburb. On the fourth day after his injury he was brought from Schidlitz to Scharfenort, weak and having lost much blood. He had received no medical attention or bandaging and his condition gave little hope for recovery. We called in a chirologist to help him, who, after he had exhausted his skills, declared that the patient would either lose his arm or die. In order to avoid both we asked the doctor for [further] advice. He ordered compresses of oak bark. These warm poultices [which were] changed every quarter hour literally performed miracles. The friend was saved and retained his arm.

After the besiegers had captured the suburbs, they began to bombard the city at close range. Now the bombardment achieved its aim. On November 1, the warehouses caught fire and started [such] an extensive conflagration [that it seemed] the entire city was in flames. Seventeen warehouses burned, and with them the French lost their food supplies and many of the citizens their most treasured possessions. Since the warehouse area was considered the most secure part of the city, many of the citizens of the burned out suburbs had placed their goods and wares in the warehouses for security. Many of the city inhabitants had also stored their possessions there because of the [steady] bombardments. I saw the fire only from Scharfenort, and though I was a mile distant, the sight was indescribable.

By contrast the sight of the Congreve fire rockets flying through the air was a more pleasant sight. I can still recall the spectacular sight we saw when the English prepared an artillery attack on the French pontoon stationed at the Hegen gate and fired ten vollies of rockets in the air from the dam or the old Radaune Nobel which, because of the great distance, mostly missed their destination.

I saw an even more spectacular fire display near Pahlschau on the Vistula dam when I returned from Tiegenhof on a lovely fall evening at a time when the city was being heavily bombarded. From this viewpoint I could see the fire on the attackers and the defenders. Shells and grenades were flying in all directions and the ground shook under one's feet even though the distance was more than three miles. The fireworks only looked spectacular from a distance; nearby it spread destruction, death and ruination.

The French lost all courage after the great warehouse fire and after every hope of a successful counterattack vanished. Governor Rapp was ready to capitulate. The agreement which he made with the Russian chief-of-staff, Prince Alexander of Württemberg, was rejected by Emperor Alexander who refused to allow the French a free withdrawal but wanted to transport them to Siberia as prisoners of war. The French threatened to renew the hostilities, but because they lacked food supplies, surrendered and left the city on January 2, 1814.

The period of negotiations concerning the capitulation was the worst time for the inhabitants of the city during the entire siege. Virtually all supplies had been consumed and those still available cost incredibly high prices. A pound of salt was sold at 10 *Talers*, a *Scheffel* rye at 40 *Talers* and even at these prices virtually nothing was available. Even the richest people would have had to do without butter and fresh meat if not a spy, risking his life, and using the city

waterworks, brought these and similar items into the city by foot. This spy, a simple citizen, whose origins I do not know, already began his daring exploits in August. He did this after he had bought coffee, sugar, cheese, butter, spices and salt from us several times. He told us himself that he took these wares, to which he added others which he did not buy from us, to the Steinschleuse at night, and there sold them to the rich citizens at high prices. He could not obtain several items which were highly desired, namely Berlin newspapers. We told him we received these and he offered us one *Taler* for every paper—nevertheless he only wanted those newspapers which reported the victories of the Allies. When he left he always took the latest and most important and gave us one *Taler* for each. The man earned a fortune with his trips but it helped him very little. He continued his journeys into the late fall [and as a result] caught a bad cold, became ill, and died. Probably a large portion of his profit still lies in a pit on the meadows behind the Guteherberg gardens in the vicinity of the Kreuger's bakery.

Finally the siege came to an end and the city was open once more. The people who had fled during the siege and found a livelihood in our vicinity returned to the city. As a consequence the sale of our wares became very meager. In spite of this, the end of the siege was most welcome, for it again brought us into contact with our dear mother and our beloved sisters whose burned ancestral home in Schidlitz no longer offered shelter and who found a mutually desired refuge with us in Scharfenort.

Mennonite Communities in West Prussia.

West Prussian Church Records in the Mennonite Library and Archives

by David A. Haury

Microfilms of eighteenth and nineteenth century congregational records from Mennonite churches in West Prussia constitute one of the richest genealogical treasures preserved in the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College. The records of the Danzig Mennonite Church include entries from the seventeenth century while several of the more recent church books contain information through the beginning of World War II when some of the congregations were dispersed and their buildings destroyed.

The numbers indicate the sequence of the microfilms in the library's collection, and each line (lettered a, b, and so forth) indicates a different book or volume for the congregation. These records from over a dozen congregations contain data on Mennonite families from numerous villages, and the researcher who does not know to which congregation his ancestors belonged may still be able to locate relevant records if a village name is known. Inquiries should be addressed to the Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, KS 67117. Library staff will conduct limited searches for patrons who are unable to visit the library, and copies of the microfilms may also be ordered.

1. Fürstenwerder
   a) Birth Register (1800-1943) 486 pp.
   b) Death Register (1800-1943) 374 pp.

2. Tiegenhagen and Ladekopp
   a) Marriage, Birth, and Baptismal Record (1780-1831) 166 pp.
   b) Church Book, Tiegenhagen (1796-1841) 166 pp.
   c) Marriage, Birth, Death, and Baptismal Record, Ladekopp (1775-1829) 182 pp.

Above. Fürstenwerder Mennonite Church.
Below. Ladekopp Mennonite Church, 1930.

3. Tragheimerweide and Orlöfferfelde
   a) Birth, Marriage, and Death Record, Tragheimerweide (1766-1862) 386 pp.
   b) Birth, Marriage, and Death Record, Orlöfferfelde (1800-1899) 437 pp.

4. Montau
   a) Birth, Death, Marriage, and Baptism Record (1782-1818) 152 pp.
   b) Birth, Death, Marriage, and Baptism Record (1819-1874) 126 pp.
   c) Birth, Death, and Marriage Record (1781-1818) 150 pp.
   d) Birth, Death, and Marriage Record (1819-1874) 168 pp.

Tragheimerweide Mennonite Church (shown abandoned after World War II).

5. Rosenort
   a) Birth, Baptism, Marriage, and Death Record (1857-1940).

Rosenort Mennonite Church

6. Heubuden
   a) Church Book (1773-1815) 186 pp.
   b) Church Book (1816-1867) 376 pp.
   c) Church Book (1868-1900) 256 pp.

