Chapter 1: Schulwiese to Rosenwald

The last great settlement of Mennonites in West Prussia was made in the Stuhm marshes in 1724. The land was chiefly meadow, which the Mennonites now began to cultivate and on which they lived on their scattered individual farms, with cattle and provisions under one roof with the residence. The occasion for the settlement of these marshes was the return of the Mennonites from Lithuania, who had lived there since 1713, but had to leave the Memel Lowlands in 1724 on account of mandatory military service.

Tragheimerweide was situated in the district (Kreis) of Stuhm until the end of World War I, when it came under the jurisdiction of the German province of East Prussia. On 10 November 1724, representatives of the Grosswerder sold two-thirds of Tragheimerweide to Salomon Becher and Jacob Jantzen for 2,200 Prussian guilders for the refugees. In the same year, 14 hides of Rudnerweide were transferred to Mennonites coming from the Tilsit marshes, who were trying to evade Friedrich Wilhelm’s recruiters for the “regiment of giants.” Other meadowlands (Schweingrube, Zwanzigerweide, Montauerweide, Zieglershuben, Klein Schardau, and Gross Schardau) were sold to Mennonites in these years, with the result that in the second quarter of the 18th century a closed Mennonite settlement came into being. The settlers for the most part came from the Montau and Schönsee congregations.

The young congregation, belonging to the Frisian branch and called the Stuhm Lowlands congregation or Schweingrube, went through a severe crisis in its first years (1733-1779). When the Frisian congregations in West Prussia at that time wanted to abolish marriages with Catholics and Lutherans, three members of Tragheimerweide living at Rosenkranz set up violent opposition, and with their follow-

Klein Schardau was situated 21 km. southwest of Marienburg (Malbork); Schulwiese was an-
Klein Schardau was situated adjacent to this canal, on the left.

These lowlands were/are laced with canals such as this, many constructed by Mennonites, thus draining the land into the Vistula River, making valuable farmland available.

It was here that Andreas Neumann owned land, possibly this same piece.
other 1.5 km. south-west of Klein Schardau. Therefore, Klein Schardau and Schulwiese, both places of residence for our Neumann ancestors, were situated within a short walk of each other, and within the administrative district of Stuhm, in what became known as West Prussia after partition in 1772.

The ‘Neumann’ surname does not appear in any of the sparse Lithuanian records from before 1724. It does not appear among the list of those expelled from Lithuania and given aid by the Dutch Mennonites. Several Lutheran and Catholic families joined the Mennonites in Lithuania (such as Schapansky, Niebuhr/Neubauer and possibly Falk). It is possible that this is also where the Neumanns came from. The problem is that this is a time period where there are very few records (mostly land leases and other name lists, without much genealogical information).

The parentage of Andreas Neumann (our earliest known ancestor), are currently unknown. However, we do know that there were a few Mennonite Neumanns before him. The earliest was Christoph Neumann, who died in Danzig in 1723. No one knows where he came from and he appears to have had only daughters. So he seems to have been the first and last of his line in that Mennonite group. These Danzig Neumanns belonged to the Flemish church and our Neumann ancestors were Frisian members of the Tragheimerweide church. About a decade or two later the name appears in the area of the Tragheimerweide congregation. A membership list of 1737 gives a Johann Nieman. In 1742 Andreas and Marianna Neumann are among those Mennonite families who rented the village of Rudnerweide. In 1744 Johann and Andreas Neumann are listed in Klein Schardau. So as far as parentage is concerned, likely possibilities are Johann or Andreas, or possibly

Source: Mennonite Historical Atlas, William Schroeder
Abraham, as someone has suggested. No hard data exists to substantiate that suggestion.

Our ancestor, Andreas Neumann, was born in 1735, in Schulwiese, Marienwerder, Prussia. Records indicate that five men with the Neumann surname - Abraham, Andreas, David, Hans, and Peter - lived and died in this vicinity, and that David and Abraham each had 6 and 9 Morgen of land, respectively. It is not possible to say at this point that they were brothers, however, given the small Mennonite population, it is quite possible that they were related, if not brothers.

