



The Heritage

www.goesselmuseum.com

Spring 2024

Celebrating the Mennonite Immigration:

Life in Molotschna Colony

By Museum Director, Fern Bartel

As the year of our 150th celebration of our ancestors' migration from South Russia proceeds, I would like to touch on what it was like for one young girl Elizabeth Unruh (1866-1943). I wish to be very clear right from the start that Elizabeth Unruh did not migrate with our Alexanderwohl ancestors, but her eyes witnessed what the Molotschna Colony was like during that time and how emotional it was for those who left loved ones behind, never to see them again. Her autobiography is a wonderful insight to life in Russia from a very young age. Her education was limited but, my, what a wonderful memory she had and a wonderful way of telling many stories! These excerpts are from Elizabeth Unruh's autobiography, What a Heritage, that I found in a binder in the museum.



"I was born on October 7, 1866, in a village in Russia called Heinrichsdorf, near the Polish border. [Volhynia area] My parents were Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Unruh." [Their first-born child]

"Our village was a large one, with several hundred inhabitants, with a large church and school, several stores, a tailor and a shoe repair shop. A large grist mill and towards the outskirts of the village there was a hotel."

The early 1870s were the time of changing Russian rules. Migration was in the air. Elder Tobias A. Unruh (1819-1875)—one of the 12 spies chosen to visit different areas of America—was an uncle to Elizabeth's father. But during this time, instead of America, her father decided to move the whole family to the Molotschna Colony. He lived there for several years in his youth and had some relatives living there.

Molotschna Colony, continued on page 3

Upcoming Events:

Museum Hours

March - April,

Tues. - Sat.: 12 pm - 4 pm

May - September:

Tues. - Sat.: 10 am - 5 pm

Closed Sundays & Mondays

Fourth Monday Genealogy Group

7:00 pm Goessel City
Community Room

March 25

"Goessel Area Rural Graves"

Brian Stucky

April 22

"The Great Trek to
Central Asia"

Marjorie Shoemaker

May 20

"Find-A-Grave"

Juanita Stone

June 24

Meet at the Prep School
Museum 50th Anniversary

Fern Bartel

Free tour of museum

150th Commemorative Events

See p. 3 for schedule.

Low German Saying

Daut jinx doch aus et goanich jinck, Dann woat doat nu uck aul noch gone.

We made it when things were impossible, so we will be able to make it now.

Mennonite Heritage and Agricultural Museum Board Members:

John Janzen, President; Pat Penner, Vice-President; Sandy Duerksen, Secretary; Aileen Esau, Treasurer; * Fern Bartel, Museum Director; * Roger Bartel, Myron Goertzen, Kris Schmucker, Lloyd Voth, Nelson Voth, Connie Wiens, James Wiens. *non-voting members

Ditt unt Daut (this and that)

by Fern Bartel, Museum Director

Wow, 150 years since our Mennonite ancestors took the big leap and once again migrated to a new country. They had to think of leaving a beautiful home where they felt comfortable and, in some situations, wave goodbye to family members they would never see again. These issues must have been so hard to think about, but the times required change.

As we look back on this big move, I wish to encourage all of you to consider becoming a member of the Mennonite Heritage and Agricultural Museum. You can help keep stories alive for the next generations; we all need to know how we fit into the big picture.

Recordings of earlier 150th presentations can be found at these links:

Rod Ratzlaff spoke at the museum's annual meeting on January 28:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6g5VVv5xGmA&t=4s>

and Dr. Mark Jantzen spoke at the Heritage Talk on February 18:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTpDzX0ITAk>

Heritage Dinner: Packing for the Journey

Join museum supporters for the Heritage Dinner, April 5, 6:30 pm, at Tabor Mennonite Church, after which Mayleen Thiesen Vinson will share an entertaining and insightful portrayal of Frü Schmidt's



Frü Schmidt packs a trunk.

dilemma—what to pack for her family? Each adult ticket-holder was allowed to pack 27 cubic feet of baggage and freight. Consider that the Schmidts have ten children! Would you have packed a waffle iron, an anvil, or corncobs? Come find out!

Contact the museum by April 1 (620.367.8200 or email goesselmuseum@gmail.com) to reserve your tickets for the Low German sausage meal catered by Goessel Grocery & Deli. Prices are \$75 per person, ages 12 and under are \$15, and first-time attenders are \$40.

Talking Tombstones

On Sunday, May 26, a few of the 1874 immigrants will be highlighted by telling their stories at the gravesites in the Alexanderwohl, Tabor, Goessel, and Blumenfeld cemeteries. In case of inclement weather, the stories will be told in Alexanderwohl Church.

