

ie. Er wurde nur 67 Jahre alt und doch hatte er trotz aller Schwierigkeiten eine Gemeinde gegründet. Er ahnte sicherlich nicht was für Schwierigkeiten diese kleine Gemeinde noch würde durchgehen müssen, bis sie endlich etwa hundert Jahre später eine kräftige, evangelische Gemeinde von über 2000 Mitgliedern und eben so viel Kindern und Jugend sein würde. So ist die kleine Gemeinde heute nach 140 Jahren hundertmal so groß geworden. Etwa die Hälfte der Gemeinde sind direkte Nachkommen von Klaas Reimer.

Er hatte fünf Kinder. Zwei davon, Margaretha, eine Frau Martin Barkman, und Peter, der eine Susanna Friesen heiratete, starben ohne Nachkommen. Abraham zog mit den meisten seiner Nachkommen nach Manitoba. Klaas und Helena, die einen Peter W. Friesen heiratete, zogen zur selben Zeit, 1874-75, nach Janzen, Nebraska, mit den meisten ihrer Nachkommen. Abraham hatte vier Söhne und vier Töchter, von welchen die meisten der Reimers, Friesens, Benners und Löwen in Steinbach und Umgegend kommen. Klaas hatte sieben Söhne und vier Töchter, welcher Nachkommen heute noch meistens in den Vereinigten Staaten wohnen, außer die Nachkommen des schon verstorbenen Johann J. Reimer, Hochfeld, Manitoba, dessen Nachkommen zum größten Teil entweder in Manitoba oder Mexiko wohnen. Helena, Frau P. Friesen, hatte zwei Söhne und eine Tochter. Die Tochter heiratete Heinrich Löwen, Meade, Kansas, und ihre Nachkommen wohnen zum größten Teil in den Staaten.

Klaas Reimer and His Times

Peter J. B. Reimer

Klaas Reimer, my great grandfather, was born in Petershagen near the village of Tiegenhof, West Prussia, in the year 1770. This was at a time of important political events. The power of Poland had steadily declined until one of its westerly provinces, West Prussia came under the rule of the famous Frederick the Great, in 1772. Under the rule of this benevolent Prussian king the Mennonites in West Prussia received full freedom to practice their religion. Frederick the Great believed in full freedom of religion but demanded annual contributions in cash for the support of his military school of cadettes from the Mennonites, who refused to serve in the army. In the year 1780 the Mennonites were granted citizenship, which had been denied them by the authorities for almost two hundred and fifty years. The Mennonites of West Prussia, East Prussia and the Free City of Danzig numbered about 12,000 around this time.

The time of my great grandfather's birth was also noted for an important social change among his people. For over two centuries the Mennonite people in that area had tenaciously clung to Dutch, their mother tongue. In 1762, Gerhard Wiebe, a visiting minister from Elbing preached in German for the first time in the Flemish Mennonite Church in Danzig. The congregation as a whole did not approve of this at the time but a German sermon of the visiting minister Cornelius Reijer five years later was approved of by a larger number of people. In another ten years, 1777, the elder Peter Epp, who later became the father-in-law of our Klaas Reimer, also began to preach in German.

He still used considerable Dutch expressions. It is interesting to see that the change from the Dutch to the German was not complete before Klaas Reimer grew into manhood. The change was not complete as a problem at all in his autobiography.

Much at the same time the Dutch language was being changed to Low German in the homes. Basically we have a mixture of Dutch and German with the difference, that where at first Dutch expressions were mixed into it we now mix English expressions into it. Even the Russian move to the Ukraine or to North America, came from a German up to the middle of the nineteenth century, only a few years ago.

At the age of twenty, Klaas Reimer joined the church in his village. According to the usual custom when the young people were encouraged to accept the responsibilities of church membership, he received no formal education in his childhood and even before baptism, evidently did not have strong spiritual convictions, because he continued to live a worldly life.

However, there are indications that he was thoughtful during this period of his life which led him to a deeper understanding, and which prepared him for his later life.

At the age of twenty-eight he moved to Danzig, where he married a Dutch girl, near Danzig, where he married a Dutch girl. After the evidently early death of his wife, he married a Friesen girl with whom he had his family.

After the death of Elder Epp in 1791, the church side took a serious turn and the latter insisted on meetings in the country though still acceptable to officiate at baptisms and communions. Klaas Reimer was called to the ministry but, being only self-educated, he felt this call from a distance and did not fully to this service.

During the rule of Frederick the Great, the Mennonites came prosperous. Appreciated by the king for their industry they had multiplied and increased their land amounted to over 50,000 acres in Prussia alone. In 1786, the new ruler feared that these extensive lands of a non-resistant group like the Mennonites would not have enough for the state of Prussia would not have enough for the country. The result was that they were forbidden to trade and were even asked to decrease their land. Trades and professions were mostly forbidden.