

LIFE IN HUCK RUSSIA

TOLD BY Phillip Schleich Oct. 1980

Church school was the school. Their classes were religion, reading, writing and math, They sat on benches with the smartest at the beginning on down. Phillip was number 1 most of the time.

The Church was at the edge of town and the school was right in town. The older kids started early in the morning with the younger children starting at noon after it had warmed up some.

The Church had a knob instead of a cross. No work of any kind on Sunday just church service. They had communion at special times during the year.

In winter the people lived in the town. One family lived under one roof with the grandma in charge of house hold chores. She would tell her daughter-in-laws what their chore is for the day. When a son got married they moved into his family house. Also during the winter the men worked. Bohl's and Schleich's were carpenters and took their work to other towns or traded work. They made cedar chests, fanning mills and fixed wagons. Jake and John ran looms to make material at home.

In the summer the families moved out to live on their land where they farmed. They lived in tents in the field;. The babies that had to be nursed went to the fields with the mother. The small children too little to work stayed at home with grandma and grandpa in town. The children big enough to work in the fields went with the mother and father.

In the summer the farm animals went out to a pasture where a herder watched all the animals. In the winter the animals were kept in town. The animals were cows, sheen, hogs, ducks, geese and chickens. The crops they raised were apples, sunflowers, water melons, melons, cherrys, goose berries, currents, carrots, green beans, wheat, vega hay, cabbage, potatoes, onions and cucumbers. They had some good land here and some land that wasn't too good some place else. Every body had the same kind of land but your land wasn't all together. The government took 1 bushel per acre.

The town had an old dutch - wind mill and a flour mill. Each one did their own wheat. They washed it first then ground the wheat. The man who ran the mill got some of your flour then he would sell it.

Every Sat. everyone cleaned, even the streets. The town was very clean, There was snow on the ground all winter 4 to 6 feet deep. They had to use sleds. They had a doctor but no hospital.

Their holidays were 3 days of Christmas with a Christmas tree, New Year, Easter and May day. Weddings lasted 3 days.

When the Germans were drafting young men of 21 into the army to fight their wars Catherine the I (1643) of Russia promised the Germans land to homestead. The government would give around 120 acres to every son born. The Schleich's moved to Russia 75 miles SW of Saratov on the Volga River. The town was all one religion of Christian Reform. The town was called Huck Russia or (Splawnucha) in Russia.

Huck Russia was mountainous where it was very cold (42 below) in the winter and very hot (90 to 100) in the summer. They raised sunflowers for oil and wheat. They lived in the town of Huck and when they went out to farm they took tents with them to stay in. There was only one year they didn't raise any crop, that was in 1831 because of a drought.

The Schleich's left Russia the same reason they left Germany -- Catherine didn't live up to all she promised. They left Huck Russia on May 1, 1907 went across Russia, across Poland to Berlin, Germany to Bremerhaven by train. Their boat, the Hanover, was in but they could not board.

John Schleich's wife had granulated eye lids and would not be able to stay in America so they went back to Huck Russia to farm a year. That year their baby died. then his wife died. John remarried. Her family was in Argentina. John Schleich's step father gave him permission to sell the farm. The money he got from the farm him and his new wife used and moved to Argentina.

The Schleich's had to wait 3 weeks in Bremen, then they did sail in June 1907 they were on the ocean 24 days. They landed in Baltimore, Maryland, to refuel then they went into the Gulf of Mexico and landed at Galveston, Texas on Aug. 18, 1907. The Schleich's sponsor was John Schnider which was Elisabeth Schleich's brother-in-law. He also paid for the fair to America. Schnider's lived outside Shaffer Kansas close to Great Bend, Kansas where the Schleich's went. That season they worked on thrashing machines in the wheat fields. They stayed that winter in Great Bend. From there they moved to Swink, Colorado in 1905 in the fall of the year where they worked in the sugar factory. In 1914 for one year they rented the Claud Marshall farm south of Swink and farmed. Then Oct. of 1914 they bought a farm about 9 miles east of La Junta, Colorado, across from Bents Old Fort. They had to build their house then moved to it in 1915. In Jan 1927 they went to Nebraska and worked as labors while looking for a farm. They moved back to La Junta, Colorado, just before Christmas 1928.

Elisabeth Schleich died on the Fort Bent farm Sept 29, 1929. Jake died during wheat harvest July 25, 1932. Philipp Schleich died April 28, 1935. Clara, Bill, Melvin and Howard were all born on the farm also where Howard died of Pneumonia at 6 days. They opened the foot of his Grandfathers grave and put him at the foot of his casket.

