

Hi Samantha,

June 2, 2019 (April letter)

This letter provides a continuation of the Marie and Jacob (your great-great-great-grandparents) story from my previous letter. As in that letter, water and dams play an important role in their lives – even after their deaths.

The story relies on various bits of information we have from my grandfather (Peter J. Reimer – your great-great grandfather) and some other items that turned up as I explored material on the web. Some of it raises a number of questions and mysteries that are very intriguing.

We know, for example, that at the age of 10 both of Marie's parents died. She was sent to a foster family (as was the common practice at the time) and her brother Peter, three years her younger, was sent to a different family. According to my grandfather, Marie was not well treated by her adoptive family, whereas Peter seemed to fare quite well—not only doing well within his adoptive family, but later, when he became a successful person as he moved into adulthood. At one point he went into business with Jacob – when they built a liquor store in Neuenberg (see <http://billreimer.net/personal/documents/PJReimerHisStory3.pdf>).

The other part of the story, concerns the nature of their parents' death. We know they both died at the same time but there were hints that the circumstances of their death were somehow tragic, and might have been shameful to the community. The first hint came when my grandfather was telling the story to his daughter, and insisted that she keep part of the story secret from the family, or at least some of the members of the family. In spite of this warning, his daughter Elsie, did follow up on the issue and provides us with some of the documents that tell a little bit more about their deaths, although it leaves a great many questions to intrigue us.

Some of the stories from Elsie's point of view can be found in envelope 44 that is part of the materials I photocopied to the Reimer USB.

As I was conducting my Internet exploration, I also came across a diary produced by Jacob D. Epp from the region, and during the same period of time covered by this story (1851-1880). It has been translated and published, or at least sections have been published that give us a wonderful idea of what life was like during those days and some of the events that occurred among the villages and in the colony. I have an electronic copy if you would like to look at it.

Lohrenz, G., & Friesen, J. J. (Eds.). (1989). *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988: Essays in honour of Gerhard Lohrenz*. Winnipeg, Man: C M B C Pubns.

One of the most intriguing is an entry for a particular day where the author mentions the gruesome discovery of two people in the following terms.

“January 28, 1880 Some two weeks ago a grisly incident was discovered in the Khortitsa colony of Schöneberg, where the Andreas Schmidt couple were found dead. The woman was in the porch and the man in the implement shed with his throat slit and a rope around his neck. The children were still asleep in their beds. What a terrible suicide. The reason for this gruesome deed is still not known. May God have mercy on these poor misguided souls.”

This account is interesting and mysterious in a number of ways. First of all, it seems strange that mention is made of the woman being found on the porch, and the man in one of the outbuildings—

hanged but with his throat cut. The author identifies the situation as a suicide. What is strange to me, is how a suicide could involve hanging and the cutting of throat. I haven't yet checked the original source and done some work on the translation to verify that this is a representation consistent with the original document. That will be one area of investigation to which I am looking forward.

In any case, we now have a mystery regarding the death of two of our ancestors.

Maria and Jacob lived long lives. They were part of the migration of the Reimers to Canada in 1900 and not only participated in the establishment of their household in Manitoba and Saskatchewan but

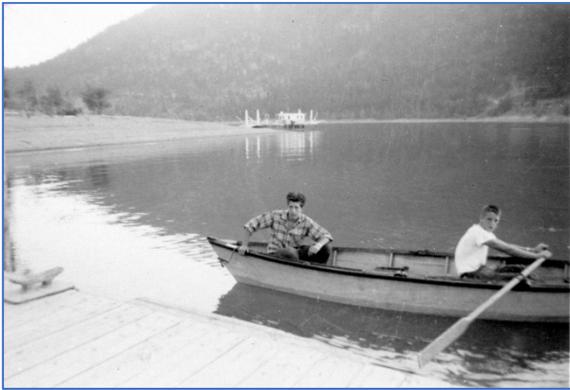


*Maria (Schmidt) Reimer*



*Jacob Reimer - in his forestry uniform*

eventually settled in British Columbia in the small town of Renata. I remember visiting their orchard when I was a young boy—sleeping in an old school bus that had been converted into a dormitory for the seasonal orchard workers (see photo), hiking up to the waterfall that supplied water to the town, fishing in the lake, and hanging out with Uncle Jake and Aunt Marie (as they were called when I was a boy).



*Pete and Bill at Renata, 1959*



Renata was subsequently flooded when the government built the Arrow dam. Maria remarried Mr. Epp from Renata when Jacob died, but Marie and Jacob are buried together under the water at Renata. When the dam was being prepared, the gravesites at Renata were poured completely over with concrete in order to prevent the bodies from floating to the top of the new lake once the water had risen.

So we see that once again the management of water and the construction of dams played as significant part in their lives not only with respect to their getting together but also in their burial and death. I continue to enjoy the thought of young Maria bringing soup to Jacob so many years ago.

Love,