MENNONITE LIFE IN VOLHYNIA, 1800-1874

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In Work Paper, No. 25 *Jacob B. Janz provided a detailed account of Fischau, a Molotschna village which employed him as its teacher in 1909. He also compiled a second document in which he explored his own family background. Janz simply tried to ascertain the essential character of the economic, social, cultural, and religious life of his predecessors. In the process of satisfying his own curiosity he produced a unique account of the Ostrog Mennonite settlement in Russia.*

Initially the Ostrog villagers belonged to the mainstream of Dutch-North German-Prussian Mennonite migration. They were among the first to leave Prussia in 1791 when its militarism threatened to curtail the expression of their pacifist convictions. A small group colonized the village of Michalin, southwest of Kiev, an area then belonging to Poland. The Second Partition of Poland in 1793 placed the region under Russian control. This settlement which survived until 1874 in turn supplied people for a new colonization site near the city of Ostrog. The first group left in 1802 and founded the village of Karolswalde. By 1823 two daughter colonies, Antonovka and Meseritski, were founded. In 1828 another village, Karolsberg, was established. Three later villages appear to have been Fürstendorf, Jadvinin and Fürstental. Some thirty kilometers west of the Ostrog villages, another group of migrants founded Waldheim and Dossidorf. The inhabitants of these two villages left for the Molotscha Mennonite colony ground 1836-37 and the villages were settled by Swiss Mennonites.

Janz's narrative focuses upon Karolswalde, the Ostrog village in which his forefathers lived. He judiciously records the memories of his father and grandfather. A lively portrait of nineteenth century village life emerges. Karolswalde farms for instance, when compared with those in the Ukraine, were small. Long hours of hard work added little to the villager's possessions and generally homes and farmyards remained modest. There was little innovation in agriculture. In spring, according to Janz's account, a single share plow drawn by two horses turned the soil. Crops were sewn by hand. In fall the grain was cut with a sickle, bound into sheaves and threshed with the flail. Crop yields barely met basic needs. Food stuffs were simple: brown bread, soup, and potatoes. Everyday clothes were home spun and hand sewn. Benjamin Tobias Janz to whom the manuscript refers, could only send his children to school for one year. At best they might learn to read. Culturally and intellectually life in Karolswalde centered on a small, self-contained community, which developed its own folkways. These tended to become sacrosanct. In this setting the elder of the local congregation was central to the preservation of Christian morality and public order. Appeals against his decisions to civil authorities were rarely successful. The community, aside from its elder, was also inherently conservative and did not feel frustrated by the confines of its own norms. In such a setting social and cultural innovation was virtually out of the question.

Karolswalde nevertheless had its own particular appeal. Its piety, though encompassed by formalized religion, reflected a steadfast faith and joy in living. One senses a love for the land. There is a certain romance about the settlement – the horse and plow; the sower spreading his seed; the swing of the sickle, the binding of the sheaves, the blow of the flail. The reader senses a profound understanding of life's basic issues; contentment with little, the small joys, the routine tasks. These were virtues in Karolswalde which prosperous Mennonite cousins in the Chortitza and Molotschna settlements, concerned with land acquisition and large scale farming, had long forgotten.

About 1540, a group of Dutch Mennonites moved to the vicinity of Schwetz (now District Marienburg), in West Prussia (which used to be part of Poland), and settled at Przechoka, the estate of a Polish nobleman. After having lived there for more than 200 years, the larger segment of the congregation was forced to seek a new place for settling, because of the oppression of the estate owner. In 1764, thirty-two families left the estate and went to Brandenburg, or Neumark, where they settled under very favorable conditions on the estate of a nobleman named Franz von Brenkenhof. In the vicinity of the town Driesen they established several villages, Brenkenhofswalde and Franztal among them. They were expected to drain the swampy soil and make it arable. Faced with hard work, poverty, and the fevers which were prevalent in such an environment, they were nevertheless eminently successful in their endeavor. But when the battle with the elements was won, and splendid farmlands took the place of the swamp, the attitude of the authorities as

well as the citizens changed from forbearance to enmity. It was a case of: "The Moor has done his work —now let him decamp." So they were again forced to continue their quest for a dwelling place.

