

## The Mennonite Settlers in Chortitza

### Part 4 – Heinrich Loewen

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Heinrich Loewen (about 1740-1789)

*Heinrich is the author's fifth great grandfather, and his son Michael is the author's fourth great grandfather.*

Heinrich Loewen (about 1740-1789) was among the earliest Mennonites to leave Prussia for the new settlement of Chortitza in 1789. Tragically, he died before he could begin his new life in the young settlement. This is the story of Heinrich and his family.

Heinrich Loewen lived in the village of Neustadterwald in Prussia in 1776 when the Census of Mennonites in Prussia was taken. This village was located a short 15 km west of the major population center of Elbing. In this census Heinrich is listed with a wife and three sons. The family belonged to the Tiegenghagen Flemish Mennonite congregation. The names of the three sons were Abraham, Jacob, and Michael [1]. Information about Heinrich's first wife, the mother of the three boys, is sparse. All that can be said is that she died before 1784 and did not make the journey from Prussia to Chortitza. Her name and other information about her remain to be discovered.

According to the census, the family rented their land. Their economic circumstances were categorized as "Low", placing them within the large, main economic category comprising 76% of the Mennonite population of roughly 2,600 households [2]. At this time in Prussia, Mennonites were forbidden to purchase land except from other Mennonites. The Mennonite population was burgeoning and the demand for land created tremendous economic pressure on the livelihoods of these people. In addition to the challenging land restrictions, the Mennonites were required to pay special taxes to maintain their military exemption and to support the Lutheran church. Heinrich would have had no realistic expectation of ever becoming successful economically in Prussia. No doubt this spurred him to join the migration eastward.

There is also a householder named Heinrich Loewen who appears in the 1772 Census of West Prussia, living in Heubuden with his wife and three sons under the age of 12 years [3]. It is not certain that this census entry refers to the same family as the 1776 census but the concurrence of the family composition between the two sets of census records is a striking coincidence. Heubuden is situated about 20 km southwest of Neustadterwald.

Whereas very little is known about Heinrich's first wife, more information is available about his second wife. Her name was Anna. Heinrich Loewen was her third husband. Her first marriage was to Dietrich Rempel, with whom she had five children. Dietrich died around 1781 and Anna remarried. Her second husband, Aron Peters, died three years later. There were no children from

that marriage. Anna's third marriage was to Heinrich Loewen in 1784. The couple had a son named Dietrich the same year. Later immigration records for the Mennonite settlements in Tsarist Russia say that Dietrich moved from Neustadterwald to the Chortitza settlement in 1789, thereby confirming the information we have about the family's location in Prussia and their immigration date.

Abraham and Jacob, Heinrich's eldest sons, headed to Chortitza with their own families, separately from their father Heinrich. This conclusion is based on work done by Schapansky, cited above, and supported by other sources [4].

Abraham Loewen does not appear in the list of first settlers who migrated to the Settlement of Chortitza, but his family is shown in the record of households receiving loans (1788-1793) under the terms of the settlement agreement forged between the Mennonites and the Russian Crown [see the reference to the loans list in citation 4]. The family lived in the village of Einlage. Subsequent census records provide no clues about the family situation in later years.

Jacob Loewen, on the other hand, was listed among the first settlers who migrated in 1789. It is most probable that Jacob was destined for the village of Rosenthal. However, there are no other records to confirm this. Jacob died before the census was taken in 1795 and his wife remarried.

By 1788-1789 when Heinrich and Anna set off for Chortitza, the household comprised five people. Most of the Rempel children from Anna's first marriage were grown and no longer living with her. The exception was her youngest son from that marriage, Nicholas Rempel, born in 1773. In addition, Heinrich's youngest son from his first marriage, Michael (born around 1771), also accompanied his father and stepmother. Finally, the son of Heinrich and Anna, Dietrich Loewen, rounded out the household.

Heinrich died before he reached the new settlement. Therefore, he is not found among the early settlers who took up homesteads. The available records provide no explicit record of the surviving family members until a few years after the settlement was established. However, inferences can be made based on the sparse information available. Listed among the first settlers is Cornelius Willms, the husband of Helena Rempel. Helena was a daughter of Anna, from Anna's first marriage to Dietrich Rempel. In 1789 when the settler list was dated, Cornelius and Helena did not yet have children. However, their household is reported to include four adults and two children. It follows that this household was a family grouping likely composed of Cornelius and Helena along with Anna and the children. The eldest child, Michael Loewen, who was about 18 at the time, must have been reported as one of the adults in this list. The Mennonite loans list for 1788-1793 supports this, indicating that the Willms household was comprised of six people including three adults and three children. Michael must have been categorized among the children in this list. The expanded Willms household settled in the village of Einlage.