Young Philipp was left with the farm until he moved his family to Las Animas county, Hoehne 1 year. 1941 moved to Model to farm for Mr. R.B. O'Brian where they had prison of German Warwork in their fields except for the last year there they farmed on their own. In 1946 bought 63 acres farm at El Moro in Las Animas County Colorado.

George Philipp Schleich moved his family from Swink to South Dakota then to Warlen Wyoming where he died as a farmer May 7, 1924. Philipp Schleich went to school 2 years in Russia. While in Russia Katherine Bohl went to the river to get a bucket of drinking water when Philipp threw some mud in her bucket. Philipp moved to America at the age of 9. He went to school one winter in Kansas, went through the 6th grade at Swink doing the 2nd and 3rd grades in one year.

+++++

HUCK 10 December 1922

My dear compatriots from Huck:

Repeatedly I receive from friends and relations acquaintances North and South America letters with the warmest requests to give answers to various questions. Regarding their family here in Huck and the present general conditions of life and situations of the old home land. Many requests this through personal letters again others request this to be given to the press. For more than a year I have written many individuals letters and now and then sent reports to the newspapers. If the latter ever reach there goal I do not know. I am convinced of a report which was received by the DFP and which was printed. Recently I received a few letters in which I was requested to let myself be heard in the Welt Post but none of the writers of the letters gave me the address of the newspaper named. Therefore, I am sending this open letter to my dear friend and brother, George Philip Schaaf. Who hopefully will take it to the right place. Above all, I would like to make the remark that I am no longer in a situation to answer all letters individually. First of all because the work is to much for me and then which has more meaning in it, for material reasons. Then with us the postage for abroad has gotten so high lately that it is impossible to answer all. Therefore, may this my report, be meant for all of my dear fellow landsman.

As I have already often remarked in letters and also newspaper reports, since March of this year, the massive starvation and various illnesses have declined, and one could say almost momentarily since the arrival of the corn and grain of America, which were sent to us, in addition, we had a rather good harvest of grain, vegetables and fruit. Which then in the true sense of the word quieted the need for food. Naturally in comparison of earlier times there is still much to be desired. Mainly, there is a lack of meat and fats. The miserable year of the civil war left us very few cattle. Usually there is not even hogs and poultry raised. A part of our inhabitants also again are lacking in bread and this is due to the fact that seed was distributed to the working cattle. The taxes however were raised accordingly to the amount of land so that many who had no cattle at all had to have his land worked and yet became little seed grain so that he had to give everything. The few that had some cattle and therefore received grain needed in comparison to his harvest very little. Namely so called great ones or the havers had to give up proportionally smallest taxes. That indeed is a very complicated matter which I might say no one among us might understand. For example, I without a team of work cattle or animals with a planting of one desjatine of wheat, one desjatine of Rye, some barley and sunflowers had to give up 72 pud of grain. Farmers, who harvested 10 times more that I didn't give up much more than that. Therefore, those who fell victims to this fate had little or nothing left over. And are again at the same point as last year. With the exception of many still have melons, cabbage and beets which we were all lacking in previous years. As you know I can't hear in no way blame our government. This rule that taxes were increased according to division of land is a general rule affecting the entire country. And, in our region, as we're an exception mainly in the possession of work animals the regulation was given to arrange this matter as we felt. As far as I know this is also made known to our village council in this matter. However as most of the members of our village council consist of the so called large farmers then they remained cold to this regulation, and let everything go as the government had stated.

The greatest need now is lack of clothing shoes and boots. One sees in this regards horrible pictures. You can go into many homes in which the children can scarcely cover themselves. Seldom go outside, especially in winter time. I am the representative of the children kitchen of the American Relief Association here in Huck. Not long ago for the kitchen I had to visit the homes of the poor in order to write down the names and ages. In many houses I found 2 or 3 children almost in Adams clothing , birthday suits, which like wild ones, sought to hide themselves. At the sight of such things one's heart cries, but how can we help when there is nothing. It isn't much better with many old people. School has started again, but most of the children don't have any clothes. Another need is fuel. The so called manure heating fuel which is customary here for this winter for most people is very scanty because there are very few cattle available. For wood, there is no permission to gather wood. One heats often with straw and that is lacking again to most. Such as the crisis in the past was with nourishment with food. Here in this winter it appears in materials for fire, or for fuel. Yes, Yes at the moment we still have much to do for our external life. What however is to be done. One must know patience according to the words of a poet. Patience is necessary, when things go badly. and so for psalms 7 v. 83. The spiritual life seems to be improving, church as well as meetings are being attended rather well. Yet when one looks around the many a dear soul is missing, which such a short time ago regularly took its place, but now, has gone over into eternity. With melancholy heart, one remembers the past days when one pilgrimed together in faith.