Heubuden Mennonite Church.

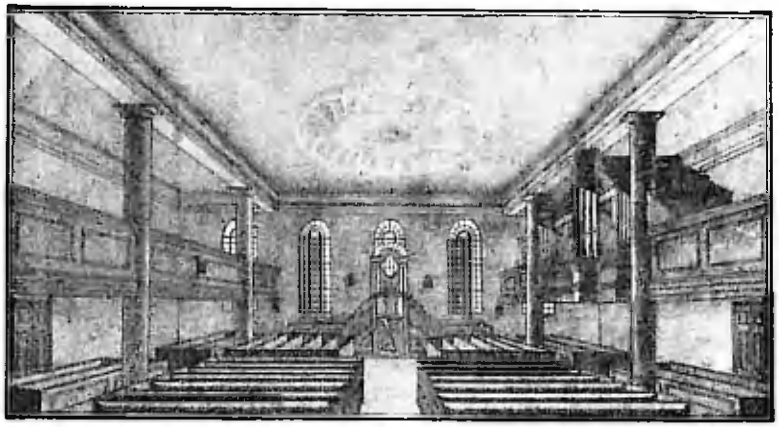
7. Königsberg, Elbing, and Ellerwald
   a) Königsberg Church Book (1794-1832), including list of elders (1721-1845) 102 pp.
   b) Elbing-Ellerwald Church Book (1825-1883) 127 pp.
   c) Elbing-Ellerwald Church Book I (by Johann Andreas, died 1846) 189 pp.
   d) Elbing-Ellerwald Church Book II (1854-1866) 180 pp.
   e) Elbing-Ellerwald Church Book III (1866-1877) 124 pp.
   f) Elbing-Stadt Church Book (Births, 1802-1940; Deaths, 1860-1940; Marriages, 1869-1942; Baptisms, 1819-1938).

8. Marcushof
   a) Marcushof Church, Marienburg, Baptism, Marriage, and Death Register (1754-1834) 263 pp.
   b) Marcushof Church, Marienburg, Baptism, Marriage, and Death Register (1792-1807) 80 pp.

9. Marcushof
   a) Baptism, Marriage, and Death Register (1787-1818) 125 pp.
   b) Baptism, Marriage, and Death Register (1819-1826) 31 pp.
   c) Baptism, Marriage, and Death Register (1826-1832) 21 pp.
   d) Baptism, Marriage, and Death Register (1833-1864) 136 pp.
   e) Church Book, (1865-1911) 75 pp.

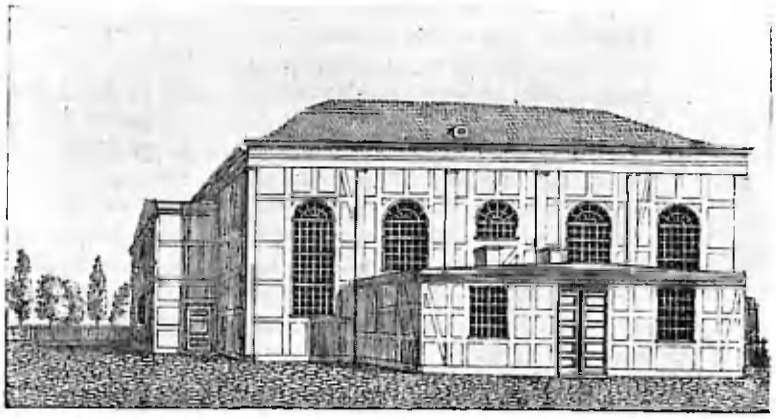
Ellerwald Mennonite Church.

10. Danzig
   a) Baptisms, 1667-1800; Marriages, 1665-1808; Births, 1789-1809; Deaths, 1667-1807; and Ministers, 1598-1807. Vol. 1 - 352 pp. and Vol. 2 - 390 pp.



17 and 18. Alexanderwohl
   a) Old Flemish or Groningerschn Mennonisten Societaet, Preusen. 137 pp.
   b) Church Record. 230 pp.
   c) Church Record. 297 pp.
   d) Marriages, Baptisms, and Deaths (Part II) 1076 pp.

20. Danzig
   a) Baptism Register (1825-1850, 1864-1877, and 1882-1943) 302 pp.
   b) Baptisms, 1841-1847; Births, 1815-1855, 1861-1867; Deaths, 1815-1828, 1837, and 1844-1845; and Marriages, 1851-1853, 1872-1881. 100 pp.
   c) Baptismal Records, 1829, 1830, 1834, 1867-1875. 18 pp.
   d) Miscellaneous Documents (1833-1914) 127 pp.



Danzig Mennonite Church.

30. Montau-Gruppe
   a) Family Records from Treul, Montau, Gross Lubin, Rosenthal, Ellerwald, Graudenz, Neunlueben, Ober-Gruppe, Kommerau, Nieder Gruppe, Bratvin, Kleines Lubin, and so forth (1857-1945)
   b) Schönsee Baptisms (1862-1944) 237 pp.

The Russian Mennonite Bicentennial: Some Pertinent Dates

by Lawrence Klippenstein

The Russian Mennonite bicentennial recalls the first emigration of Mennonites from West Prussia and Poland to New Russia in 1786-1789. A large number of non-Mennonite Germans were involved in the move as well.

Such an event can bring to mind a wide field of reflection—the two-century old past, all the complexities of present-day realities, and the unanswered questions of what may still happen in the years ahead.

The story has its roots, one could say, in the offices of the eighteenth century tsarina of Russia, Catherine II (the Great), her Vice Regent of New Russia, Prince Grigori Alexandrovich Potemkin, and the ambitious "caller of colonists," Georg (von) Trappe. It began as well, of course, in the homes and churches of Polish-Prussian Mennonites in the 1780s, all those families which decided to emigrate to the Dnieper Valley to establish new communities on the Russian steppes.

These notes will recall very briefly some of the "moments" that formed the birthing matrix of the "Russian experience" for the pioneers and their descendants now scattered all over the globe.