The 1776 Prussian census lists 17 Mennonite families in Klein Schardau with the following surnames: Albrecht, Becher, Block, Ewert, Jantzen, Kliwer, Neumann, Nickel, Penner, Schmidt, Tiahrt, Voldt, and Wichert. In fact, Andreas Neumann is the only Neumann listed in that census; three other Neumann contemporaries were not yet married, and therefore would not have been listed as separate families. It does raise the question of who his parents might be; why are they not listed?

In 1824, Mennonites held 17 properties in Klein Schardau, and in 1885, Klein Schardau was inhabited by 26 Catholics, 32 Evangelicals, and 69 Mennonites. Mennonites who were residents of Klein Schardau and Schulwiese, were members of the Tragheimerweide Mennonite Church.

With respect to our Neumann ancestors, there may also be merit in the explanation that they were newly-‘converted’ Lutherans or Catholics, and hence, the Neumann surname does not appear in Mennonite church record books prior to 1737. This would not however, explain their absence from the 1776 census.

Andreas to Heinrich Dietrich

Andreas Neumann (b. 1735) married Margaretha Abrams, of Klein Schardau, Stuhm, Prussia around 1764, based on the birth date of their first child. They appear to have moved there after their first child’s birth, according to the records, which also indicate that this was where Andreas died in 1808. They too were landowners, owning 4 Morgen of land, and they had six children – all sons.

David Andreas Neumann was their fifth child, born 23 February, 1783. In 1815, David married Katharina Foth of Insel Kueche, Marienwerder, Prussia. After their third child, in early 1819, they immigrated to Russia; his passport is dated September 14, 1819. They had no cash, but brought possessions valued at 330 rubles, 45 kopeks, 1 wagon, no horses, one head of cattle; the wagon and head of cattle cost 126 rubles. The local administration suggested providing financial aid for the purchase of two horses and one head of cattle at a sum of 155 rubles, and also for building a house and establishing the household, at a sum of 589 rubles. They settled in #4, Village of Marienthal, Molotschna Colony, where they had two more children.

While still in Prussia, David Andreas Neumann fathered our ancestor, David David Neumann, born out of wedlock in Klein Schardau on 23 September, 1816, to Sara Dahl. Sara Dahl and son, David David Neumann, emigrated to Russia ten years later, in 1829. The 1835 Molotschna census lists her living with David, at the home of Gerhard Peter Schroeder, #5 Marienthal, next door to David’s father, David Andreas Neumann. So even though David and his mother, Sara, emigrated later, they took up residence in Ukraine, next door to David’s father.

David David Neumann married Katharina Goossen in 1838, in Halbstadt, Molotschna, South
Russia. They had four children: Katharina, Johann, Dietrich David, and Maria. Katharina immigrated to the United States in 1908, with her husband Jakob Toews. David David Neumann died 28 July, 1855, in Halbstadt, at the age of 38. Katharina married Erhard Wall four years later.

Son, Dietrich David Neumann was born December 13, 1852, in Halbstadt, three years before his father passed away. He married Katharina Bergen in 1879, in Konteniusfeld, Molotschna, and together, they had 12 children. At least two children are recorded as having been born in Sparrau, Molotschna, including our ancestor, Heinrich Dietrich. Dietrich David and his wife are both recorded as having died in Rosenwald, Barnaul, Asiatic Russia; Dietrich in 1913 and Katharina in 1921.

Between Halbstadt, Molotschna and Rosenwald, Siberia, Dietrich David Neumann spent some years in both Sparrau and in the village of Kamishovoje, Orenburg. When he arrived in Orenburg is not clear, but it is known that Molotschna Mennonites began establishing eight villages here in 1895, south and east of the Chortitza settlers. Dietrich David Neumann was a teacher in Sparrau and in Orenburg. He was physically handicapped due to poliomyelitis, which may explain his choice of occupation, which paid a modest remuneration. His oldest son, Heinrich Dietrich, worked as an indentured labourer for other farmers.

