

Anna Teichroeb and Gerhard Giesbrecht

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Dutch Mennonite Historical Genealogy www.mooserungenealogy.com

My great Grandfather, Peter Teichroeb (1857-1944), moved to Canada from the Mennonite settlement of Fuerstenland in 1925. My grandfather, Dan Teichroeb, (1904-2005) followed a few months later. Peter's first wife, Agatha Dueck (1859-1922) had predeceased him. He remarried not long after her death. His second wife, Maria Dueck (1865-1937), refused to leave Fuerstenland and the family lost contact with her. By 1926 all of Peter's children and their families, with two exceptions, had also moved to Canada. His son Heinrich (1899-1922) had moved west in 1922 and got as far as Germany before contracting Typhus. He died alone in a boarding house at the age of 22. Peter's daughter Anna (1882-?) remained in Fuerstenland with her husband, Gerhard Giesbrecht (1885-1933), and their children.



Anna Teichroeb (1882-?) and Gerhard Giesbrecht (1885-1933) with their children. Back row: Agatha (1913); Maria (1915). Front row: Peter (1917); Margaretha (1922); Anna (1919).

Anna and Gerhard owned a flour mill in Fuerstenland. In the aftermath of the Revolution all privately owned enterprises were nationalized. Anna and Gerhard lost their business but were permitted to remain as workers there.

After 1925 it became difficult for the family in Canada to maintain ties with Anna. Dan Teichroeb would send letters and care packages to his sister in Fuerstenland. For several years the packages were received and acknowledged. Then, around 1934, Dan received a letter by return mail indicating that Anna and Gerhard were deceased.

It was learned many years later that Gerhard had died in 1933 but Anna survived him. After his death letters from Canada were returned.

World War II (1939-1945) created chaotic conditions for the family. German speaking citizens of the USSR were treated badly. It seems that Anna's son Peter was taken away by Russian police in 1941 and never seen or heard from again. Tragic events of this kind were not uncommon. The German army occupied Eastern Ukraine for a time, during which German speaking inhabitants had a brief reprieve from Russian domination and mistreatment. However, when the German military retreated from the occupied territories in 1943 they implemented a policy of relocating German speaking citizens to other German occupied territories further west. This was the experience of Anna and the three youngest of her remaining children. At various times in 1943 they all were moved to Poland and resettled. Her eldest daughter appears to have emigrated to Poland after the war.

This brings us to the photograph shown above. It must have been taken in 1925-26 in Fuerstenland. It was in the possession of Dan Teichroeb (2004-2005) for many years and then kept by his descendants. Someone, at some time, removed an individual from the photo. It is believed that this was the condition of the picture by the time Dan obtained it. No one knows if he brought it with him to Canada, or if his father, Peter, brought it. The figure removed from the picture appears to be a woman dressed in black. Likely this would be an older woman, given the style of dress among older Mennonite woman at that time. If this is a photograph of the last family members remaining in Russia, then the older woman could be Peter's second wife, Maria. She objected strongly to emigrating and possibly she removed her image in defiance of the family that moved to Canada.

Postscript 2025

Anna was placed in Leszno, Poland in 1944. After the war ended many "repatriated" Mennonites in Poland and Germany were loaded on boxcars and sent to Kazakhstan, a member state of the USSR. I have discovered a letter written by Anna's daughter, Maria, to my grandfather Daniel Teichroeb in 1972 in which she mentions that her mother Anna had died in October 1963. The letter was sent from Stepnoe, Zhambyl Region, Kazakhstan. Maria had married a man named Janzen. Her letter refers to a daughter who had turned 14 years of age.

Gerhard Giesbrecht is mentioned in an issue of Die Mennonitische Rundschau on 12 April 1933 where it says that he died of starvation on his way to the Torgsin shop in Nikopol (possibly to purchase food). The article says (roughly): "We get anxious when we think about how long it will be until we next get food. That is why I ask, for those of us in need in Russia, not to withdraw your support. Gerhard Giesbrecht, who lives in Michaelsburg, died of hunger on his way to Nikopol to Torgsin. Please help us." The article was written by Abram Klassen.

Die Mennonitische Rundschau also published a letter on 11 January 1933 written by Anna to her family begging for assistance. Roughly translated it says: "Fuerstenland, Michaelsburg. Wishing you all the best and the peace of God. Since we are living in dire hunger and only have rags to wear and are covered in ulcers, we come again with the request, ask for us from outside people or the Board, maybe there is some help, because we are dying, hunger hurts a lot. If all five children ask, and mother has at least some bread, it's fine. Dear sister, if you are still sickly, pray for us for as long as you are alive. May our brothers and sisters remain in love until we return. If the good Lord would soon deliver us from our world, that is our prayer. Anna Giesbrecht". The letter ends with their mailing address in Michaelsburg.