3 January 1772

Hans von Steen wrote to his colleague Dr. Johann Cueperus in Utrecht, the Netherlands, that the Mennonites of Northern Poland were under greater duress from Lutherans than Catholics, hence preferred to live in Catholic jurisdictions.[1]

13 September 1772

Fredrick II (the Great, 1740-1786) annexed the western and some other portions of Poland. Mennonites in this sector now came under Prussian rule.[2]

20 June 1774

Mennonites of West Prussia and Lithuania were informed that they would have to pay 5,000 Thalers annually in support of the Kulm military academy in lieu of military service from which they were otherwise exempted.[3]

30 January 1780

The minister Peter Epp was ordained as *Aeltester* (Elder or bishop) of the Danzig city Mennonite congregations. It meant that he needed to move away from the country congregations, which he had served till then, and settle in Danzig proper.[4]

27 March 1780

The *Gnadenprivilegium* of Frederick the Great was now formally handed over to the Mennonites. The terms of it had been shared with the Mennonites soon after the 1772 annexation.[5]

14 July 1785

Catherine the Great had begun to advertise her interests in foreign colonists through special manifestos issued in 1762 and 1763. To what extent these were published in Polish areas and the Free City of Danzig on the Baltic Sea is uncertain. Thousands of German colonists from the German states further west and south did respond and move to Russia. Some settled near St. Petersburg, but most of them moved to the Volga River region further east.[6]

The new manifesto of 14 July 1785, carried an invitation for more settlers, this time to colonize the Caucasus area particularly. It gave Potemkin, the energetic Vice Regent of New Russia, a legal basis for extending the colonization efforts of Catherine to his own region, a good deal of it recently conquered from the Turks.[7]

5-7 June 1786

The manifesto of 1785 then led Potemkin to engage the services of Georg von Trappe, a "procurement agent" who was anxious to hone his skills at procuring settlers for his Russian homeland—and to reap the resultant rewards for himself. He saw special opportunities among the hard-working Mennonites of Danzig, who were known to be under pressure economically, and whose Low German dialect he spoke quite well.

The contract for this arrangement carried the date of 5 June 1786 on the obligations which Potemkin promised to carry, and the date of 7 June on the part signed by von Trappe.[8]

7 August 1786

The von Trappe colonization appeals were read in both Mennonite churches of Danzig. Mayor Pegelau called *Aeltester* Peter Epp and Isaac Stobbe to account for this and asked them not to have anything to do with the Russian representatives supporting this appeal.[9]

17 August 1786

Frederick the Great died.

Frederick the Great.

Catherine the Great.

By this date von Trappe had managed to recruit nearly 250 families in Danzig and environs. Thirty-five of them were Mennonites. He had very quickly secured the enthusiastic support of the leading minister in the Danzig Mennonite congregation, *Aeltester* Peter Epp. The Danzig authorities, on the other hand, opposed him vigorously, doing their utmost to frustrate his emigration designs.[10]

22 September 1786

In September 1786, von Trappe signed an agreement with two young Mennonites, Jakob Hoeppner of Bohnsack and Johann Bartsch of Neugarten.[11] By this they contracted to visit New Russia to investigate more carefully the settlement opportunities which von Trappe was promising the Mennonites.

The agreement made this an all-expenses paid trip and added promises of "generous rewards from the tsarina" if the investigation would lead to the emigration of 200 families during 1787.

31 October 1786

Hoeppner and Bartsch began their survey trip on 31 October 1786.[12] They were the only Mennonites in a group of 141 which left Danzig to settle in New Russia at that time. This group is usually referred to as the "Danzig colonists." By the end of 1786 their number had risen to nearly 1,000.[13] Bartsch and Hoeppner would be away for about a year.

11 November 1786

Johann Bartsch, one of the two deputies investigating South Russia, sent a letter home to his wife.[14] It also informed the churches about the progress of their land scouting journey.

29 November 1786

Hoeppner and Bartsch arrived at Dubrovna in Belorossia (White Russia). Two days later, Bartsch wrote another letter to his wife.[15]

22 April 1787

The two deputies spent the winter and early spring of 1787 in a careful inspection of the region along the lower Dnieper River, even going as far as the Crimea and the Molotschna River to the east. On 22 April 1787, they submitted a 20-point list of conditions of settlement to Vice-Regent Potemkin at his capital in Kremenchug.[16] Potemkin was very busy preparing for a state visit from the Tsarina (whose favorite he was) and so could not tend to the offer till several months later that year.

24 April 1787

Frederick William II of Prussia (1786-1797) confirmed the *Gnadenprivilegium* of his father, Frederick the Great, but added that Prussian Menno-

nites would not be able to purchase more lands because they were exempt from military service.

13 May 1787

Potemkin introduced the deputies, Bartsch and Hoeppner, to Catherine II at Kremenchug. Both men were obligated to remain with the royal entourage, headed for Crimea, till it was completed.[17]

5 July 1787

Vice-Regent G. A. Potemkin confirmed the immigration arrangements set forth by the delegates in April.[18]

Summer, 1787

The first Mennonite families from West Prussia moved to New Russia. The fathers were Hans Hamm, Kornelius Willems, Peter Regier, Jacob Harder, Diedrich Isaak, and Franz Barkmann. Abraham Krahn, a certain Behren Janzen family, and Abraham Epp were also among those who moved already in 1787.[19]

7 September 1787

Catherine II approved these arrangements through a special edict which was signed and publicized by Count Alexander Bezborodko.[20]

29 December 1787

Georg von Trappe publicized the printed invitation of the tsarina among the Mennonites in Danzig.

1 and 13 January 1788

Georg von Trappe handed out the invitation of the tsarina to members attending the Neugarten Mennonite Church in Danzig.[21]

19 January 1788

Von Trappe distributed additional copies of the invitation to Mennonites of Danzig and arranged a gathering of hopeful, would-be emigrants in the premises of the Russian embassy in Danzig. Members of the embassy also signed a special contract made personally with the delegates.[22]

23 February 1788

Four Danzig Mennonite families left for New Russia: Gerhard Rempels, Heinrich Claassens, Hans Sawatskys, and Peter Reimers (some sources list Neufelds instead of Rempels).[23]

10 March 1788

Hoeppner and Bartsch joined a group of seven Mennonite families enroute to New Russia.[24]

24 June 1788

The group led by Hoeppner arrived at Dubrovna.