Flying the Flags

Last Memorial Day, flags of recognition and honor were put on the graves of those who came during the Alexanderwohl Church's emigration from South Russia in 1874. It was amazing to see and hear over 400 flags in the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church cemetery, about 80 in the Tabor Mennonite Church cemetery, and about 60 in the Goessel Mennonite Church cemetery. This Memorial Day, the flags will be flying in those cemeteries and in the Blumenfeld (Schmidt-Wedel-Boese), Greenfield, and N. Blumenfeld cemeteries. Finally, in September, the flags will again be placed in the Alexanderwohl cemetery when an event will be held to visit the immigrant house site.



The museum invites people to “claim” their ancestor(s) by placing a ribbon on the flag wire. The ribbons, Tyvek wrist bands provided by the museum, can be left blank (using it as a prayer flag) or written on—perhaps a note of tribute or thanksgiving. The museum suggests this be a family activity including young children to help them learn their ancestral stories. If you have immigrant foreparents who are buried in other locations in the Goessel area and would like to honor them with a flag, please let the museum know how many you need, where you will place them, and the names of the immigrants. Flags can be picked up at the museum.

The people who immigrated have made a profound impact on our community. Let us recognize and honor them. If you would like to place the flags on graves in the future, you may take them after the September display.

Molotschna Colony, continued from page 1

"The news came that many were going to move to America that summer, Uncle Tobias Unruh with his whole family too. But many [moved] to Molotschna."

"Those leaving for America, left a few weeks before those leaving for the Molotschna. All of a sudden there were some wagons and people there from Poland, to take those along from here who were also going by wagon. The weeping and talking one does not forget. Mother's youngest sister, only 16, found it very hard to say good-bye to mother."

At the age of nine, Elizabeth's family made their way to the Molotschna and settled in the village of Gnadenheim, the next village east of the Alexanderwohl village.

"We attended church in Alexanderwohler Church in a nearby village. In the winter we sometimes had services in private homes. Here in Gnadenheim, I went to school for one year, mostly to learn to write and to learn to read the writing. Now I was nearly thirteen years old, I had one year of school in my eighth year when we still lived in Heinrichsdorf."

[Now writing about the Molotschna] *"It was a beautiful country around the Molotschna Colony area, every kind of fruit and so many mulberry trees grew here, although everything had to be planted. For it was a bare area, not even a willow grew there, they too had to be planted."*

"By now there were rows of fruit trees and other trees growing from village to village. Even planted bushes and small forests behind the villages. The Mennonite Settlements were always thought of as model achievements."

"We had lived here in Gnadenheim for five years when all of a sudden a great 'migration fever' took hold of many, this time to Asia."

At 14, Elizabeth was on the Great Trek to Asia and kept a diary on the trek. She came to America in 1884, and married Abraham H. Schultz in 1886. They had ten children and ended up in Waldheim, Saskatchewan, Canada.



Upcoming Commemorative Events:

Heritage Dinner

"Packing for the Journey"

Mayleen Thiesen Vinson

April 5, 6:30 pm

Tabor Mennonite Church

Kansas Mennonite Men's Chorus Concerts

April 7, 4:00 pm

Bethel College

April 21, 4:00 pm

Tabor College

Heritage Talk

Talking Tombstones

May 26, 3:00 pm

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

Heritage Display

Immigrant flags placed at area cemeteries

May 24-31

Heritage Talk

"A Mennonite Story Timeline"

Arlin Buller

June 9, 7:00 pm

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

Heritage Talk

"Side by Side Stories: Kaw Nation and Alexanderwohl"

Pauline Sharp and Annette Voth

July 14, 7:00 pm

Tabor Mennonite Church



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March, April, October,
& November:
Tues. - Sat.: 12 pm - 4 pm
Closed Sundays & Mondays

Open by appointment
December through February

May - September:
Tues. - Sat.: 10 am - 5 pm

The Heritage

Written & edited by:
Fern Bartel, Director
Aileen Esau, Treasurer
Museum Board Members
Anne Harvey

Become a Museum Member!

It's easy to become a member. Choose a membership level below, fill out the form, and return it with your check payable to MHAM to: Mennonite Heritage & Agricultural Museum, P.O. Box 231, Goessel, KS 67053.

Individual \$20 Couple \$40 Family \$50 (Includes children and grandchildren age 18 and younger)

Annual memberships run from Jan. 1 - Dec. 31.

Benefits of annual membership

- Unlimited free visits to the museum
- 10% discount on museum store purchases
- One guest pass (two guest passes for couple and family memberships. Not valid for Country Threshing Days)

Life memberships \$500 / person

- Membership fee is added to museum endowment fund
- Unlimited free visits to museum
- 15% discount on museum store purchases
- Five guest passes per year (Not valid for Country Threshing Days)
- No annual membership renewal

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I would like a life membership ____ \$500 / person Telephone: _____

Name _____

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Please send future newsletters to my email address: _____