The initial years were most difficult – long winters, frequent thefts by surrounding people, poor soil and frequent crop failures. Many Orenburgers joined others from Ukraine in 1907-08, to establish new settlements in Siberia.

In 1906, Heinrich Neumann and another man, by the name of Hiebert, initiated a meeting to con-

Dietrich David Neumann is recorded as having lived in Kamyshovoje until 1908, when he and his family moved to the Barnaul settlement in Siberia.

Martin Loewen, future husband of yet-to-be born Sara Neumann, lived in the nearby village of Pretoria, where the Loewens lived until their emigration one month before the Neumanns, in 1926.
Consider the offer of free land in the newly-established Barnaul Settlement in Siberia. This group of landless Orenburg residents sent delegates to join representatives from other colonies to secure land. They secured free land, reduced railroad fares, start-up loans, and exemption from taxes!

In 1908, Dietrich David Neumann moved his family eastward, to the Barnaul Colony in Siberia. Heinrich Dietrich Neumann (1885-1955) was baptized in Orenburg in 1908, and married the next year in Siberia, to Sara Wiebe (1890 - 1958), whose family too, had moved to the Barnaul Colony the previous year, from the Chortitza Colony. This gives us the only indication of when the move was made.

**Barnaul Settlement**

The Barnaul Settlement was located in the Kulundian Steppes between the Irtysh and the Ob rivers in West Siberia, a part of the USSR in the Altai Territory (formerly Tomsk). The settlement was at first called Barnaul, since this was the only city in the area at the time of the settlement in 1907. In 1911, when the city of Slavgord was established ten miles from the settlement, the settlement took this name.

The initial settlement of 36 villages grew to 58 by 1925. The initial villages had 20-30 farmsteads, with about 40-50 hectares per farm. Agriculture was the economic backbone of the colony, but industry soon developed as well. By the end of 1921, the total Mennonite population was 14,890.

**‘A Horse and Camel Age’**

Early in their married life, Heinrich and Sara lived in Slavgorod⁴, and that is where their four oldest children were born. When Heinrich was conscripted into the military during the war, Sarah Neumann and children moved in with her parents, the Wiebes, in Gruenfeld. Heinrich was able to return home for some visits during his time of service in the military. Upon Heinrich’s return after the war, he purchased a farm in Rosenwald, which was about 3-4 miles from Gruenfeld.

Dietrich Neumann had named the village Rosenwald when the Mennonites first arrived there, owing to some roses growing in the centre of what was to become the village. The village had a “V” shape to it as the buildings were situated to keep the roses intact. This shape prevails in the historic atlas. Here the family lived until their departure for Canada in 1926.

Although Rosenwald is not found on the map, it is included as one of 26 villages that constituted the Orloff municipality of the Slavgorod settlement in 1920. In fact, an error in the map exists, in that Rosenfeld is actually Rosenwald.

In his memoirs, David Neumann describes that time as “a horse and camel age”. Their house was typical of most Mennonite homes built during those years.

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The first airplane ever to fly over Rosenwald was seen by only David. His accounting of the event, to his siblings, was greatly embellished; he described it as a big bird sailing across the sky and occasionally flapping its wings. When they discovered the truth, next day, his story became the most hilarious family joke. David writes, “It took me some time to recover from this psychological debacle”.

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Caption reads: “Siberian Sledding—Peter Janzens of Rosenwald”

*Heinrich Neumann and family likely rode in a sled much like this one, as Janzen was a contemporary of Heinrich Neumann.*
times, with a large oven in the middle that served the dual purpose of preparing food and heating the house, fueled by dried manure bricks.

In his memoirs, Dave Neumann provides a good description of life in Siberia:

Our life style was primitive to say the least. Those were pioneer years. Our dwelling place was shared with the farmyard animals and fowl. Chickens, geese, ducks, pigs, calves, horses and cows, pigeons and children, men and women, all under one roof with hay, straw and farm machinery to boot!