28 July 1788

A farewell service, including several hundred persons, was held at the Mennonite church in Rosenort, West Prussia, for the 152 families who were moving to New Russia at this time.[25]

20 June 1789

Johann Cornies, later to become a leader in New Russia, was born as the oldest son in the family. His parents, residing in Burwalde, would emigrate from Prussia in 1804.[26]

20-22 July 1789

The first Mennonite families reached Chortitza. There was much unhappiness because it was not the place originally promised by Hoeppner and Bartsch. Potemkin had forced them to change locations.[27]

30 July 1789

Frederick William II issued a new edict to cover arrangements with the Mennonites. While asserting its support for the pledges made by Frederick the Great, it nevertheless added further restrictions regarding land-owning by Mennonite families.

11 February 1790

Hoeppner and Bartsch provided a detailed report on the settlement so far. It was sent to the Mennonites in the Danzig area.[28]

Spring, 1790

Mennonites began to establish the first permanent villages of the Chortitza colony.

29 July 1791

Aeltester Bernhard Penner, chosen to lead the new congregation in 1790, passed away after a serious illness. Johann Wiebe was chosen now to replace the Aeltester Penner, but for a long time he refused to accept Aeltester duties.[29] Vice-Regent Potemkin also died this year.

4 April, 1793

The second partition of Poland took place this year. It meant that Danzig also came under Prussian rule.[30] Another wave of Mennonite immigration followed, lasting till about 1796.[31]

18 April 1794

Two Prussian Mennonite ministers, Aeltester Cornelius Regier and Aeltester Cornelius Warkentin, arrived in New Russia to help with organizing church life in the young colony.[32]

6 November 1796

Paul I became the new tsar of Russia after the death of Catherine the Great some weeks earlier. He confirmed all

Potemkin.

the rights she granted to the Mennonites of New Russia and, in some cases, even extended them to encourage further settlement in his country.[33]

This is a small part of the story of these beginnings. A full account of these experiences is still to be written. Existing materials need to be researched carefully and other sources located to fill in details.

The next wave of Mennonite settlers came in 1803-1804. The Chortitza colony, though still struggling in many ways, was by now reasonably well established and the newcomers could benefit enormously from their hosts in the new villages here. The Russian government had also learned a lot about helping foreign colonies to get underway. The new settlement, east of the Molotschna river would therefore develop more quickly in some ways, and avoid some of the difficulties which the pioneers had to face before them.

The two settlements formed the "mother colonies" of a growing Mennonite community that would grow eventually to about 120,000 persons right after World War I. Then came the Revolution, civil war, and the Second World War. With the policies of the Soviet Union regarding its German population came the breakdown of these two communities, so that after World War II, they had disappeared as Mennonite colonies in the Soviet Union. It is hard to say if Mennonites will ever again populate this area in any numbers. Many remember the time, however —thus recalled, they may be sustained for many decades to come.

ENDNOTES

[1]The relationship of Mennonites to Lutherans in the Prusso/Polish areas of the northern Vistula are traced from the sixteenth century in Hermann Nottarp, *Die Mennoniten in den Marienburger Werdern. Eine kirchenrechtliche Untersuchung.* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1929). This reference to Hans von Steen is found in J. J. Hildebrand, *Chronologische Zeittafel.* (Winnipeg, Man.: Selbstverlag, 1945), p. 134.

[2]This was part of the first of three partitions of Poland by Prussia, Austria and Russia in the later part of the eighteenth century. Cf. Hajo Halborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1648-1840.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 253-254, and Melvin C. Wren, *The Course of Russian History.* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Ltd., 1979), pp. 223-225. The Prussian take-over and government of areas in which Mennonites of Prusso-Poland lived is discussed in (H.) G. Mannhardt, "Die Mennoniten unter den preussischen Koenigen", *Mennonitische Volkswarte,* I (December 1935), pp. 431-443.

[3]On East Prussian and Lithuanian Mennonites cf. Erich Randt, *Die Mennoniten in Ostpreussen und Litauen bis zum Jahre 1772.* (Koenigsberg, 1912), and also Horst Penner, "East Prussia," *Mennonite Encyclopedia.* (Scottdale, PA, Hillsboro, KS, and Newton, KS, 1956), Vol. II, pp. 124-125.

[4]Cf. The history of the Danzig Mennonites and Peter Epp's ministry in H. G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde. Ihre Entstehung und ihre Geschichte von 1569-1919.* (Danzig: der Danziger Mennonitengemeinde, 1919).

[5]Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der altpreussischen Mennoniten.* (Marienburg: Im Selbstverlag der alt-preussischen Mennonitengemeinden, 1863), pp. 131-132 has the full text of the *Gnadenprivilegium.*

[6]Hattie Plum Williams, *The Czar's Germans with Particular Reference to the Volga Germans.* (Lincoln, Neb.: The American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1975), pp. 29-96. Cf. also R. P. Bartlett, *Human Capital. The Settlement of Foreigners in Russia, 1762-1804.* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 35 ff.

[7]Bartlett, *op. cit.*, p. 121. Potemkin's work is discussed in Marc Raeff, "The Style of Russia's Imperial Policy and Prince G. A. Potemkin," in G. N. Grob, ed., *Statesmen and Statecraft of the Modern West.* (Barre, Mass.: Barre Publishers, 1967), pp. 1-51, and James Duran, "Catherine II, Potemkin and Colonization Policy in southern Russia," *Russian Review,* 18 (January 1969), pp. 23-36.

[8]David G. Rempel, "From Danzig to Russia. The First Mennonite Migration," *Mennonite Life,* 24 (January 1969), pp. 9-10 (henceforth cited as "From Danzig to Russia"). Cf. also Rempel's article, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47 (October 1973), pp. 289-290 (henceforth cited as "The Mennonite Commonwealth").

[9]D. H. Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten. Versuch einer Darstellung des Entwickelungsganges desselben.* (Rosenthal bei Chortitza, 1888), p. 2. The other German families are found in lists of German Catholic and Evangelical groups mentioned by Karl Stumpp, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763 to 1862.* (Lincoln, Neb.: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1979), pp. 62 ff. and 92 ff. (as in 1982 reprint).