(name of author not available)

+++++

Splavnuha (Huck) 12 November 1922

To: Oswald Sittner, Montrose, Colorado

Dear Brother-in-law Oswald!

Our beginning is in the name of the Triune God. Amen

Although the large ocean and many mountains and valleys separate us, we are still happy that we can once again communicate with one another in letters which was forbidden us during the long period of war. Therefore, be cordially greeted and spiritually kissed by us, your blood relatives. Right at the beginning I would like to ask that you conduct an active exchange of letters with us.

We received your last letter and rejoiced over your health. We can also boast good health and all the more so because I, your brother-in-law and brother was ill nine long weeks. One cannot really enjoy health until after recovering from a difficult illness. Now we want to proceed in our letter by sharing with you the happy news that we have received your gift or should we say "our" gift, just as you sent it. You should have seen the glowing faces as the things were unpacked, In the hour of distress and need one is always happy when one has friends who take pity on one. Accept our heartfelt thanks for this timely help, which has tightened the bonds of love with mother even stronger, and she sends you special greetings.

What should we write you that is new? One comes again and again to the need which oppresses us. We are 13 people in the family and it takes a lot to feed us. We had seven horses but have only two now. During the war we had to give up 12 head of cattle. The economy is going backwards rather than forward. With us it isn't enough that we have regressed so far, but what can one do? The harvest was varied. There will be no more bread for some people by Christmas.

A distribution of land was undertaken. Then we received our land in Bovinska, 200 Dusch. The harvest was slim for us, because without seed there is no harvest.

People with many cattle received a lot of seed and also harvested a lot. Then it also depended upon the scattered rain. Our Jacob was drafted into the army.

He has been gone two months and we don't know where he is. Now we want to close with many greetings and with the request to write again soon. Your brother-in-law.

Jacob Hempel

+++++

From Kansas, La Crosse, 4 September 1922

When I emigrated from my home village - Huck, Saratov - in 1907 and came to North America, one had no idea about the misfortune which would break out over Europe in such a short time. Then the beautiful villages still stood in full splendor. Active life, zealous work. were everywhere and one noticed a general state of well being among the Germans along the majestic Volga river flowing so proudly. Yes, that was then!

And everything is said to look so miserable and desolated it seems to me that it was all only a dream, but it is the truth better, hard fact. With melancholy I think of my relatives and friends over in Russia. As we see in the newspapers, much has been gathered for the kin suffering in need, but that is only a drop on a hot stove (i.e. a drop in the bucket), for the misery is gigantic and the needs are many.

As I haven't heard any news from my relatives in Russia I would be thankful to every sender who could give me information about the following people either directly or through the newspaper: Christine Zitterkopf nee Wilhelm; Marsa Elisabeth nee Wilhelm; Johannes and George Wilhelm; Johannes Schlotthauer, all in Huck, Saratov. Brother Jacob Wilhelm in North American requests information.

I have just received a letter from my father and brother, Philipp Wilhelm, in Argentine, South America. My father is 77 years old. There has still been no physician found for my blind sister.

Now I greet all friends and relatives, especially George Philip Kindsvater. Let me hear from you in the Welt Post. We had a fairly good harvest here. As far as we are concerned, we are quite happy, God be praised that we did not feel (suffer) any more from the Great War other than expensive time. Everything is rather dry here. With longing we are waiting for rain so we can sow wheat.

Jacob Wilhelm

+++++

A Letter from Russia

Huck, March 20, 1922

Beloved in the Lord, Brother George Philipp, Sister Christina and Children. Since postal traffic between us and America has been reestablished, I wanted to resume correspondence with you but didn't get to it because I am seldom home (more about that later) and then I am very busy answering letters to various people in America. Now, however, I recently met with your brother George. He said you would be interested in receiving a detailed letter from here about all conditions, mainly however about the spiritual life. As a result, urged out of love to you I will do this and to be sure with all joy. Above all things my family status. We are eight souls: I and my wife with 8 children, 2 sons and 6 daughters: in addition a foster son Heinrich Scheibel. (the son of my sister Eva Katherine.) and finally my father-in-law who is with me since February 1921 as he is alone as his daughters are all married and my mother-in-law Sister Christina, died in February last year of a half-years illness of diabetes. As of today all are well, praise, and thanks to God, in spite of the great distress (need) in which we find ourselves.

