

The 1835 Census: a New Genealogical Stepping Stone

I still remember the surge of excitement I felt last year when I first heard that a significant collection of Mennonite records had been uncovered in the Ukrainian archives at Odessa. The fires of my excitement were stoked even further when Dr. Harvey Dyck, Professor of Russian History at the University of Toronto, reported that one of the prize documents in this find was the 1835 Revision List—or census—of the Molotschna Colony. Mennonite genealogists around the world are now waiting for the publication of this census, hoping that it will “bridge the gap” that has hindered so many efforts to trace the history of families through the turbulent years of Mennonite life in Russia.

The lack of available records covering this relatively short period in Russia has stymied virtually every researcher at one time or another. The resulting frustration is made worse due to the many tantalizing—and easily accessible—records that cover the earlier generations of these same Russian Mennonites when they lived in their former homeland in Prussia.

The preliminary reports regarding the 1835 census indicate that it truly is a genealogist's delight, and promises to give many Mennonite researchers the long-awaited means to stretch their family histories across the Russian years, and back to the earlier home in Prussia. The census is still unpublished, but some researchers have already scanned microfilm copies, and their first impressions are very exciting. Several excerpts from the census have already appeared in a handful of family histories, and others will certainly be appearing as time goes by. We hope the promised full translation of the census will soon be published, giving everyone access to this amazing resource.

The census itself is contained in a bound volume with more than a thousand pages. The original text is handwritten in Russian, but the added marginal comments and notes are largely in German. As far as we can tell, the census covers the entire Molotschna Colony, and has listings for all the villages that existed there at that time.

The census uses as a reference point an earlier census taken in 1816, which was apparently the last census recorded prior to 1835. Unfortunately, this earlier census was not among the documents discovered in Odessa. The 1835 census lists the succession of owners that had resided at each *Wirtschaft*, or homestead, since the 1816 census. As a result, the census is more than just the customary “snapshot” of families at a point in time—it is also a moving picture of the successive residents of a village between 1816 and 1835.

The entries usually note the dates that owners moved in and out, thereby portraying a chronology of a family's migrations. Each entry generally gives the name of the village from which and to which the members of the families moved. By referring to the entries for those other villages, the researcher can often track a family from village to village. The census reveals that most young couples lived for some time, and had their first children, while living in their parents' homes. Only years later, presumably when they had the resources to support themselves, did they move out to form their own household.

In those households where a former owner died between 1816 and 1835, the year of death is often noted. If the widow of the

householder remarried, the record clearly indicates the names, and the father's name, of the stepchildren in the household. This is a significant improvement over the 1808 census recorded by B. H. Unruh. If the householder remarried, often there is even an identification of which children are by which wife. This will be a great help in unraveling the tangled relationships that most researchers confront due to the frequent deaths and remarriages that occurred in that inhospitable time.

The entries in the census are organized first by village, and then by the “number” of the homestead within each village. The full name of the head of household is given, which, under the Russian patronymic system, means that the first name of the father of each head of household is also stated. This is another wonderful byproduct of this census, often adding an additional generation to the pedigree chart.

Each entry also generally gives the year that the family migrated to Russia. This is a special bonus for those families that migrated to Russia after the 1808 census recorded by Unruh. His lists of immigrants after 1808 are quite sketchy, and this census provides a much better picture of the later immigrants to the Molotschna. These migration year notations alone will provide a rich resource for future scholarly research into the migration patterns of the Prussian Mennonites.

The census entry lists each person living in the household by name, age, and relationship to the head of household. On occasion, a person is listed without providing the relationship. Perhaps these isolated entries document the presence of a servant, foster child, more distant relative, or a “live-in” laborer. More research will be needed to identify these rare, but intriguing, entries.

An example of a census entry is the listing for Household #40 in the village of Sparrau. It records the following residents at that address:

David David Klassen	age 29
Agneta Klassen, his mother	age 53
Helena Klassen, his wife	age 27
David David Klassen, his son	age 1
Dietrich David Klassen, a brother	age 26
Maria Klassen, Dietrich's wife	age 23
David Dietrich Klassen, a son	age 3
Heinrich Dietrich Klassen, a son	age 1
Peter David Klassen, a brother	age 21
Barbara Klassen, a sister	age 18
Anna Klassen, a sister	age 16
Johann David Klassen, a brother	age 15
Jacob David Klassen, a brother	age 13

This entry records three generations of Klassen family members living at this address: Grandmother Agneta, the widow of David Klassen, her seven children David, Dietrich, Peter, Barbara, Anna, Johann, and Jacob; and the wives and children of her sons David and Dietrich.

Interestingly, this entry records the family of Johann Claassen, one of the eighteen founders of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and one of its foremost early leaders. He appears in the census entry as the fifteen-year-old brother, Johann David Klassen. Also listed is his older brother Dietrich, who also was one of the eighteen MB founders. This census entry provides the names of his parents (David and Agneta Klassen) and the names of a whole list of hitherto unknown brothers and sisters.