[10]A sample of the invitations von Trappe used is published in David G. Rempel, "From Danzig to Russia," p. 90.

[11]*Ibid.*, p. 11.

[12]This date is according to the Gregorian calendar. By the old Julian calendar then still used in Russia this would have been October 19; a twelve-day difference existed at that time.

[13]The Alt-Danzig settlers are mentioned in Stumpp, *op. cit.*, pp. 92 ff. with map attached.

[14]*Op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

[15]Cf. Microfilm #69 at the Mennonite Heritage Centre for copies of the Bartsch correspondence dating from this period.

[16]*Ibid.*, pp. 16-23 has a German edition of the petition. A detailed analysis of this document is in Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 283 ff.

[17]This tour, begun on 18 February of the year, was meant to be a kind of imperial triumphal entry into an area (the Crimea) formally ceded to Russia by Turkey in 1784. The facades of the "Potemkin villages" built to impress the tsarina with the welcome of her subjects, were prepared for this occasion. The group reached Crimea around 15 May and was back in Moscow on 22 July. For a brief description of this tour cf. Gladys Scott Thomson, *Catherine the Great and the Expansion of Russia.* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 143-147.

[18]Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 286.

[19]Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederlaendische niederdeutschen Hintergruende der mennonitischen Ostwanderung im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert.* (Karlsruhe: Im Selbstverlag, 1955), p. 204 and Jacob Quiring, *Die Meindort von Chortitza in Suedrussland.* (Muenchen: Druckerei Studentenhaus Muenchen Universitaet, 1928), p. 9.

[20]Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten,* p. 28.

[21]*Ibid.*, p. 33; Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 288-289. Cf. also P. Hildebrand, *Erste Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus dem Danziger Gebiet nach Suedrussland.* (Halbstadt: Typographie von P. Neufeld, 1888), pp. 35 ff.

[22]The terms of the contract are set out in detail in Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 289.

[23]Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennoniten,* p. 129; J. Quiring, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[24]Hildebrand, *op. cit.*, pp. 46 ff.; Unruh, *op. cit.*, p. 205; Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 292. The date would be 22 March 1788 by the new calendar. Hildebrand wrote that the departure day was Easter Day, *op. cit.*, pp. 46 ff. That would have dated it March 11/23, 1788.

[25]Quiring, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[26]D. H. Epp, *Johann Cornies. Zuege aus seinem Leben und Wirken.* (Rosthern, Sask.: Echo Verlag, 1946), p. 5.

[27]Hoeppner wrote of the change in locations as occuring "at the request and the concerned considerations" of Vice-Regent Potemkin. "Ein Brief aus Chortitza vom Jahre 1789," *Mennonitische Warte* IV (January 1938), p. 21. Cf. also *Kurze Aelteste Geschichte der Taufgesinnten (Mennoniten genannt).* (Odessa: Franzow und Nitzsche, 1852), p. 12. On the early settlement experience in Chortitza cf. N. Kroeker, *First Mennonite Villages in Russia, 1789-1943.* (Vancouver, B.C.: The Author, 1981), pp. 14 ff.

[28]Gerhard Wiebe, "Verzeichnis der gehlatenen Predigten samt andern vorgefallenen Merk wuerdig Keiten Gottes in Elbing und Ellerwald von Anno 1778 den ersten Januar," unpublished manuscript, photoduplicate in Mennonite Heritage Centre, pp. 197-199.

[29]The hesitancy of Johann Wiebe, and the steps taken to persuade him to accept appointment, are recorded in the Gerhard Wiebe diary.

[30]Halborn, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.

[31]M. Waltner, *Die Gemeindeberichte der deutschen Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer.* (Leipzig: Verlag Hirzel, 1941), p. 13. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 298. This author said that a total of 118 families, totalling 623 persons migrated in the period 1793-96.

[32]Cf. Johann van der Smissen, "Zur Geschichte der ersten Gemeinde Bildung in des Mennoniten-Kolonien Russlands," from a reprint in *Zur Heimat,* 21 September 1880, p. 139 and 7 October 1880, p. 147.

[33]Hildebrand, *op. cit.*, pp. 82 ff., Epp *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten,* pp. 58-62. The active colonist recruiting policy of Catharine II was, however, discontinued under Paul, then resumed under his successor, Alexander I, after 1801.

Forbidden Fancies: A Child's Vision of Mennonite Plainness

by Laura H. Weaver

*Adapted from an article in *Journal of Ethnic Studies*

The label "plain" or "plain people," traditionally applied to Mennonites, was the most formative feature of my upbringing as a child in the Old Order (Wenger) and Lancaster Conference groups in Pennsylvania during the 1930s and 1940s. I was taught the doctrine of nonconformity to the world—a doctrine that meant the cultivation of religious and cultural separation from the rest of society. From my earliest memories I had a strong sense of "us" versus "them": I knew that we were "plain" and that others were "fancy," "worldly," "gay," and "modern." To us as insiders, plainness constituted normality; fanciness in the dominant culture constituted abnormality.

Mennonites' practice of plainness, as I perceive it, has had complex effects. First, because the desire to achieve plainness led not just to simple ordinary clothing but to a distinctive pattern of dress and hair style (radically different from that worn by members of the dominant culture), we conservative Mennonites felt like and were treated as a minority group. Although most of us were white, we were so physically different from ordinary Americans in clothing and hair style that we were immediately recognized and labeled. Further, because of our non-exposure to media such as radio, television, and movies (all three prohibited), we were culturally different from the mainstream. Because of these two differences (the chief one being appearance), we constituted a minority group.

A second consequence of the plainness doctrine was that tension developed between plainness as a positive quality (as intended by the founders of Mennonitism) and a negative quality (for example, in American society). Although separate from the dominant culture, we could not help being conscious of or even absorbing the negative connotations of plainness as asceticism and even ugliness.

