

The Mennonite Settlers in Chortitza

Part 10 – Heinrich Epp and Helena Dyck

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Introduction

Heinrich Epp (1826-1905) and Helena Dyck (1827-1902) were third generation residents of the Chortitza Mennonite settlement established in 1789 in southern Ukraine. Heinrich's father, Peter Epp (1798-), was born in the village of Rosenthal to parents who arrived in Chortitza in 1795 [1]. Heinrich's mother, Helena Goertzen (1803-) immigrated to Chortitza in 1818 with her older siblings Maria, Isaac, and Johann, settling in the village of Kronsthal [2].

Helena Dyck's father, Peter Dyck (1806-), was born in the village of Chortitza to parents who immigrated in 1804. His parents settled originally in the new settlement of Molotschna but moved quickly to the older settlement of Chortitza [3]. Helena's mother, Maria Regehr (1806-1867), was born in the village of Neuendorf to a father who was among the first immigrants in 1789 and a mother whose origin is unknown [4].

This article is the story of the ancestors of Heinrich Epp (1826-1905) and Helena Dyck (1827-1902). *[Heinrich Epp (1826-1905) and Helena Dyck (1827-1902) are third great grandparents of the author.]*

Elder Peter Epp and the Mennonite Migration

Elder Peter Epp (1725-1789), the leader of the Flemish Mennonite congregation in Danzig, was the most influential individual in the Mennonite community during the events leading to the Dutch Mennonite migration to the southeastern steppes of Ukraine in Katherine the Great's Russian Empire [5]. In the years preceding the migration the Mennonite community, whose ancestors had fled Netherlands in the sixteenth century, occupied the lowlands of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, a hospitable land for religious dissidents. Abruptly in 1772 the conspiratorial Russian, Austrian, and Prussian Empires occupied and dismembered the Commonwealth. Most Mennonites instantly became members of the Prussian Empire through this stroke of political fate. At once the new ruling administration began to apply pressure on Mennonites, challenging their language, educational methods, religious principles, and ability to acquire land for the burgeoning Mennonite population. Peter Epp foresaw the erosion of Mennonite culture that the community had guarded for over two centuries living in the tolerant Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. The cultural erosion began with pressure to replace the Dutch language with High German in church services. It spread to rising taxes on Mennonites to enrich the coffers of the Lutheran Church. Next the administration challenged the right of Mennonites

to abstain from military participation, severely curtailing the rights of Mennonites to purchase land as the penalty for military abstention.

When an emissary of the Russian Empire approached the Mennonites with an offer of land, political independence, and religious freedom, Peter Epp chose to encourage community interest in the offer, making his church available to the Russian mission to communicate information and enlist interested congregants. Epp had to resist a threatening Danzig city administration, opposed to the Mennonite population leaving the region. In covert fashion he facilitated arrangements in Danzig, enabling the emissary to conclude an initial list of settlers and plans for migration.

The first wave of Mennonite settlers began the trek to Chortitza in 1788. Epp did not join the migrants, although by 1789 when the first settlers in Ukraine sent impassioned requests to Danzig asking Epp to come to Chortitza to organize the church there, he made plans for the journey. His fragile health failed him days before he embarked. He died without experiencing the culmination of the movement he was so instrumental in starting.

The Epp Family – the Ancestors of Heinrich Epp (1826-1905)

Elder Peter Epp's son, Heinrich Epp (1757-1805), and daughter in law, Anna Penner (1757-1798), immigrated to Chortitza in 1795. Prior to moving they lived in the Prussian village of Hochzeit, 10 km from Danzig [6]. They were original settlers in Rosenthal, a village in the settlement of Chortitza [7].

Anna Penner (1757-1798) was the daughter of Gerhard Penner (about 1729-1761) and Elisabeth Woelke (about 1729-1764) [8]. Gerhard and Elisabeth lived in a village in the vicinity of Danzig. Their marriage as well as Elisabeth's baptism and death records are in the Danzig Flemish Church register. Other Danzig Church records demonstrate that Elisabeth's parents, Cornelius Woelke (about 1698-1756), and Anna Reimer (about 1693-1757), also lived in the Danzig area.