In their need Russia seemed the sought-for refuge, since it offered special privileges to the Mennonites. The emigration from Schwetz and Driesen started in 1802. They went singly and in groups. The first emigrants went through Austria. Though they tried to settle immediately after crossing the border, it was not until they came to the estate of the nobleman Karol Jablonovsky in the province of Volhynia, that they finally found a resting place at Ostrog. Conditions must have been very bad in their old home, for they left to go to a strange country in search of a new home without any definite destination or fixed terms.

Count Jablonovsky must have been a nobleman indeed because he offered them very favorable terms. For each dessiatine of arable land they paid 90 *shagiv* (45 kopeks) and for every dessiatine of pasture or hay 120 *shagiv*. For the first settlement they received free building material from the estate forests; each home-owner received the necessary cordwood for heating, which he had to cut and haul himself, for the annual payment of four rubles. Any lumber which they needed beyond that could be had for the sum of one ruble per log, which when cut up yielded three lengths of boards or beams, each measuring eighteen feet. If a man wanted to cut cordwood for sale in town, he paid fifteeen kopeks per load.

The land was good, and bordered on the Vilna River. There was also a canal running through the area. The soil appeared productive. Since the situation looked promising contracts were signed and settlement began. In honor of their new master the first village was called Karolswalde. It was situated five versts from Ostrog. In order that each farmer have his land close to his home, it consisted of a row of about thirty single farmsteads, separated from each other by wooden fences. The farms were surveyed in such a way that each farm contained part of the higher ground suitable for agriculture, and part of the lowland, used for pasture and hay. The individual farms measured anywhere from one and one-half to fifteen dessiatines, depending on the available manpower in each family. As yet there was no greed for land, which so characterized the Mennonites in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Because of the method of settling described above, the village was very long, approximately five versts. The road ran along the single row of homes, which were built on the meadows and fenced on both sides.

The homes were built of lumber and thatched with straw. Since the lumber for building was free the houses were roomy, with wooden flooring (and therefore dry). Windows were small. Those with means used beams which were sawed and planed. The others built block-houses, chinking the walls with clay, and then whitewashing them. Each home had an entrance with kitchen and two other rooms; one large room (*grosse Stube*) used for entertaining or as a workshop, and a smaller room used for sleeping and eating. In the big room in place of the built-in china cabinet of later styles there was a kind of fire-place which opened into the big built-in brick oven or stove. This fireplace was used for heating and even for light since spruce firewood was used. In winter the oven was heated through a door from the kitchen. These brick ovens formed the wall between the two rooms, thus providing heat for both places. A small cubby-hole was built into this oven from the smaller room. This could be closed by a tin door, and was used much as we use our ovens nowadays— for cooking and baking.

A church as well as a school was built in Karolswalde. These too were built of lumber and thatched with straw. The furniture was of pine consisting of plain unpainted benches without backs. The church had a raised platform at the front for the elders and the precentor (*Vorsänger*). The pulpit too was placed on this platform. The church usually also contained a small study-like room for the preacher called the *Ohmsstewki* (preacher's room).

Daily Life and Occupation of the Settlers

In Prussia suffering and want had been the lot of the settlers. On account of the low acreage and large families the standard of living remained modest and even low for quite some time. The settlers had four sources of income: agriculture, cattle-breeding, trade or handicrafts, and casual labor. Agriculture yielded only enough for their own needs. Rye, barley, oats, buckwheat, peas, and potatoes were raised. Wheat could not be cultivated, as the stems were not strong enough to carry the heads. The method of cultivation was the simplest. The soil was turned with a sulky-plow pulled by two horses. The seeding was done by hand. The grain was put in a large sheet which was hung over one shoulder. The husbandman walked along scattering the grain, a handful every two paces. It was then harrowed. When the grain was ready for harvesting, the women cut it with sickles, tied it into bundles and stooked it, thirty bundles to a stook. The threshing was done with a flail; threshing machines or even stone rollers were unknown. The threshing was

left for late fall, when frost prevented other work. Since the days were short in fall, some of the work had to be done by the light of lanterns. The gathering of the stooks and the threshing was often done by the women as well, as the men went out on hire. Since the yield was small it was usually barely enough for the needs of the family.

