

THE THIESSEN FAMILY

The Thiessen family name is common among Mennonites of Prusso-Russian background. According to B. H. Unruh, the name "Thyess" which later became Thiessen (Thiesen, Tiessen, Tyssen, Tieszen) occurred in 1569; a teacher by this name lived on the West Frisian island of Texel off the coast of The Netherlands. Reimer claims that the name Thiessen was common among the Flemish Mennonites.¹

Our family immigrated from Prussia in 1805² settling in the Mennonite village of Muntau, a Molotschna colony. Here Peter (b 1769)³ and his family took possession of a complete farm of 65 desjatin.

On the list of the Molotschna colony of 1806, Peter and Margarete gave their place of origination as Neulanghorst or Gardenkampe, Gross Werder in Prussia.⁴ Because immigration from West Prussia was at times forbidden by the government, people went first to Danziger Werder and from there immigration to Russia was permitted.

Our great-great-grandfater Peter (1798-1881)⁵ was born in Danziger Werder (before the immigration to Russia) along with the two brothers for which we have a record.

Peter grew up in the Molotschna village of Muntau and married Elizabeth Giesbrecht there on October 12, 1820.⁶ She was the daughter of Gerhard Giesbrecht (b 1734) and his second wife Susanna Heyde (b 1764).⁷ She and her parents had immigrated to Russia in 1803 from Lakendorf, Gross Werder, Prussia.

What little is known of the children of Peter and Elizabeth is found in the journal of our great-grandfather John P. Thiessen. John was the ninth child of Peter and Elizabeth and born on May 20, 1839⁸ in Muntau. He married Anna from the village of Schönau on November 11, 1860.⁹

The first eight children of John and Anna were born in Muntau. At the time of the birth of their ninth child they were enroute to America and staying at the home of Anna's uncle, Isaac Thiessen, younger brother of her father, in Rosenhof, Ekaterinoslofs Government, South Russia. Here their child was born on July 3, 1874; they named him Isaac.¹⁰

The family left Russia when Isaac was 11 days old on July 14, 1874.¹¹ They departed Liverpool on the ship China and arrived in New York on August 29, 1874.¹² From there they traveled by train to Mountain Lake, Minnesota where they made their home by a creek about 3-1/2 miles from town. The house has since been destroyed by fire but the barn is still standing.

Anna lived just a short time in this country. She died after a severe and hard illness of 15 weeks at the age of 35 years on September 1, 1876¹³ and is buried there on the family farm along with her infant son who died on November 7, 1876.¹⁴

Anna, born April 17, 1841,¹⁵ was the daughter of Peter and Margaretha (Iriesen) Thiessen. Her father's family was originally from Holland, immigrating to Prussia and from there to Russia in the late 1700's where he was born in the Molotschna colony of Rosenort in 1808.¹⁶