Heinrich Epp (1757-1805) and Anna Penner (1757-1798) had eight children. They migrated to Ukraine accompanied by four children. Three children had died in the years preceding the journey. One child was born in the new settlement. Peter Epp (1777-1844), the eldest child, was one of the children who moved with the family. Around 1796 Peter married Katharina Ens (1770-1810) [9].

Katharina Ens (1770-1810) was a daughter of Martin Ens (1739-about 1802) and Gertruda Penner (1741-1807). She was the fourth of eight children. She accompanied her parents when they moved to Chortitza in 1795 [10]. Before emigrating the family had lived in the Prussian village of Schoensee, midway between Danzig and Marienburg, as the 1772 Census of West Prussia demonstrates [11]. They were still living in Schoensee as recently as 1790 [12]. After arriving in Chortitza the family settled in the village of Rosenthal. In 1802, following the death of

Martin Ens, the farm passed to Peter Epp (1777-1844), husband of Katharina Ens (1770-1810) [13].

Peter Epp (1777-1844) and Katharina Ens (1770-1810) lived on the farm in Rosenthal during the early years of their marriage. In 1806 Peter and Katharina were farming in Neuendorf. In 1808 they gave up the farm and Peter worked full-time as a schoolteacher and cobbler in Neuendorf. Katharina died in 1810 [14]. Three months later Peter married Christina Reimer, the widow of Jacob Braun, a tailor in the village of Chortitza. They relocated to Chortitza within the next year, possibly because Christina still had property there. Also in 1811, Peter's son, Peter (1798-) moved to the farm of Isaac Klassen in Neuendorf, where he worked as a servant. In 1814 he worked for Peter Isaac, remaining in Neuendorf. He remained there through 1816, the last year of revision list records. In the meantime, Peter Epp (1777-1844) and the rest of the family were still in Chortitza in 1815. The census records tell us that the family did not own property and they were hosted by another owner. I interpret this to mean that Peter Epp (1777-1844) was renting. They were still living in Chortitza in the first half of 1816, but by autumn of that year they had moved to Schoenweise.

Peter Epp (1798-), the son of Peter Epp (1777-1844) and Katharina Ens (1770-1810), married Helena Goertzen (1803-) around 1823 [15]. According to a Certificate of Citizenship granted to a grandson of Peter (1798) and Helena (1803), the newly married couple lived in the village of Chortitza in 1835 [16].

Helena Goertzen (1803-) was born in 1803 in Petershagen, a village midway between the Prussian cities of Marienburg and Elbing, to George Goertzen (1725-1808) and Maria Neubauer (before 1764-1819). Maria was George's second wife. They were married in September 1784 following the death of his first wife the previous June. George Goertzen died in Petershagen at the age of eighty-three, never migrating to the new settlement in Ukraine [17]. It is unlikely Maria moved either since the main migrations paused around 1805 and only resumed around 1820, the interruption caused by the instability of the Napoleonic wars. We know of Maria's death from inheritance records listing three of her children, Maria, Helena (1803-), and Johann [18].

Peter Epp (1798-) and Helena Goertzen (1803-) became members of the Schoenhorst Mennonite congregation. The Schoenhorst Church register contains records of one son, Jacob, who was born in 1823. They had at least one other child, a son named Heinrich, born in 1826 [19].

The scant records that shed light on the birthplace of Heinrich Epp (1826-1905) indicate that he was born in Chortitza, where his parents were known to have lived in 1835. His parents moved to Schoeneberg in 1853. There are no records indicating whether Heinrich moved with them, but Schoeneberg was the birthplace of his future wife, Helena Dyck (1827-1902), whom he married in 1848 [20].

The Dyck Family – the Ancestors of Helena Dyck (1827-1902)

Helena Dyck (1827-1902) was the first of six children born to Peter Dyck (1806-) and Maria Regehr (1806-1867).

