

Margaretha Friesen was the daughter of Abraham von Riesen-Friesen and Katherine (Wiebe). Abraham and his wife gave their home as Kalte Herberge, Gross Werder at the time of their immigration to Russia in 1802 to the settlement of Orloff.¹⁷ Their families were both originally from Holland and had emigrated from there to Danzig, Prussia; and then, responding to the Russian government's invitation to the Mennonites, immigrated to Orloff, a Molotschna settlement in south Russia.

Abraham's father, also named Abraham, and his mother Margaretha (Wiebe) also emigrated from Kalte Herberge, Gross Werder, taking the same route to Orloff in 1805.¹⁸ Both of the von Riesen families changed their name to Friesen before immigrating to Russia, according to the family story, because the Russian government disallowed names of descendants of emperors.¹⁹ However, both the Stumpp and Unruh books show von Riesens immigrating to Russia; though it is a fact that these particular people did enter Russia using the name Friesen as did several other von Riesen families.

John needed help after the death of his wife Anna. He had six children to care for - Peter 14, Margareta 11, Abraham 8, Jacob 7, David 4, Isaac 2, and the youngest Johann who was just 4-1/2 months old when his mother died. Helena, the 17 year old daughter of his neighbors Johann and Anna (Buller) Ratzlaff, came to take care of the household duties. The Ratzlaff family emigrated from Waldheim in Russia. They took the ship S.S. Vaderland out of Antwerp arriving in Philadelphia on July 28, 1876.²⁰

Helena was a good worker and John asked her to become his wife. They were married on October 29, 1876.²¹ The next years they continued to live on the farm there in Minnesota where twelve more children were added to the family. John's health was not always good so in April of 1900 he moved his family to Richmond, Texas where he purchased some 300 acres of land and built a new three-story house for his family.

The Galveston Hurricane of September 1900 destroyed their house which they rebuilt. Their last son Herman was born here in Richmond in 1902.

Most of the Mennonites moved away from the Richmond area, including the Thiessen family who moved to Oklahoma in 1908. They settled on a farm west of Gotebo where they lived for quite a few years.

Helena became ill and was taken to the Gaede Sanitorium in Weatherford, Oklahoma and from there to her daughter Lena's home. John and Helena were both cared for here - Lena, John, Anna and George cared for their parents until their death, taking the nursing duties in shifts. John was 87 years old when he died on October 28, 1926.²² Helena preceded him in death by six weeks on September 16, 1926. They are both buried in Corn.