Since August I haven't been home a week at a time. I have always been searching for food. Twice I was on the Linie, on which trips I spent much time, for example six weeks for one round trip. It is impossible to describe for you here the various conditions and horrifying images which I have seen on the way. The rest of the time I have spent in the vicinity in the Russian villages with exchange of various products for wares and other objects.

Imagine, from fall on no supplies stored in any manner and 12 souls which need care! And yet the dear Lord has as let us survive even if very little, meager food stuffs and lessened quantities so that today it is still true. The Almighty can feed many with little! Our life style is plain and simple. From the Linie I brought some white flour and millet. Once a day "Riebel" soup is cooked and once "Kascha," naturally eaten without bread. Sometimes these are groats, then it is baked into bread with watermelon, beets or oil cake and distributed piecemeal. The last time I brought a few potatoes from the Russians, which are likewise divided. In addition we have some sauerkraut, green beans and so forth. We no longer have pigs as well as chickens. Although there is nothing special about such food, we have it first class, so to say, but again no stored supplies. Others generally live considerably poorer. Many from watermelon and beans alone, others from horse meat and that mainly died (as opposed to being slain) For example my only horse died and was taken off to be cooked in nothing flat! However it is much worse on the "Wiesenseite". There there are cases where human flesh is eaten! Terrible but true! As a result of what is described here, death has gained the upper hand. Here in Huck during my 2 month absence in January and February more than 200 adults died, and so it goes doubled. Most of the dead are buried in mass graves up to 20-25 in a grave, partially without coffins. Sometimes they cannot all be taken away so that 20 pile up in a day.

I can't tell you even roughly all the deceased since April of this year, when we were exploited the worst and starvation began. It was officially determined here that 50% die directly of starvation, 25 per cent indirectly, that is on the edge of starvation, and 25 per cent of normal illnesses.

Now, the help which we receive, from our government there are 2 kitchens, which give food to selected persons from the poorest class, but which (i.e. food) is very very meager. Then we have 4 kitchens of 300, 1,200 children in all, are fed once daily by the American government through Mr. Repp. Their meals are however very nourishing and have already saved many dear little ones from horrible death by starvation. Yet, once in awhile it happens.

Obtaining the products is very difficult because our railroad traffic is almost completely stopped. Now the breaking out of spring is imminent and we can already see the danger ahead. I myself am in the commission and last night we met and pondered and pondered what we should do with the little that is still here. Individual presents also arrive which are very welcome. Those most sure (are) through the "ARA" (American Relief Agency) through them everything arrives punctually at place and on time. Much is still promised us. I have discussed these personally with the American representative but again and again the main problem is Russian transportation. Things are also poor regarding available seed from our government, but very little and in addition little cattle power. In addition the people are starving, no bread no clothing everyone goes around in rags and tatters. Oh, that the dear God might have mercy on them!

Furthermore the intellectual and spiritual sides. Schools have come to a complete standstill. That is the government schools and church schools. The main reason: no fuel for heating. In addition, the school master, assistant and church elder are almost always busy with funerals. Recently there was a strange coincidence here. Three church directors died shortly after one another: Brother Oswald Sack; Brother Georg Schafer (Welems) and Brother Philip Kindsvater (1st row, younger). Only the fourth remained left. Yesterday we elected three new ones: Brother John Lickei, Brother Conrad Huck, 2nd row and Brother John Huck, 2nd row.

If you were to come into the church, you would be frightened, First of all by the many empty benches, then since fall, so far of typhoid, hunger and under nourishment: Jac. Schuckmann; Br. Osw. Hausch; Br. John Wilhelm, eldest: Brother George Michel, Hofmannsplat; Brother John Hixt Jr. Brother Georg's son; Brother Philip Hein and his son John; Your brother Conrad and wife and daughter-in-law; a few days ago your brother George's wife Barbara; Sister Christine's mother, her two uncles Jacob and George Brotzmann, Andrese; the latter's wife. From our (prayer) meeting; Brother Osw. Frick died of spotted typhoid during my absence, ill only nine days; Brother George Luther; Sister Elisabetha Eckerdt, Brother Jac's wife, Sister Anna Marg. Hempel, Stumme and other who have not been recorded (here). These are only a few who occur to me.

Now, enough for this time. If it interests you to know more, please ask. I am ready at any time to answer you if possible. Otherwise everything is recommended to God in mercy!