Cattle-breeding was more profitable. The lowland along the Vilna, which was yearly inundated during the spring thaw, provided excellent pasture for grazing and hay for the winter. Only enough horses were kept to till the land. When the weather was fair they had to be satisfied with the pasture. They were kept in a paddock behind the farmyard and fetched from there to be harnessed for work. The number of cows depended on the acreage of the individual farmer, anywhere from two to eight. The dairy products were mostly sold in the form of cheese and butter, and only a small portion of these products were used by the family. Pigs and geese were raised as well and were readily sold in the county town; the geese were especially sought after by the Jewish merchants.

Agriculture therefore supplied the settlers with their daily sustenance. The food was simple but nourishing. There was no lack of meat, especially since there were fish and crayfish to be had in the river and canal. Milk too was plentiful, as was buttermilk. The customary breakfast consisted of groats or porridge eaten with milk, instead of only coffee and milk and bread. Since wheat could not be raised, white bread was not attainable. They depended on dark bread which was mostly eaten without a spread. Only for the holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost did they buy some white flour to bake a kind of panbread. If however the Vilna flooded the land and the grain and potatoes rotted, even the dark flour had to be purchased. In that case the bread was rationed. The soup, milk, dumplings, and so on were eaten from a common dish. Meat and potatoes were eaten with the fingers. Forks, knives, and plates were found only in the homes of the better situated families, and they used them only for special occasions. Bowls, serving plates, and spoons were mostly of wood, usually carved by the householder himself. The potatoes were cooked mostly with their jackets on, peeled at the table, and eaten with salt; only seldom was there gravy to put on them. Fruit was plentiful and cheap.

The long winter evenings were also utilized for work. The older girls and women used this time to spin flax. Every home had a spinning wheel and loom. The yarn spun by the women was loomed by the older men into strong white linen. This material was used in its natural state or dyed for making clothes. It was an honor for the family if their clothing was homespun, selfwoven, homesewn, and home-tailored. Only for festive attire was material bought in town. For work, jerkins were worn. For church attendance the men had a churchcoat. Every youth got this churchcoat when he was baptised. It was then too when he got his first pair of high boots (*Stiefel*), which usually cost two rubles. Ladies' good shoes were bought for thirty kopeks. It also cost thirty kopeks to resole a pair of boots. For work around the home and farm mules [slipper-like footwear which left the heel exposed] with wooden soles and leather uppers were always worn. The poorer people wore this type of footwear to church too. These mules were manufactured in the home, so that every householder had to be familiar with the use of simple woodworking tools. But some were tradesmen as well (i.e. carpenters, cabinetmakers, shoemakers, etc.), making their living that way.

Where the family was large and the proceeds from agriculture and cattle-raising were inadequate to cover all needs, someone had to hire out in order to earn additional cash. This lot customarily fell to the young men. They usually worked as lumberjacks, felling and cutting up trees or making cordwood. Cutting up lumber into boards was the highest paid job, paying as much as four rubles per day. Since lumbering was done mostly in winter, different work had to be found for summer. They found this in the hay and grain harvest on the neighboring estates. In haying a worker received board and fifteen kopeks wages. In the grain harvest a female worker received thirty kopeks per stook of tied bundles, but she had to provide her own board. The latter consisted of bread and onions, washed down with plain water. Some girls went into service as maids, receiving a yearly wage of six rubles or thirty lengths of linen. Besides doing the housework she was expected to spin a certain quantity of yarn. This meant getting up earlier in order to do this spinning. A hired man received fifteen to twenty rubles annually. His work consisted of threshing, cutting feed, splitting wood, and feeding the cattle.

Religious Customs

Pacifism or the refusal to bear arms was the reason for the oppression [of the colonists] in their old home in Prussia and the same problem created difficulty in the new homeland. As we know from Mennonite history, the Russian Government had promised complete religious freedom to the Mennonite settlers, thereby freeing them from compulsory military service. However the government officials did not interpret this decree the same way as the Czar did. They exempted the young men from the service but each

one had to buy his freedom with a high tax, thus misusing the privilege granted them by the Czar. The first to protest against this oppression was a church elder, Benjamin Dirks. He found out that the Czar was to come through a neighboring village and stop for dinner at the station. He wrote a petition asking for the abolition of these abuses. On the day of the Czar's visit he set out for the station, dressed in his best– the churchcoat with its hooks and eyes, closured, polished knee boots, and peaked cap. He waited until the arrival of his sovereign and as the ruler was about to enter the station he handed him the petition with this comment: "Your Imperial Majesty, we are Mennonites."