With this kind of information, many of us will find the precise information we need to uncover our own ancestors and their families. Keep your eyes open for the published texts of the census. It undoubtedly will be a valuable and informative resource for future family history research.

-Alan Peters

Fresno Pacific College (continued from page 2)

The main floor of the building is composed of an entrance hall, three classrooms, a library, kitchen, dining room, store room for foods and a service porch and bath room. Upstairs there are seven rooms occupied by eighteen girls and the matron, two bath rooms with tub and shower.

The contents of the building consists of the following: 50 classroom desk chairs, sixty folding chairs. Four teachers' desks with were donated, two large study tables in the library, 200 books were purchased, some donated, others loaned, two pianos were purchased. Eighteen beds, springs and mattresses, 12 dressers, 4 chiffonniers, three large dining tables, twenty-four chairs, one overstuffed set, three extra overstuffed chairs, one large refrigerator, an electric dishwasher, a large cook stove and numerous smaller articles. These were all included in the original purchase price of the building. Cooking utensils, dishes and silverware were purchased.

We thank God and all persons who made these things possible.

Peter A. Enns, presentation at the symposium "The U.S. Mennonite Brethren Board of Education, 1954-1979: A Ten-year Retrospect," Fresno, Calif., 5-7 April 1989.

I became interested in Pacific Bible Institute during the 1940s when I was managing Mr. P. K. Warkentin's farms. Two or three years into my farm management tenure, Mr. Warkentin donated approximately \$31,000 to [Pacific Bible Institute]. This amount represented the balance owed by the Institute on the [Tuolumne Street] Administration building. . . . Mr. Warkentin got into some difficulty for making such a large contribution at one time. There were leading brethren in the Mennonite Brethren Pacific District who questioned the motive and, I believe, were somewhat suspicious: how could a Christian and specifically a Mennonite Brethren Christian make that much money in one year and have enough left over to purchase additional farms in the Reedley area?

Being Mr. Warkentin's manager and being a party to the earning of his money, I became interested in this controversy. I also became interested in the affairs of Pacific Bible Institute. . . .

In 1950 I was elected as a member of the Pacific District Conference Board of Trustees and was the treasurer of the Board the first five years. By virtue of my office as a Trustee of the

Conference, I was also a member of the Pacific Bible Institute Board of Directors.

During the early stages of my tenure as a trustee and as a member of the Directorate, issues presented themselves which I did not fully understand. Mr. A. A. Schroeter, the Chairman of the Trustees, was very knowledgeable and definitive. He could explain them. He would often answer a difficult question by saying . . . "I checked this out with legal counsel." Since Mr. Schroeter used the same legal counsel that I used, I asked Mr. Paul Eymann at one occasion about some of those responses. He explained that Mr. Schroeter was very careful to check with legal counsel often, but that did not necessarily mean that he always accepted legal counsel advice.

I also examined the P.B.I. catalog, [and] I could find only one upper division course, and that was "counterpoint." I never did get it through my head how this could qualify the school to offer a fifth-year degree. Also the school was giving credit for Bonehead English. This was not a very popular discovery for a Berkeley graduate.

Another item of interest that puzzled me a great deal was the method that the School Administrator used to get the college accredited. The President would inform us that he was working diligently on this matter, but that it would require him to make another trip to Chicago. After several trips, I believe we all realized accreditation was an elusive goal.

I also remember that a requirement for accreditation was that the school must have a vault. On one occasion a Mr. Penner and I had a 24-hour deadline to meet to build a vault. We were instructed to drill holes into the foundation wall and take a large piece of concrete out. Then we would have a vault. We worked hard and long hours. We could not even get our drill through those very thick walls, let alone a chunk of concrete out to make room for a vault. I sometimes wonder whether those drilled holes are still in the building. Another failed attempt toward accreditation. . . .

My observation in 1954 was that the college had approximately 67 disgruntled students as well as several disgruntled teachers. If I remember correctly, the school operated on approximately a \$25,000 annual budget at the time. . . .

When the General Conference accepted the Pacific Bible Institute as its school, it took over the operation of the school but not the physical assets. These assets continued to belong to the Pacific District. So the West Area Committee [of the Board of Education] began to negotiate with the Pacific District Trustees to find a way to purchase land for a new campus on the West Coast.

The Trustees of the Pacific District found a cotton farm southeast of Fresno, consisting of approximately 53 acres located on Butler and Chestnut avenues. Mr. Jones owned this property. . . . Mr. Jones offered to sell the 53 acres at \$3,000 per acre plus 5% interest on the unpaid balance payable in 5 years. Mr. Jones gave me a piece of scratch paper on which he had scribbled the terms and his signature. I took this paper to the Trustee meeting and also the next Board of Education meeting in Hillsboro. The trustees developed a plan. It was something like this:

1. Subdivide a portion of the property into residential lots—approximately 81 lots;
2. Reserve 3 acres on the corner of Butler and Winery for a church, now known as the Butler Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church; and