

#11

From The Mennonite Historian June 1990 p. 10

The Prussian Mennonite Emigration: A Letter to the Family

Translated and edited by Lawrence Klippenstein

This letter was written by Maria Born, nee Wiebe, earlier Mrs. Ens.[1] It was copied from a document in the State Archives in Danzig, Section 117, Tiegenhof No. 881, located in the original files of Zeyers-Vorder Kampen, page 12. The document was first reprinted in Der Bote No. 15 (April 12, 1939), 5, and reappeared in Mitteilungen des Sippenverbandes der Danziger Mennoniten Familien EppKauenhowen-Zimmermann VII, No. 5 (October, 1941), 132-133. The document was submitted for publication by Franz Harder.

My dear children, It would be the deepest desire of my heart that this simple letter would find you, my dear children, in good health. Thank God we are well. I have received your letter of 5 August 1788, and note that you are well. For that we are thankful. You have said that you would like to follow us if! tell our destination. This I would gladly do, but I can offer you nothing due to your circumstances, of which you are fully aware. But I would like to tell my daughter Maria that she may come as soon as she is able, and in whatever way possible. My dear daughter Maria, do come, if you would like to, perhaps with Peter Neufeld. That would be your best way, but do inquire about it first. I am living at Solovii [2], three Russian miles (wersts- ed.) from Dubrovna. My family is with me there. We are living together with many other families on a large estate. My situation though is quite distressing. God has permitted a great separation in my life. He has taken my dear husband from me.¹ He arrived here shortly after we had come from Riga, then became sick, and was in bed for fourteen days with Putatschen [typhoid]. He departed from this world on 13 September 1788, at 4:30a.m. to enter eternity. On the 17th he was buried at Solovii in an honorable way according to the customs of our country. The trip from Riga to Dubrovna has gone well so far. Magdalena and Anna did get very sick while travelling, and Anna is still very sick. Thank God, the rest of us are well. You, my dear children, have written me about the purchase money. I want to pass that on to you. Do give my greetings to my brother H. Wiebe, and to H. Penner, the present owner of the property. Ask them that the rest of the money be given to the children. Otherwise do not be too concerned about my situation, thinking that it may be difficult because I am in a foreign country. I am quite well, and have really nothing to complain about. It would not be honouring God or the gracious Empress if! were to do so. We know that things are fine here in Russia, no matter what the dollards (dumme Pöbel) may jealously say against Russia. Let them beware that they do not devour themselves in so doing. We are living in peace here, are not charged for living expenses, and may get our wood from the forest as we need it. We may also feed our horses on the pasture. I can tell you that I am better off now than if I were with you. They would surely be after me there. Jacob Hoepfner, the deputy, is my guardian. He has promised to see that I get anything I need, and to do what is best for me at all times. If you were as well off as I am, no one would need to go to bed hungry. I must close now. Please give my greetings to my brothers and sisters. I wish all of you would be treated as well as I am. If you want to enjoy what I have, then you may follow me. I give overall of you to God's care and peace. I remain, till death may part us, your loving mother

Maria Born

Solovii at Dubrovna,² 22 October 1788

P.S. I would also like to send warmest greetings to Peter Isaac, guardian of my two children. I am wondering if it will be possible to get the money for them. Could you send me an answer to this by return mail? I will give you the address to which you should send the letter. Address it to The Most Honored Baron von Macolotschy, care of Jacob Hoepfner at Dubrovna, to be forwarded to Mrs. Born. Send it with Mr. H. Penner at Langenzug Campe. A letter from Solovii.

Endnotes

'Her husband's name was Isaac. His death date is listed as September 9, 1788, B.H. Unruh, Die niederlandisch-niederdeutsche Hintergrunde der Mennonitischen Ostwanderungen (1955), 291. Maria later married Isaak Woelke with whom she may have lived in Chortitza after 1794, and later also in Einlage. Cf. Marianne Janzen, "The First Mennonite Settlers in Russia (1789)," unpublished manuscript, MHCA, 14.

²Dubrovna (the Russian spelling was Dubrovno) was a regular stop-over for all the immigrant groups. It was located on the Dnieper River, which made it possible to ship goods downstream to Chortitza

Notes added by Glenn Penner:

1. She is #196376 in the GRANDMA genealogical database. Her daughters Maria, Magdalena and Anna have not yet been identified.
2. Solovii is now known as Solawye, Belarus, which is about 11 km (7 miles) west by southwest of Dubrovna. This former estate is located at 54.599218 by 30.501264. See the Google Earth screenshot below. She mentions that there were many families living on this estate. Was this estate the base for the Mennonite immigrants of 1787-90? If so who owned it?