The Czar took the document, told Dirks to wait and went to the waiting-room. In a short time he was back and told the waiting man: "Justice will be done." This was no idle promise. The abuses were discontinued, and no recruiting tax was ever demanded again.

The preachers and elders looked upon themselves as keepers or guardians of morality and Christian living. For a long time they were able to control and direct public opinion. Drinking, cardplaying, swearing, and stealing, as well as all manner of excesses were taboo. The leading men struggled against these vices energetically, even to the extent of using the ban. The ban had three categories: 1. The front bench in church where the one who was being punished had to sit in front of the pulpit for a subscribed number of Sundays, and listen to the extra admonitions of the preacher which were uttered for his benefit. 2. The mild punishment, which meant absence from communion and other meetings. 3. Excommunication, in which case even the other members of the family were forbidden to associate with the recalcitrant. Sometimes, however the action of the elders seemed rather extreme. Take the following instance. Custom forbade a young man any intimate association with single females. If it happened that there was an illicit relationship between a man and a girl or a widow, and this became known to the elders, the two were punished and then married, whether they wished to be or not. If one of them was not baptised, both the baptism and the marriage were performed on Sunday forenoon. As a rule though, such marriages were performed in the school, or at the *Schulzenamt* ("village council"), without benefit of the customary wedding preparations and festivities.

I was told of a young man, who had an affair with a widow. The elder heard of it and assured himself of the facts through an inquiry. He thereupon insisted that the village council agree to marry the two at once. Right then and there the two were called to the school (the council usually met at the home of the head councillor or "Schulze") and the bishop married them. The widow had been sewing and was wearing a threaded needle in her cap. The bishop had spoken the blessing. After the ceremony he remarked to the young man in Low German, "Well my son, Petie, now you don't have to go to her secretly. Now you can stay with her all the time." ("Na min Sahnky, Petaky, nu bruckst du nich mea heemlich ranni, nu kaunst emma be ar bliewi.") Such and similar occurrences must have had the desired effect, for instances of illegitimacy were very few. The young people preferred a proper wedding.

Weddings

When a couple agreed to be married there was a prescribed procedure to follow. Both parents must give their blessing and the elder or *Ohm* his sanction. The day of the wedding is decided and preparations begin. First the wedding guests must be invited. This was done by the wedding bidder (*Chostibeddy*). This worthy individual bedecked with boutonniere and green ribbons and in his Sunday best, seated on a Russian saddle and astride a noble steed, rode from yard to yard in the village. The forelock and mane of his horse was decorated with colored ribbons. He carried a heavy whip with a short grip. Having arrived in front of the house he cracked his whip loudly a few times. Upon this signal the son of the house (or someone else) came out to hold the horse. The wedding-bidder dismounted, went to the members of the family (who by this time must have been gathered at the door, I'm sure) and proclaimed his invitation as follows: "The parents on both sides and the bridal couple send greetings and invite you to the wedding," then gave the date, which was always in the week. His duty done, he again mounts his horse, cracks the whip once more and departs, to repeat the performance at the next house.

There were three kinds of wedding guests: 1. Those that were asked to the betrothal evening (i. e. the evening before the wedding). These were usually the next of kin and were obliged to help with all the preparations and the serving of the wedding meal. 2. To this category belonged all the honored neighbors, who came at nine o'clock on the day of the wedding. 3. All the poor who had to be asked for decency's sake and were to appear at twelve noon, when dinner was served. But my informant said, "As a rule they were there before the other guests."

The wedding lasted two days and took a lot of work and preparation. A steer or cow was killed. White

bread and white flour was bought in the city. Beer and brandy were provided by the groom. During the two days of celebration there was one sermon (*Traupredigt*) which was delivered during the forenoon in the church. It was attended by all the wedding guests. There was a certain protocol to be followed on this occasion: The wedding-bidder in all his finery started the procession. Next came the bride and her two attendants seated in a horsedrawn vehicle. Another vehicle conveyed the groom, who also had two attendants. Then followed several more vehicles for the next-of-kin and other relatives. The vehicles were wagons without springs called *Kasten-wagen* (box wagons). On the way back from the church the groom led the way, with the bidder next and then the bride, with all the others behind her.