The building was made of sod. We would plow up a patch of virgin soil with a one-shear sulky plow. With a spade this sod was cut into approximately fifteen inch lengths. These almost square pieces of building material were roughly four inches thick. With these sod squares—4 x 15 x 15 inches, the walls were built. The roof was spanned with tamaric or the like and sod squares served as shingles. Warm? Oh yes! These dwellings were warm. No wind or frost could penetrate these fifteen inch walls. However, a combination of wind, water and what other elements there may be could combine and weaken the walls to the point where they might cave in. I remember our family awakening one morning and our gable was flattened, exposing the living quarters to public view.

After a winter’s accumulation of animal manure, it was processed into bricks measuring approximately 12” x 12” x 3”. They were dried and stacked for winter use. For light cooking, a ready supply of straw lay stacked nearby.

In winter, prematurely-born or sickly animals would be taken in and placed near the warm oven until their strength was sufficient to weather the colder temperatures of the barn.

Farming during the ‘famine years’ were challenging at best. Heinrich Neumann had one horse and one cow. He hitched the two together and plowed, and as a result, the cow no longer provided milk.

Jake Neumann describes their existence as one of “living in abject poverty until the last three years in Russia”. His parents had had no opportunity to accumulate wealth during the war nor in the years leading up to it. Heinrich Neumann started farming with next to nothing, recalls Jake. He was lucky to provide food and clothing for his family.

While some of their neighbours were completely without clothes, the Neumann children did not go without, even if their homemade clothes drew derision from friends at school. Heinrich Neumann manufactured cow-hide pants for his sons.

Jake Neumann described a typical Christmas as follows:

We travelled to our grandparents’ home in a covered sleigh through a terrible stormy day; the children were tucked away under a canvas. I recalled my first Christmas. I happened to see Santa Claus putting out gifts—it looked like my mother and her sister. I no longer believed in Santa Claus. Each child received a figurine and some cookies.

Church

No church existed in Rosenwald, but there was a Mennonite Brethren church about three miles away, should they want to attend. In fact, the Mennonite Church in the Barnaul settlement was divided into five districts, with Gruenfeld being one of them, but the Neumann family attended the Mennonite Brethren church. Heinrich’s roots were in the General Conference Mennonite Church, and wife, Sarah’s were in the Mennonite Brethren. Sara Loewen remembered going to church perhaps five times in her first 10 years. She did attend Sunday School regularly though, which was taught by a village teacher. She admits she had very little knowledge of what a Mennonite was. A local resident conducted weekly Sunday School for the village children in his home. David Neumann writes, “On the whole, I am left with the impression that spiritual emphasis was not a priority in our village.”
Notes:


2. Source: Dr. Glenn Penner, University of Guelph

3. 1 Morgen = 1.38 acres

4. There is some question about place of residence from 1908—1918. It has been commonly accepted that Heinrich Neumann’s family lived in Gruenfeld until 1918, when he purchased a farm in Rosenwald. Jake Neumann, however, indicates the four oldest were born in Slavgorod, and his childhood memories appear to bear that out. He remembers a town/city considerably larger than the village of Gruenfeld, and seeing his first automobile, which most likely was not in Gruenfeld. Furthermore, when Heinrich was conscripted in 1914, his family moved into a barn on the property of Sara’s parents. If they already lived in Gruenfeld, why would they leave their home and move into a barn on Sarah’s parents’ property? Two children are recorded as being born in Gruenfeld during this time, when the family was living with the Wiebes.

Part of the confusion around the Wiebe’s village of residence is the fact that records indicated Schoental as the place of death. This village lay several kilometres immediately north of Gruenfeld, but being Mennonite Brethren, and since the MB Church was located in Schoental, their church records would have been with the church in that village.

Source: Mennonite Historical Atlas, William Schroeder
Note: Error on original map indicates “Rosenfeld” where “Rosenwald” should be labelled.