For adult Mennonites the plainness doctrine had a positive theological and ethnic foundation, despite its leading to a minority position and to tension between conflicting connotations. However, to some children growing up in Mennonite families, plainness meant, chiefly, denial of certain things—both physical and non-physical. The areas most affected were clothing, hair style, language, conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing, entertainment, church services, transportation, and machinery of various kinds. The things denied to us were, we discovered, normal in the outside world; and that world impinged upon us—via dolls, books, non-Mennonite relatives, and public schools. Whether from these exposures or from innate desires, some of us children began to wish for the prohibited things and for a life in a less censorious group. This need we tried to satisfy by creating imaginary characters and objects, by trying out substitutes in the privacy of our rooms, and by fantasizing about escape.

Despite our experiencing those negative qualities of plainness, as children we also sensed some positive ones—particularly the group identity it produced. And now as adults—whether ex-plain Mennonites or fringe Mennonites[1]—we respond ambivalently to plainness. We reflect upon the relationship between essences and material objects. Granted the positive values of plainness, can its essence be preserved without external manifestations? Does plainness need the earlier prohibitions (clothing, machines) to survive? Or does one choose (in each generation) new areas for the practice of plainness? Perhaps, as ex-plain or fringe Mennonites, we set the limits at different places. Instead of having the areas dictated to us, perhaps we now choose ways in which to practice plainness. For example, while we now use makeup, we might not approve of face-lifts. Although some elements of the child's negative vision (plainness defined as certain taboos) persist, the prism through which a Mennonite perceives the world leads to other forms of plainness.

Growing up in a "plain" family, I became aware first (as a preschooler and as a grade school student) of the prohibitions concerning clothing, hair styles, and language. To me, plainness meant no ribbons, no collars, no short sleeves, no white shoes, no socks, no slacks, and no jewelry. (For boys and young men it meant no ties or mustaches.) But most importantly, plainness meant no cut hair and no curls, whether artificial—created by curlers or permanents—or natural (as mine were). Mother told me that when I was a child, I had natural curls; all she had to do was to wrap strands of my hair around her fingers, and the hair stayed in curls. (I myself do not remember my curls; and because the Wenger Church forbade the taking of pictures, I have no photograph showing them.) Instead of allowing my hair to hang in curls (as my mother later admitted she wanted to), she parted it in the middle (it dared not be parted on the side), drew it back in twists on the top of my head, and formed braids that hung from the nape of my neck.

Matching my plain hair was my plain dress—with gathers between the yoke and the sewn-in belt, snaps for the back opening, long sleeves and a long

skirt—black shoes, and black stockings. (A picture taken by a guest when I was five or six years old captures that image of plainness in hair and clothing. See photo.) That uniform, I recall, sometimes subjected me to ridicule in grade school; once, as I was sitting down, a non-Mennonite girl rubbed her hands over my black stockings and laughed sneeringly.

As a result of our plain dress, we were—in public schools, bus stations, and stores—immediately identified as minority people. Our plainness invited special attention. For example, during my first grade at a public one-room school near New Holland, Pennsylvania, a passer-by stopped and took pictures of us plain children. (I don't remember the person who did it; I remember only the act. I often wondered how the picture came out—how I looked in it.) Years later, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a stranger stopped Mother and me on the street and asked if he could take our pictures. We agreed. I don't remember what that person looked like, either; I just remember being singled out.

We Mennonite children were plain not only in appearance but also in language. Here "plain" meant the German language, retained by Mennonites in their homes and church services. Although, obviously, the German language itself is not "plain," it provided Mennonites with an instrument to perpetuate separation from the rest of society. The use of German distinguished us from "English" or "worldly" people and during Word War II, of course, made us suspect. When I was in seventh grade, and by this time, members of the Lancaster Conference, we moved to another community, still in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, but in an area where no Wenger Mennonites lived. On the moving day as children in the new neighborhood gathered around our house to watch us unload our belongings, they heard German being spoken. The next day at school—our first day there—the children reported of us, "They're Germans!"

Just as plainness dictated our hair style, clothing, and language, it also determined the maintenance of a household. Electricity, indoor plumbing, and central heating systems were "fancy," not necessary. Therefore, we plain children did homework by kerosene lights and used outdoor toilets. We went outside to pump water, carried it into the house for bathing and cooking, and carried it out after it had been used; emptied chamber pots and cleaned them; brought in wood and coal and carried out ashes.

In two other important areas of life—entertainment and church services—plainness influenced us. While some of our activities (for example, sledding and playing with dolls) did not differ from those of other children, certain kinds of entertainment were denied us: plain people did not go to movies, circuses, and amusement parks. And at church we had no musical intruments and no flowers. In the Wenger Church, plainness also meant no pulpit. Even in our travel to church we were "plain": we went by horse and buggy; instead of sitting behind a dashboard, we sat behind a horse.

Many of our prohibitions, I observed very early, focused on the machine. This category included, of course, automobiles (called "machines") and other objects possessed by "fancy" outsiders or by "worldly" Mennonites whose "drifting away" had begun with the purchase of a car. Among the prohibited objects were machines not only for transportation but also for communication and entertainment (telephones, radios, movies) and for household use (refrigerators, toasters, electric mixers).

As a Mennonite child, I outwardly accepted plainness. But I found ways to fulfill inner desires for prohibited items. Not allowed to have my hair cut, I sometimes (at home in my room) opened my braids, rolled up my long hair, and fastened it—at the nape of my neck—with a bobby pin. As a result, the hair looked as though it came only to the neck. Also, I pushed the hair out and up on the top of my head and fastened it with another bobby pin—all of this to get rid of the flatness produced by pulling the hair back in tight twists and braids.

Another proscription—this time in clothing—led me to notice and admire worldly clothes: my doll's dress (blue and white polka-dotted, with a white lace collar and cuffs); the red and white polka-dotted dress and white shoes worn by my teacher Miss Heisey during the first day of school; the mustaches worn by Dr. Foutz (our medical doctor) and Mr. Townsend (a grocery truck driver). Responding to my observations, I created an imaginary Laura who, like my doll and the other girls I saw in school and in stores, wore a short-sleeved white blouse with a lace collar, blue skirt, white socks and shoes, and had curls. And on a few occasions I was able to do more than imagine. When I visited Aunt Laura, I dropped my "plain" identity. Because she had married a non-Mennonite (a Lutheran), her children wore worldly clothing, which I borrowed for weekends there. I wore my cousin Blanche's pink dress trimmed with white ribbons and her white shoes and socks.