Now it was time for the wedding feast. A beef-broth with dumplings (*Klutske*) was served with beer and some brandy to drink. After dinner there was another ceremony, the capping. Accompanied by singing the wreath which the bride wore for the wedding ceremony, as a token that she was a virgin, was removed and replaced by a cap (*Haube*) to denote her marital status. (Around the turn of the century these were fancy concoctions of black ribbon and lace, tied by ribbon under the chin.) After that was done the groom expressed his appreciation and thanks: First the parents, i. e. the brides' parents, for giving up their daughter to him, second the elder or *Ohm* for performing the wedding ceremony, and lastly the guests, for honoring them with their presence. This was the moment when it was finally permissible for the young couple to stand or sit together as married folk. This ended the formal wedding celebrations. But even though there was no regular evening meal prepared for the guests, people stayed on and consumed more beer and brandy. Occasionally some of the guests might have a bit of trouble keeping their balance or talk a bit more than usual, but it didn't go much beyond that. Noisy carousing was frowned upon and those who imbibed too freely might find a quiet place in the barn to sleep it off. The elder stayed to the end to take care of the proprieties. No folk songs were sung in his presence. They dared not play marches or dances on the accordion or dance and play games as long as the *Ohm* was present. The more daring of the young people might gather at a neighbor's place, darken the windows and then have a wedding ball. If however news of this reached the elder, he went accompanied by the chief village councillor and investigated the matter. All those who participated were punished. Everyone sought to avoid this punishment. If at all possible everybody tried to slip away so as not to be caught. It is told of one occasion where, when the elder walked in, someone blew the lamp out and all the young people slipped away even though the elder stood at the door with arms and legs outstretched. If some of the young people sought to continue their frivolities in a neighboring Russian village, they were found there too.

Anyone who bought an accordian was excommunicated. Once a preacher, Abram Jantz, was relieved of his speaking privileges, because he played a folk song on his flute. It was a long time before the elders permitted a change in the hair styles or clothing. The elders kept strict order in all areas since they were [for practical purposes] the civil authorities. The Russian officials supported their rule and often sent back any Mennonite who came to them with complaints. Just how much authority they had is seen by these examples. An older man had seduced a young girl. Besides getting his twenty-five stripes, he was put in the stocks several hours each day for a number of days. The girl was penned up in a pigpen. Another man, who was a drunkard and a thief, had half of his head shaven clean because nothing else seemed to be effective.

Funerals

The coffin was unpainted. The corpse was dressed in a white shirt and socks. Besides that the men wore a peaked nightcap (*Zipfelmutze*) and the women a white cap. The funeral guests were invited by a bidder as for the weddings. The funeral always took place in the forenoon. The mourners gathered at the home. After a few funeral hymns were sung, the coffin was put on a wagon and taken to the graveyard. The cemetery was not situated beside the church but at the opposite end of the village.

It was the custom that whosoever built the coffin was also responsible to have the grave dug. As a rule, before the funeral procession started moving, this man and a few helpers (all bearing spades) went ahead to dig the grave. Since the soil was sandy this was not a difficult task, but they had to be careful. The edge of the grave was apt to give way if too many people stood too close. After giving the grave diggers enough time the funeral procession, singing funeral hymns, slowly started on its way down the long village street. This singing had to be kept up until they reached the open grave. At this time, after the coffin was lowered into the grave, there was the funeral sermon. For the sermon all the men bared their heads. The grave was then closed and everyone went back to the home of the deceased for a meal. This consisted of beer-soup with crumbs of white bread. Beer and brandy were consumed as well. This beer-soup, together with the white bread, was frequently served at wedding breakfasts.

Emigration

In Karolswalde living conditions were difficult from the beginning. Through the steady growth of the population, conditions did not improve and the result was large scale emigration. Many of the settlers went to Waldheim, Taurien Province, South Russia. Those that were more prosperous stayed behind, but even they had quite a hard time of it.