The Census of 1795 reflects numerous changes experienced by the family group over the course of the six years since arriving in the new settlement. Cornelius and Helena Willms still lived in the

village of Einlage along with Helena's younger brother Nicholas Rempel [5]. Anna Loewen is not listed in the household. She may have died before the census was taken. Homestead records confirm that she had died before 1802, following which her homestead had been transferred to her daughter and son-in-law (Helena and Cornelius Willms) [6]. It is interesting that although Cornelius Willms was reported as the head of the household in the available records, clearly the homestead belonged to Anna, who continued to own it during the period between her husband's death and her own. In 1795 Michael Loewen had moved out and was employed on the farm of Peter Dyck in Neuendorf. Dietrich Rempel, the youngest son of Heinrich and Anna, is not listed in the Willms household and is not found in the census. This is striking because he was only 11 years old in 1795. In fact, Dietrich does not appear again in census records until 1807, living with his wife in the village of Rosenthal.

Not long after his employment with Peter Dyck, Michael Loewen was married to Maria Bueckert (born 1777). Maria was a daughter of Daniel Bueckert who emigrated to the settlement of Chortitza from the village of Poppau in 1789. The Bueckert family settled in Neuendorf. No doubt Michael met Maria while he was working in Neuendorf. *[Daniel Bueckert is the author's fifth great grandfather, and his daughter Maria is the author's fourth great grandmother. Their story is told in Part 3 of this series at <https://www.mooserungenealogy.com/chortitza/articles/part-3-daniel-bueckert/>.]*

Daniel Bueckert died not long after arriving in the new settlement. The village census for Neuendorf, taken in 1795, indicates that the Bueckert homestead was inhabited at that time by three of Daniel's surviving children, Jacob (1775), Maria (mentioned above), and Anna (1780). After Maria married Michael Loewen they took over the farm. The census for 1797 lists Michael Loewen as the head of the household. It appears that Maria's brother, Jacob, was living on the farm with them at that time. He moved out on his own before 1801.

Michael and Maria had a daughter named Maria in 1798 and a son named Jacob in 1800. *[Jacob Loewen (1800-1857) is the third great grandfather of the author.]*

Tragedy struck around 1800 when Michael died, still a very young man. Maria next married Jacob Peters, who took over the farm in Neuendorf. Maria's life is taken up in Part 3 of this series, cited above.

The son of Michael and Maria, Jacob Loewen, had an eventful life, made more colorful by family lore, ending in a bizarre mishap. He struck out on his own at a young age. In 1813 his mother and stepfather were residents of the village of Neu-Osterwick, where they lived among the landless residents. Jacob does not appear in the 1813 census, possibly because he had moved out to work. By May 1814 he had returned home but before October he had moved out once again. In the October 1814 census he was listed as a worker in the Schoenhorst household of Johann Wolf and Anna Peters. Anna Peters was the sister of Jacob Loewen's stepfather Jacob Peters. *[Johann Wolf and Anna Peters are the author's fourth great grandparents. Their story is*

told in Part 1 of this series at <https://www.mooserungenealogy.com/chortitza/articles/jacob-wolf-and-justina-harder/>.]

The census of 1815 brought the news that Jacob Loewen had returned home once again. In May 1816 Jacob went back to the farm of Johann Wolf in Schoenhorst. There is no information for the years until 1822 when Jacob married Maria Klassen in the village of Neu-Osterwick. Nothing is known about the background and family of Maria Klassen [7].

Jacob and Maria had a son named Peter in 1841. Maria died before 1852. Oral family history tells us that Jacob had two more sons, Johann (1852), and Bernhard (1854), with a woman named Margaretha Braun, whom Jacob had purportedly married around 1854 [8]. *[Johann (1852-1934) is the second great grandfather of the author.]*

Little is known about Margaretha Braun except her year of birth, which is claimed to be 1836. According to family lore Margaretha was a household servant working for Jacob Loewen's family. After Jacob's wife, Maria, died it is claimed that he took up with this teenaged servant girl and she became pregnant with Johann at the age of 15 or 16. It is difficult to assess the elements of this story to separate fact from fiction. That Jacob married Margaretha after his first wife died appears to be rooted in facts passed down from family relatives who knew the couple. It is less certain, but possible, that Margaretha was a servant in the household.

