

Agatha Thimm (1751-1803)

Copyright 2024 by Barry Teichroeb. All rights reserved. www.mooserungenealogy.com

Agatha's Life

Agatha Thimm lived in the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth in the latter half of the eighteenth century. She was born and raised in the rich farming region circumscribed roughly by Gdansk to the west, Malbork to the south, Elblag to the east and the Gulf of Gdansk to the north. Her family were members of the Dutch Mennonite community that had been a prosperous, burgeoning population in this vast country for over 150 years.

The tolerant political stability that existed during Agatha's childhood gave way to the dissolution of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth when it was partitioned in 1772 between the empires of Prussia, Austria and Russia. It is unlikely Agatha ever envisioned emigrating a few years later to a bleak, unsettled eastern Ukrainian region on the Dniepr river, controlled by the Russian empire and only recently purged of its indigenous Cossack population [1]. However, for Agatha this move to Ukraine was still years in the future.

Agatha's family origins are unclear. There were Mennonites by the name of Thimm recorded in various census documents in 1772 and 1776, and possibly 1727 [2], but no definitive records connect Agatha to parents. She married Cornelius Hiebert (?-1791) before 1776. They were recorded in the 1776 Census of Mennonites in Prussia, living in Ellerwald 5. Trift, near the city of Elbing (modern Elblag). They had no children at this time. Cornelius' occupation was listed as innkeeper. They rented the land they occupied and were relatively poor [3].

Living a short distance away in Ellerwald 4. Trift (less than 1 km from Ellerwald 5. Trift) were two households headed by David Thimm (1748-after 1811) and Franz Thimm (1751-1804). Both men were weavers. Whether they were brothers is open to speculation as is the possibility they were siblings of Agatha.

Near the end of the eighteenth century Mennonites began to settle in an area around Zeyersvorderkampen, not far from Ellerwald [4]. Agatha and Cornelius moved there, as did David Thimm and Franz Thimm [5]. While the coincidence of all three families moving to the same destination is not evidence of a familial relationship, it is suggestive of family ties.

Agatha and Cornelius did not stay in Zeyersvorderkampen long. The Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned in 1772, the regions inhabited by Mennonite populations generally becoming part of Prussia. Life for Mennonites in Prussia became difficult, a consequence of burdensome taxation and land acquisition restrictions placed on the Mennonite community, along with pressure to assimilate into the larger militaristic Prussian culture. For many Mennonites anxiously guarding their culture, religion and economic prospects, the only hope for prosperity was to move east, accepting a generous offer of land and cultural freedom

extended by the Russian Tsar. A large group of 228 Mennonite households set out for Ukraine in 1788-1789. Agatha and Cornelius were among them.

This group headed to a new Mennonite settlement on the Dniepr River that became known as Chortitza. The journey was difficult. Settlers traveled from the Baltic coast (north of their homes) to Riga, Latvia, either 450 km overland or 600 km by boat. From Riga they transferred to river craft when the waterway was clear, or sleighs when the river system froze, and followed the Dvina River and then the Dniepr River 1450 km south to their final destination [6]. It is clear from Peter Hildebrand's eyewitness account of the trip that the settlers endured months of arduous travel to reach Chortitza [7]. Along the way possessions were frequently stolen or destroyed.

Agatha and Cornelius settled in the village of Neuendorf [8], situated on the Tomakovka River, 12.5 km east of the Dniepr River. No doubt they shared with their neighbors a sense of alarm when they first gazed upon the rocky, unbroken landscape of eastern Ukraine, so different from the rich, lowland area they had left behind. It took years to make the land productive and the Chortitza settlement thrive.

When they arrived in 1789 Agatha and Cornelius were listed with a household of four adults and four children. There are few detailed records in existence to reveal who these people were. Later census records indicate that Agatha and Cornelius had three children by 1789: Aganetha (1779); Cornelius (1781); and Agatha (1783). The other two adults and the fourth child are unknown.

Cornelius, Agatha's husband, did not live long in the new settlement. He died around 1790. Shortly after his death Agatha married the much younger Abraham Dyck (1769). Her new husband took over the Hiebert farm [9]. There is no record of Abraham's immigration to the Chortitza settlement, but he may have traveled with another household, thus obscuring information about him.

Abraham (1769) was a son of Heinrich Dyck (approximately 1730-1787) and Judith Preuss (1731-1810) of Krebsfelde, 16 km west of Elbing [10]. Abraham's brother, Heinrich, moved to the Mennonite settlement of Molotschna in 1803, settling in the village of Muensterberg. Accompanying Heinrich's family was Judith Preuss, mother of Heinrich and Abraham. Judith lived with her son Heinrich's family until 1805 when tragedy struck the family. Both Heinrich and his wife, Margaretha, died in 1806 leaving four children ranging in age from 8 to 20. The eldest child, a daughter, was married shortly after her parents died. Her new husband took over the farm and the remaining children continued to live there. Judith moved to Neuendorf to live with her other son, Abraham, residing there until her death in 1810 [11].

A child was born to Agatha and Abraham in 1791. He too was named Abraham [12]. By 1802 a young boy named Johann Thiessen had joined the family. Perhaps he was an orphan but there is no information to confirm this. In 1807 the young Thiessen boy was no longer living with the family [13].

Agatha died in 1803. Abraham remarried and raised a large family with his second wife.