Hard work was also the lot of my grand-father Benjamin Tobias Janz. Casual labor and weaving brought in only a meagre income. The three dessiatines of rented land did not help much to ease the burden. A soup of flour and water, with potatoes and black bread, were the main items of sustenance. The three children of his first marriage left home early, and after having married, emigrated to the United States. Poverty did not permit him to give his children the customary grade-school education. The older ones were permitted to go to school for only one winter, so they could at least learn to read. Writing was not considered necessary for poor people. In spite of his poverty Benjamin Tobias Janz was respected in the village. Proof of this is the fact that he married the daughter of the schoolteacher Henry Block. Benjamin Tobias was elected to the position of precentor (*Vorsänger*). When conditions in Karolswalde became too difficult he moved to Gruental, Station Krivok, where he owned thirty morgen. Because the Lutherans took over almost the whole village he stayed there only a few years and then moved back to Karolswalde. There he bought the establishment of Jacob Bäcker, who lived close to the church and was a master turner. Since the economic situation became steadily worse, people started sending their sons to the Molotschna as hired help. Because conditions there were much more favorable, a group of emigrants followed the single laborers. This group established the church at Alexanderwohl. Those who had the means bought land or farms. Those who could not do that were divided up among the different villages as landless laborers. They were assigned a small plot of land which was usually at the end of the village and made their living by working for the farmers.

Grandfather bought a half farm (*Halbwirtschaft*) in Conteniusfeld for 1400 rubles. It was No. 26 and situated on the creek side of the village street. (In the Molotschna the villages consisted of two rows of homes facing each other.) Here he lived for twelve or thirteen years. Then, since most of his children had left home and he felt too old to carry on, he sold the farm. The buyer was Isaak Wall, who paid him 2200 rubles. Grandfather moved into one of the laborer cottages and spent the rest of his days as an artisan. He set up his loom in the corner room (*Eckstube*). A hole had to be dug in the floor to accommodate it as the ceiling was too low. Of his children only Helen and Henry had stayed at home. Benjamin lived in the neighboring small farm (*Kleinwirtschaft*), a fact which pleased his aging father. Maria worked for Karl Schmidt, Gnadenfeld, and Aganetha had married Kornelius Warkentin of Waldheim. But Grandfather was not to enjoy this pleasant state of affairs. Death, resulting from tuberculosis, came at age 68, on October 13, 1889. The funeral took place at the home of his son Benjamin on October 16. Elder or bishop John Schartner, Alexanderwohl, officiated. The place of burial was the southwest part of the Conteniusfeld cemetery. As the grave site was not looked after and no marker was placed, it was impossible to find the exact location in later years. My father estimated the cost of the whole funeral to be seventeen rubles twenty-two kopeks. Plain and humble as he had been in life so he was in death. He wore his hair in the Volhynian peasant style, combed down and cut straight around the head except higher over the eyes. But his simplicity was augmented by cheerfulness and contentment. As the work at the loom became mechanical, making use of only the arms and legs, he shortened the time by singing. One of his noble characteristics, my father told me, was his religiosity. Every Friday he fasted. One day father asked him why he did that. His answer was: "You don't know, Benjamin, how good it is to pray on Friday night, when the flesh has become quiet and the soul light."

My father, Benjamin B. Janz, had a hard time of it when he was young. Poverty and privation besides hard work marked his childhood as well as his adolescence. A soup of water and flour together with potatoes and black bread (often baked with bran) constituted the meagre nourishment of the laborer's family. As soon as he was barely strong enough he had to help his father at the loom. It was his job to wind the yarn onto the reed spools which were put into the shuttle. A few years later he became, as Joseph of old, a herdsman. This was a happy time, since there was a boy appointed to this task from nearly every family in the village. The boys enjoyed games and sometimes played mischievious pranks. One favorite pastime was breaking in young horses or even steers, without benefit of halter or bridle and with only a willow switch for restraint. Bathing in the canal must have been a great thrill even though this was strictly forbidden. On one such occasion Benjamin's brother Jacob almost drowned. He had slipped into one of the deep holes which were in the canal and was only saved by the shouting of little Benjamin, who attracted the attention of a man. The man came and pulled him out. The result was punishment at home. People

believed in the old adage, "Spare the rod and spoil the child!" One expression was: "Just wait, I'll tan your hide so hard that you'll jump to the ceiling."