Laura H. Weaver (born 1931).

Those "fancy" creations (imaginary and literal), stemming from my wish to look like other people in the mainstream, foreshadowed my later recognition that the combination of my high forehead and the hair pulled back from it gave me a severe look and that my face needed soft curls around it. Not everyone, I discovered, looks good with hair drawn back in braids or in a bun. (The braids of my childhood were replaced by a bun, covered by a prayer head

Laura H. Weaver, early high school (first type of cap worn).

covering when, at the age of twelve, I became a church member [Lancaster Conference]. See photo.) My experience with hair, shared by some other Mennonite girls and women, illustrates the tension between positive and negative connotations of plainness. Mennonite girls and women sometimes associate the negative connotations of plainness (as physical unattractiveness, lack of sexual desirability) with their own religiously-induced plainness. For them there are no options in hair styles but, instead, a denial of flexibility for differing facial features and skull shapes. I recall hearing an outsider (a man) observe to a Mennonite couple, "Mennonite men seem to like their women to have long hair." But the Mennonite woman replied, "It's in the Bible." Her wearing long hair in a bun was not necessarily her or her husband's preference but obedience to a command. My adult distress at that lack of versatility was clearly anticipated by my having created a Laura who looked as I wished her to.

Unlike plain clothing and hairstyle, other forms of plainness (such as lack of electricity) did not lead to my vicariously cultivating their opposites. However, the denial of machines, which, perhaps more than any other prohibition withheld knowledge of the outside world, did stimulate me to adopt compensatory devices. When my sister Dorcas and I heard our schoolmates speak of radio programs (this was before television), we created imaginary programs and characters and talked about them to each other at home. And when Aunt Sarah, a "plain" Mennonite who did housework for "worldly" people in Philadelphia, returned with gifts from employers, we were delighted by the train—a connection to the outside world. Meeting her at the station, we wished to see what was at the other end of the train; and occasionally we were allowed to go on train trips to see our cousins in neighboring York County. Because the machine exposed me to wider horizons —beyond the plain one—I saw it as a liberator, not an oppressor. Although I did not realize it at the time, I saw the machine not as invading the garden but as providing an escape from an uncongenial garden.

I noticed something else rather early, but realized its implications only later: the restriction against those physical things—fancy clothes and machines—was a tenet affirmed by people possessing other negative but less tangible qualities: rigidity, petty concern with rules, and exclusiveness. Uniformity in dress and hair style created a monotonous appearance perpetuated by people obsessed with the size of the front piece on women's head coverings and with the length of skirts. In addition, the desire to maintain strict conformity led to preoccupation with a closed society: the arena of brotherhood and sisterhood became smaller and smaller. For example, when some members deviated on a specific issue, either they voluntarily split from the larger Mennonite group or they were excommunicated and then formed their own group. (One subgroup was so small it was called "The Thirty-fivers.")

Consequently, Mennonites objected not only to their children's joining a "worldly" church or marrying outsiders with names like McDonald or Woodward but even to their joining or marrying into a more liberal, "worldly" Mennonite group. When my father eventually joined Lancaster Conference, one of his brothers wrote a letter expressing pain at my father's having left the Wenger Church and, even earlier, the Pike Mennonite Church (a splinter Old Order group), into which he had been baptized. In some families such an act led to the rebel's being disinherited. To a child, this concern with traditional versus liberal was integrally linked with physical objects: "liberal" meant not so much a theological position as the freedom to have fancy clothes and more machines. My impression was confirmed by my father's actions after he became a member of the Lancaster Conference: he bought a record player and a radio.

Exclusiveness and in-fighting persisted despite some Mennonites' awareness of its irony. As a child, I remember that Mennonite adults, although always theologically committed to pacifism, sometimes admitted, "Mennonites don't believe in fighting, except among themselves." Distressed by those negative features, I sometimes wanted to escape to an existence not determined by what "the church people" or "the relatives" thought. I wanted to leave a group that coerced members into submission and required public confession for lapses.

While my plain childhood had limitations, it also had compensations, some of which I was aware at that time. One advantage was our sure feeling of identity: our distinctive dress enabled us to recognize each other immediately—even strangers in train stations or on buses. When we saw a plainly-dressed stranger on the street, we exclaimed, "There's a Mennonite." And, secure in our shared behavior, we could usually approach those strangers without fear. We knew who we were; we knew what "our people" did and did not do. Another compensation was that the conscientiousness taught by our plain way of life yielded success at school. Although as a Mennonite student in a public grade and high school I did not attend movies and dances, I did head the honor roll and edit the school paper. (Other Mennonite students, equally trained to discipline themselves, achieved similar academic and extracurricular success.)

The quality of our relationships with other people was, likewise, affected positively by our plainness. For example, plainness meant equality: instead of the title "reverend" we used the terms "brother" and "sister" for ordained ministers and lay-persons. And

plainness encouraged not attempts to impress people with our language but, instead, straightforwardness. Discouraging artifice, plainness helped us to develop integrity in our dealings with each other and with outsiders.

Our sharing of the positive dimensions of plainness was celebrated in numerous church and social activities. Of those activities, the most memorable for me was hymn singing. Opposed to musical accompaniment, conservative Mennonites have always stressed a capella congregational singing. I recall in the Wenger group, the singing of German hymns such as "Gott ist die Liebe" at church services and in homes, especially on Sunday afternoons; and in Lancaster Conference, the singing of English hymns in Sunday evening song services. Mennonites' unusually effective a capella singing, often immediately attractive to outsiders, remains in the memory of ex-plain or fringe Mennonites long after their credal attachment to plainness has disappeared.

Now as an adult who no longer dresses "plain," how do I perceive plainness? While I, as other ex-plain or fringe Mennonites, no longer stand out in a group because of my physical appearance (people no longer point to me and say, "There's a Mennonite"), I retain a closeness to friends who grew up as I did and have remained the same or have changed in similar ways. I can also establish immediate rapport with strangers who had a "plain" Mennonite background: my meeting a Heatwole from Virginia or a Stoltzfus from Pennsylvania in a plane or at an academic convention, juxtaposes the joyless and the joyous connotations of plainness. Even if the other person no longer dresses "plain," a feeling of kinship exists between us—a kinship based on having at one time looked different from other people in the mainstream. And plainness still influences our encounter. While we have now chosen to wear "fancy" clothes, to use machines and to live professional lives similar to those of other Americans, we retain plain speech and genuineness; not gamesmanship but sisterly and brotherly regard characterizes our conversation.