Agatha's Legacy

Agatha Thimm's son Cornelius Hiebert (1781) moved from Neuendorf to Schoenhorst early in the nineteenth century. He married a young woman named Anna Nickel and raised a family. Time passed and generations multiplied. In 1827 a granddaughter of Cornelius was born. Anna Hiebert (1827-1911) was a member of the last generation to consider the Russian Empire a safe place for Mennonites to live. She married Johann Dyck. One of their daughters, Agatha Dyck (1859-1922), married Peter Teichroeb (1857-1944) of Schoenhorst. Agatha and Peter had a large family and a very prosperous life that lasted until Russia, broken by the First World War, entered a period of violence and destruction that only diminished with the death of Josef Stalin in 1953. The youngest child of Agatha and Peter, Daniel Teichroeb (1904-2005), while still in his teenage years, fought to survive the Ukrainian War of Independence and served in the White Army during the Russian Revolution, escaping in 1925 to emigrate to Canada. He rejoined his father and siblings in Saskatchewan. Daniel Teichroeb is the author's grandfather.

Agatha Thimm's son Abraham Dyck (1791) remained in Neuendorf where he was married and established his home. There is scant information about Abraham, except that he had a son named Abraham (1815-1848). The younger Abraham married Elizabeth Dyck (1819-1909) in Neuendorf. As the Mennonite population of the Chortitza settlement grew, the demand for land greatly outpaced the supply. A "daughter colony", Bergthal, was established 200 km southeast of Chortitza in 1836. Abraham and Elizabeth moved there in 1846. That year their son Johann (1846-1914) was born in Bergthal. In 1874 this son moved to Canada. A few years later Johann married Katharina Peters (1861-1941), who had moved to Canada in 1875 with her parents. Their daughter, Anna Dyck (1891-1956), married Wilhelm Striemer, the son of a strongly conservative Bergthal minister in Saskatchewan. Wilhelm and Anna had a large family. Among the children was a daughter, Helena Striemer (1915-2000), who is the author's grandmother.

Conclusion

Daniel Teichroeb (1904-2005) married Margaretha Schapansky (1908-1987). Helena Striemer (1915-2000) married Albert Fast (1907-1977). The eldest son of Daniel and Margaretha, Peter Teichroeb, married the eldest daughter of Helena and Albert, Marjorie Fast. The marriage of Peter and Marjorie, the author's parents, established Agatha Thimm as a matriarch on both sides of the author's family.

Source Notes

[1] For a more comprehensive discussion of the cultural and economic pressures faced by the Mennonite community in Prussia see: Barry Teichroeb, *Eastern Vision - The Peter Epp Story* (1725-1789), <https://www.mooserungenealogy.com/articles/eastern-vision-the-peter-epp-story/>.

[2] See the 1772 Census of West Prussia: Villages Containing Mennonites, extracted by Glenn H. Penner and found here:

https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1772/West_Prussia_Census_1772.pdf;

the 1776 Census of Mennonites in West Prussia compiled by Glenn H. Penner and found here:

https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.pdf.

Also note that the reference to Christof Teem could be a reference to Christof Thimm in the Brandregister of 1727 transcribed by Glenn H. Penner and found here:

https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Brandregister_1727.htm.

[3] See the 1776 Census of Mennonites in West Prussia, cited above.

[4] See the article by Richard D. Thiessen, "Zeyersvorderkampen (Pomeranian Voivodeship, Poland)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. November 2012. Web. 8 Nov

2024, [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Zeyersvorderkampen_\(Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland\)&oldid=168727](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Zeyersvorderkampen_(Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland)&oldid=168727).

[5] Agatha and Cornelius were recorded as immigrating from Zeyersvorderkampen to the Mennonite settlement of Chortitza in Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen*, Karlsruhe, Heinrich Schneider, 1955, p. 295.

David and Franz are both listed in Zeyersvorderkampen in the 1789 Land Census of West Prussian Mennonites, compiled by Adalbert Goertz and found here:

<https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1789alph.htm>.

[6] William Schroeder and Helmut T. Huebert, *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, Winnipeg, Springfield Publishers, 1996, p. 13.

[7] See the comprehensive account by Peter Hildebrand, *From Danzig to Russia*, Winnipeg, CMBC Publications and Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2000.

[8] See the research done by Glenn H. Penner, *The First Mennonite Settlers in the Chortitza Settlement*, found here:

https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/First_Mennonite_Settlers_in_Chortitza.pdf.

[9] See Peter Rempel, *Mennonite Migration to Russia 1788-1828*, Winnipeg, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2000, p. 31.

[10] See Henry Schapansky, *Mennonite Migrations (and The Old Colony)*, Rosenort MB, Henry Schapansky, 2006, pp. 494-495.

[11] Information about Heinrich Dyck's migration is found in Rempel p. 70, cited above and in the 1805 and 1806 census records for Muensterberg, Molotschna, found at:

https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Molotschna_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_October_1805.pdf;

[https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Molotschna Mennonite Settlement Census 27 October 1806.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Molotschna_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_27_October_1806.pdf).

[12] These changes in the household are described in the Chortitza census of 1795. Glenn H. Penner's transcription and translation of the 1795 census can be found at:

[https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza Mennonite Settlement Census 1795.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_1795.pdf).

[13] The 1802 and 1807 census records can be seen here:

[https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza Mennonite Settlement Census October 1802.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_October_1802.pdf);

[https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza Mennonite Settlement Census November 1807.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_November_1807.pdf).