The poverty of his parents precluded any education for Benjamin. It was his privilege to go to school for only one winter. His teacher was Henry Block, his grandfather. There were between thirty and forty students. School was in session summer and winter, from early morning until evening. There was only a break for the harvest season. The lessons were in German. The customary greeting in the morning was "Guten Morgen Herr Lehrer," and in the evening "Gute Nacht Herr Lehrer" for goodnight. Almost all the high German they learned came via the school. Prayers were said four times a day. If the teacher was busy with church book-keeping (which the teachers usually did), the children had to look after themselves. At noon they had a recess of one hour. At this time only the Low German dialect was spoken. Most children carried their lunch and a bit for "Coffee-break," only they called it *Vesper.* They played outside but without supervision. The teacher's salary was thirty rubles per annum and one dessiatine of fenced pasture. For recording a marriage in the church records the fee was twenty kopeks and ten kopeks for a death or birth.

There was no special school furniture. The students sat on plain benches, which were set up in two long rows in the schoolroom. Under these conditions Benjamin barely learned to read printing in one winter. That he learned it at all is proof of his perseverance and industry, as the teaching methods were primitive, depending on the spelling out of single letters. Only the most talented learned reading in one year. Most took two and some even three years to learn to read. Writing was not considered essential for poor folk in those days, so father did not learn to write at school; although he did learn it later on his own.

As a youth he helped out by earning money on a neighboring Polish estate as a helper during harvesting and haying. In winter he worked in the forest holdings of the estate owner. Cutting the tree trunks into boards was the hardest, but best paid work. A worker could earn up to four rubles a day, but the local speculators knew how to relieve the naive Mennonite youths of their hard-earned cash through the sale of liquor and other palate tickling luxuries. The nights were spent in barracks almost like gypsies around a fire. Often young Benjamin suffered from the frost and once from the fire. His homemade clothes were meagre protection against the elements. The overcoat which was not heavy, served as a blanket at night. For that reason he had to lie close to the fire, so that he almost roasted on one side, while the other was stiff with cold. One night sparks from the open fire fell on his clothes and set them on fire. Thanks to the timely help of his co-workers, he got away with a few burns. This outdoor life hardened his body against heat and cold.

In his eighteenth year he together with nine other young people attended the baptismal instruction class of bishop Tobias Unruh of Karoswalde. At this time the bishop was of the opinion that fashion-craze and wordliness were creeping into the church. Some of the young men who had been working in the Molotschna had come home with different haircuts and fashionable clothes. This had incurred the displeasure of the bishop. He believed he had to oppose this trend. He demanded that the church avoid contact with these modern youths and in such a way put pressure on them. The church members, however, were quite passive in the matter. In order to coerce the members to do his will he denied baptism to the nine candidates. When this did not produce the desired result, he gave in and baptised them anyway. The baptism took place December 26, 1869.

The nice fashionable clothes, high wages, and good food made the Molotschna look like the promised land and became a strong magnet, drawing ever more young people. In 1873, our father followed the general eastward migration and became the hired man of Dirk Peters of Halbstadt. The following year he worked in Conteniusfeld for Andreas Voth, receiving an annual wage of 135 rubles. Whole families, being tired of the rent system in Karolswalde, moved to the Molotschna in order to acquire their own land. Catholics and Lutherans took over the rent holdings in the village, and since their religion and customs differed from those of the Mennonites, the latter moved out en masse. The well-to-do sold their property with live-stock and furniture to the Lutherans for approximately 2200 rubles, and bought land in the Molotschna. The poorer ones settled in the different villages as laborers. This was in 1875. Among the newcomers were the parents and family of our father Benjamin Janz. They bought a farm and settled in Conteniusfeld. Benjamin now came home and helped his father with the work. During this time he became acquainted with Helena Vogt, whom he married on December 2, 1876 in Conteniusfeld. They lived at home with young Benjamin's parents for one year and in 1877 they acquired a small farm on the east end of the village. They lived there until they left for Canada in 1921.