Peter Dyck (1806-) was born in the village of Chortitza. His parents, Peter Dyck (1775-1808) and Margaretha Klassen (1779-1814), emigrated in 1804, following their marriage in the Prussian village of Mielenz, 8 km west of Marienburg. They moved to the new settlement of Molotschna, but they stayed there for only a brief time [21]. In 1806 they took over the farm of Jacob Klassen in the village of Chortitza [22]. By 1807 they had moved to a farm at Schoenhorst. The 1808 census lists Margaretha on her own with her children because her husband Peter had died. She remained on their farm. By 1810 she had married Heinrich Funk, and he had taken over the farm. They moved again after 1811, to Neu-Osterwick. In 1814 Margaretha died and Heinrich remarried. Peter Dyck (1806-) continued to live with his stepfather.

Maria Regehr (1806-1867) was born in Neuendorf to Peter Regehr (1751-) and his wife Maria (1775-). Peter Regehr immigrated to Chortitza in 1789, among the original group of settlers who established the settlement. With Peter was his first wife, Susanna, who died in 1802 [23]. Peter Regehr (1751-) was a son of Johann Regehr (1716-) and his wife Katharina, who lived in the Prussian village of Schoensee [24].

The first child of Peter Dyck (1806-) and Maria Regehr (1806-1867) was Helena Dyck (1827-1902), born in 1827 in Schoeneberg, a village established in the Chortitza settlement in 1816. According to property ownership records the family continued to live there until at least 1859 [25]. When the Mennonite community established a new settlement, Fuerstenland, southeast of Chortitza in 1864, Peter Dyck and Maria Regehr were among the earliest settlers. The community named Peter the first, unofficial, mayor of the settlement [26].

Helena Dyck (1827-1902) married Heinrich Epp (1826-1905) in 1848 in Schoeneberg. They moved to Fuerstenland, settling in the village of Michaelsburg. The year they moved is uncertain. The baptism registry for the church in Fuerstenland records the baptisms of two daughters, one in 1887 and the other in 1889 [27].

Heinrich Epp (1826-1905) and Helena Dyck (1827-1902) had eight children. Their fourth child was a boy named Heinrich (1855-1906). He was born in Schoeneberg. He may have spent his later childhood years in Fuerstenland, although this is not certain. In 1876 he married Margaretha Rempel (1857-1937), a woman from Neu-Osterwick in the Chortitza settlement. After their marriage they lived in Fuerstenland until they moved to Canada in the 1890s.

[Heinrich Epp (1855-1906) and Margaretha Rempel (1857-1937) are second great grandparents of the author. Margaretha Rempel's family history can be found in Part 7 of this series, at <https://www.mooserungenealogy.com/chortitza/articles/part-7-neighbors-the-schoenhorst-homesteaders-of-1789/>]

Source Notes

[1] Glenn H. Penner, The First Mennonite Settlers in the Chortitza Settlement, found at [https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/First Mennonite Settlers in Chortitza.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/First_Mennonite_Settlers_in_Chortitza.pdf), #22.

[2] Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert (Karlsruhe, Heinrich Schneider, 1955), p. 218.

[3] Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, p. 348.

In addition, the Chortitza revision list of 1807 includes the family at Schoenhorst #1, found at [https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza Mennonite Settlement Census November 1807.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_November_1807.pdf).

[4] Glenn H. Penner, The First Mennonite Settlers in the Chortitza Settlement, #90.

[5] For a comprehensive article about Peter Epp, see Barry Teichroeb, "Eastern Vision: The Peter Epp Story (1725-1789)", found at <https://www.mooserungenealogy.com/articles/eastern-vision-the-peter-epp-story/>.

[6] See the Danzig Church Family Book Volume 2, p. 319, found at [https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Danzig Family Book 2.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Danzig_Family_Book_2.pdf).

[7] Peter Rempel, Mennonite Migration to Russia 1788-1828 (Winnipeg, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2000), p. 42.

[8] Danzig Church Family Book Volume 2, p. 319.