Plainness may also influence other areas of our lives. We may continue to affirm the right to be different; we practice "the right not to be modern" (the sub-title of Albert N. Keim's book on the Amish and compulsory education),[2] but we give "modern" our individual interpretations. And while we assume that right, we wonder, as we observe today's Mennonite young people who have never looked different from people in the dominant culture, whether this ideal of plainness will persist without the prohibitions.

For me personally, the tension between two definitions of plainness is now less intense. But while no longer forced to practice a plainness allowing no versatility in hair style and clothing, I may still feel inelegant. Is that an undesirable remnant of my past? Or perhaps in my giving less attention to achieving elegance and more attention to teaching and research, I have voluntarily internalized what I have been taught. Not only intellectual curiosity but also the discipline inculcated by my plain tradition motivates me. Teaching and research are, after all, my work; and "plain people," as non-Mennonite employers of Mennonites usually say, are "hard workers." This aspect of plainness I do not find objectionable.

Thus, while my childhood negative vision of plainness may still determine my actions as an adult (for example, in choices of once-forbidden fancies in clothing and entertainment), my experiences as an adult in the dominant culture have not obliterated the distinctive doctrine behind the prohibitions. My vision will always be affected by my having been one of the "plain people." For me, as for Saul Friedlander, who was speaking of his Jewish identity, ". . . the essential appear[s] . . . through a particular prism that . . . [can] never be eliminated."[3] The prism of plainness forever determines the way I view the world, and, as an adult, I affirm the joyous features of that prism.

NOTES

[1]I am writing, of course, from the perspective not of non-plain Mennonites (those who never dressed plain) but of Mennonites (whether now members of the church or not) who once dressed plain.

[2]Albert N. Keim, ed., *Compulsory Education and the Amish: The Right Not to be Modern* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

[3]Saul Friedlander, *When Memory Comes*, trans. Helen R. Lane (1978; rpt. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979), p. 145.

Laura H. Weaver, after high school (no strings, a little more "liberal").

Radical Reformation and Mennonite Bibliography, 1987

by Marilyn Loganbill

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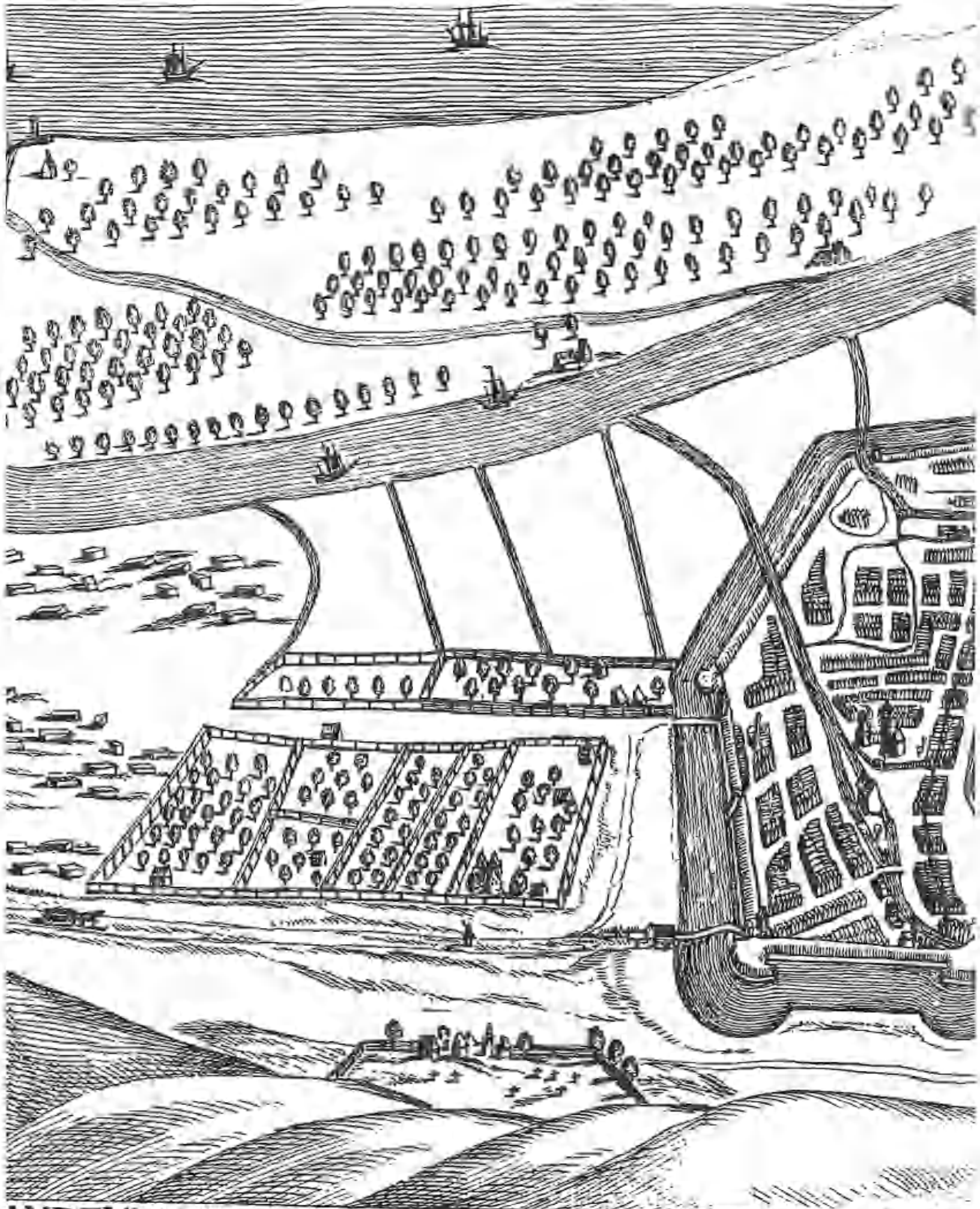

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