

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 purchased land and built 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 (Friesen) 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

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. On July 13, 1885²² John became a naturalized citizen of the United States of America, renouncing his allegiance to the Czar of Russia Alexander III in the District Court of Cottonwood County, Minnesota.