[9] Henry Schapansky, Mennonite Migrations (and The Old Colony) (Rosenort, Henry Schapansky, 2006), p. 522. The marriage date is based on the date of birth of their daughter Anna in 1797, as reported by Henry Schapansky. Other places of residence are sourced from the Chortitza revision lists posted at <https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/>. Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, p. 252, reports the death of Martin Ens and the inheritance of his farm by son in law Peter Epp.

[10] Glenn H. Penner, The First Mennonite Settlers in the Chortitza Settlement, #42.

[11] Glenn H. Penner, The 1772 Census of West Prussia: Villages Containing Mennonites, found at [https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1772/West Prussia Census 1772.pdf](https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1772/West_Prussia_Census_1772.pdf).

[12] Franz Harder Document Collection, Deutsches Auslands-Institut, Berlin Document Center, National Archives and Records Administration, found at <https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/mf%20mss%20261/pages/894.php>.

[13] Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, p. 252.

[14] Tim Janzen, Chortitza Settlement Vital Records 1809-1812, found at https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Vital_Records_1809-1812.pdf.

[15] This date is based on the birth of the oldest known child, who was born in 1823.

[16] The Certificate of Citizenship, issued by the Chortitza Municipal Administration in 1916, lists the following details: David Epp, born 1858, was the son of Jacob Epp (1823) and in 1916 he lived in Schoenhorst (Wodjanoj); Jacob Epp (1823) lived in Schoeneberg (Smoljanoj) in 1858 and transferred to Schoenhorst in 1869; David Epp (1858) was the grandson of Peter Epp (1798) who lived in the village of Chortitza in 1835 and transferred out to Schoeneberg in 1853; David Epp (1858) was the great grandson of Peter Epp (1777) who moved to Imperial Russia and was living in the village of Chortitza in 1816.

[17] Tiegenhagen Mennonite Church Book Records, found at https://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/cong_314.php, pp. 14-15 records the marriage of George Goertzen and Maria Neubauer, pp. 16-17 records the death of Goerge's first wife, pp. 72-73 records the birth of Helena Goertzen (1803-), and pp. 86-87 records Goerge's death. There is speculation that Maria Neubauer's recorded surname was actually her married name from a previous marriage. If she had an earlier marriage the husband's name is unknown and there are no records of any children. Therefore, there is no foundation to assert that this is not her birth surname.

[18] Tim Janzen, "Account of the Fund for Minors in the Chortitza Colony from 1815 to 1819 as of January 16, 1820", found at https://mennonitegenealogy.com/download/1820_Chortitza_orphan_records_English.pdf. See the entry for the village of Kronsthal.

[19] The Index for the Schoenhorst Church Register is found at <https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/schoen2.htm>. The Mennonite Genealogy site once contained a transcription of the register as well as a GED file, but these are no longer available online. Information included here is from the genealogy files. In addition, Orval Ens and Cornelius Epp assembled the information from family records that establishes the genealogy of Heinrich Epp (1826-1905). See Cornelius Epp and Orval Ens, "Jacob Epp and Elizabeth (Ens) Epp Genealogy 1845-1987" and Orval Ens, "Heinrich and Margaretha Epp Genealogy 1855-1984".

[20] Anna Dyck's obituary, written by her son Peter Epp, mentions her birthplace.

[21] Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, p. 348.

[22] Peter Rempel, p. 9. Other village references in this paragraph are from the associated revision lists found at <https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/>.

[23] Tim Janzen, Chortitza Colony Vital Records 1801-1813, <https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/vital.htm>.

[24] Glenn H. Penner, The 1772 Census of West Prussia: Villages Containing Mennonites, found at https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1772/West_Prussia_Census_1772.pdf.

[25] 1859 List of Chortitza Colony Householders, found at https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/1859_Chortitza_Original.htm.

[26] John Dyck and William Harms, 1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve (Winnipeg, The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1998), p. 156.

[27] Cary Desnoyers and Tim Janzen, Fuerstenland Baptism Register 1885-1932, found at https://mgr.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Fuerstenland_Baptism_Register_sorted_by_name.htm.