The uncertain elements of this story are the actual birth year of Margaretha and the year of her marriage to Jacob. Certainly, the occurrences of children out of wedlock, and middle-aged men consorting with teenage girls would have been scandalous in the Mennonite community at that time.

The story ended abruptly in 1857 when Jacob and Margaretha died in a carriage accident. The children must have been adopted but there is no surviving information about the events that transpired after the accident.

## Notes

[1] Henry Schapansky completed the research linking together Heinrich's family; see *Mennonite Migrations (and The Old Colony)*, published by Schapansky in 2006, p. 399.

See also Karl Stumpp's reference to Dietrich, Heinrich's son born in 1784, who came from Neustadterwald in 1789 and lived in Einlage. Stumpp's information is incomplete; it is not possible to discern whether any of the other entries refer to members of Heinrich's family. That said, this scrap of information demonstrates the family's specific geographic origin in Prussia and their immigration in 1789. See Karl Stumpp, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763-1862*, Lincoln Nebraska, American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1997, page 188.

[2] Glenn H. Penner has posted a comprehensive transcription of this census at [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776\\_West\\_Prussia\\_Census.pdf](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.pdf). Penner also provides an analysis of the economic circumstances of the households listed in the census and I have drawn on his work for this article. Heinrich Loewen's surname is recorded incorrectly by the census takers as "Leben".

[3] The 1772 Census of West Germany is found at [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1772/West\\_Prussia\\_Census\\_1772.pdf](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1772/West_Prussia_Census_1772.pdf).

[4] Glenn H. Penner's article describing the earliest settlers in Chortitza contains an entry possibly related to Heinrich's son Jacob, who moved to Rosenthal. See this document at [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/First\\_Mennonite\\_Settlers\\_in\\_Chortitza.pdf](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/First_Mennonite_Settlers_in_Chortitza.pdf).

There is a reference to Heinrich's son Abraham in the records, "Funds Loaned to Mennonite Settlers in the Chortitza Settlement: 1788-1793", translated by Glenn H. Penner and Wilhelm Friesen, which can be found at [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Funds\\_Loaned\\_to\\_Mennonite\\_Settlers\\_in\\_the\\_Chortitza\\_Settlement\\_1788-1793.pdf](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Funds_Loaned_to_Mennonite_Settlers_in_the_Chortitza_Settlement_1788-1793.pdf).

These materials provide circumstantial, but not definitive, support for Schapansky's conclusions.

[5] Census records for the settlement of Chortitza can be found at <https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/>.

[6] See Benjamin Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen*, published by Heinrich Schneider in Karlsruhe in 1955, page 251.

[7] See the vital statistics records at [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza\\_Colony\\_Vital\\_Records\\_1822.pdf](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Colony_Vital_Records_1822.pdf).

It seems likely that Maria Klassen was a daughter of either Abraham Klassen and Helena Born of the village of Chortitza or Johann Klassen and Elizabeth Nickel of the village of Kronsgraben. However, there is no way to prove whether either of these is the correct family without the emergence of new information.

[8] Analysis of Autosomal DNA information for the people who claim to descend from Jacob has demonstrated the family relationships to be accurate. The DNA used in this study was all sourced from the Ancestry.com DNA database, processed through the Timber algorithm which helps to eliminate the effects of endogamy. The method used was to identify all DNA matches which were related to Jacob Loewen. These matches fell into five groups: (1) descendants of Peter Loewen, half-brother of Johann Loewen; (2) descendants of Bernhard Loewen, full brother of Johann Loewen; (3) descendants of Johann Loewen's wife Sara Dyck by her first husband; (4) descendants of Maria Loewen, grandmother of the authors father; (5) all other descendants of Johann Loewen. The resulting matches (using averages for each of the five groups) were clear. The strongest matches were the descendants of Maria Loewen, with an average match of 235

cM, and these were consistent when broken down for first cousins once and twice removed. Next were the other descendants of Johann Loewen, with an average match of 123 cM, consistent with second cousins and second cousins once and twice removed. The next group were the matches to descendants of Bernhard Loewen, with an average match of 91 cM, consistent with third cousins and third cousins once and twice removed. Following this was the group of descendants of Sara Dyck, with an average match of 76 cM, consistent with half second cousins twice removed. The final group was the descendants of Peter Loewen, with an average match of 45 cM, consistent with half third cousins and half third cousins once and twice removed. This data appears to demonstrate very clearly that Johann and Bernhard were full brothers and Peter was their half brother. Jacob was the common ancestor of all three men.