Hearty greetings from me, my wife and children, your brother loving you in Christ!

Philipp Kindsvater

+++++

A Letter from Russia

Huck, February 16, 1922

Dear Children Jacob and Katche!

The letter you wrote to us on December 2 last year we received with joy. Although it found us in a very sad situation. We have also written a letter to pastor David Maul, who should also pass it on. We do not know if he or you have received it because so many letters are lost, whereas we have insured this one, although it costs 10,000 Rubles.

We are notifying you that your father-in-law and father suffered a stroke two years ago, he sits in the room and cannot walk. We others praise God, are healthy.

Jacob died of an epidemic. His wife came back with the children, moved everything. Grandmother died in the spring. Cousin Johannes Kohler also died in the summer. Your father also died in winter, likewise of famine, whereby so many have already died, and are still dying daily. In this year 200 souls have already died, mainly of starvation, for you cannot imagine how poor things are here, everything is lacking. Many have had to withstand hunger, and the almighty knows how things should still turn out with us for need climbs higher from day to day. I, your mother, have had to trade almost all the clothing in the trunk but it all isn't enough, because one doesn't get anything for it. If there is no help for us soon, then we are done for. One hears there should be help for the elders from America. As of today, however, nothing has happened. Children, as of now 1,200, receive their ration every day. For a few days, 350 old souls get a ration daily from our government, but again what is that among so many for it is the same for almost everyone. There is a small section who can still make it until the new harvest. Of course it cost them a great deal and at the same time they can't live as independently as before as the years (when there was) bread with every meal. We think there should (soon) be no more families in Huck. There are almost no groceries to buy. Everything costs millions, as with everything. It's fine for whoever has millions. A pair of Oxen costs 40 to 60 million, a horse from 15 to 25 million; a cow from 10 to 20 million; a sheep 2 million a goat up to 4 million; a pud of coarse meal 2 million; a pud of millet 3 million; 1 pud potatoes 300,000 rubles; one pound of meat 40,000 to 60,000; one pound of butter 200,000; one pound of oil 160,000; and so it is with everything (prices) climb from day to day, and how should we live without any income. We are presently living two children receive (food) from the American kitchen, we two old ones from the relief kitchen: the others some from the ration kitchen, where by it costs 600,000 a pud, and no one can have any more. The last we traded for clothes, but now the trunk is empty. We still have 2 geese and a cow, that is all which we can keep, God knows. For if there is no help soon, we will have to do something. We also don't know if we will receive seed for planting.

You write, if we were only with you. Yes, dear children, it would also be our wish, but it can't be (even) with the best will. First of all, because of father because he is nothing for such a trip. Secondly, because we will not be allowed over the border. Thousands of people from all villages have sold everything in order to go to America; they are near the border and starve to death by the hundreds.

The Norka people in America have sent much to their friends already (and) to individuals. If you want to help us, then you could also send something. Outside they pay money to a commission, tell who it is for, so those designated receive groceries in Saratov, (from) where whole trains have already come to various villages only nothing from Huck people, but a few notices are said to have arrived from Saratov. The "Hucker" (people from Huck) make themselves least known. Now this is not a matter of force for we leave each to his own will.

Want to close and wish you everything good and recommend ourselves to God the Almighty, for he knows everything and what he has in store for us. He alone is Ruler of all and we leave ourselves to our fate though him. Hearty greetings to you both and your children from your parents, Jacob and Catherine Bohl.

If we can expect an answer from you the Almighty knows, into whose hands we give ourselves We have also received a letter from Peter's father-in-law. He asks if it is so poor here but he also didn't send anything.

+++++

June 27, 1973

Good Morning Aunt Elizabeth & family:

It has been over 10 years since we have written one another. Now that world conditions have changed we should correspond more often.

First of all, we want to wish you a happy birthday on July 28th when you will be 82 years old; also wish you a long happy family living. Either you are living with Daughter Helen or she with you. Am anxious to know what has happened in your family the last 10 - 11 years. My half brothers and sisters wonder how you are and what your children's work is. Who is the letter writer? Please write immediately and we will answer to keep up the correspondence.

I have a request. In Colorado live the children of my Uncle Conrad, son of Oswald Frick. He was my father's brother born in 1871, now deceased. Where the children are living, etc. we would like to know. Maybe you could run an ad in the newspaper. I would be so grateful, please.

On May 7th we celebrated my 70th birthday with 30 guests, for 2 days we had music, eating, singing and dancing. Martha is 61 years old. I no longer work. I pass the time reading books from the library, playing cards and visiting with friends and movies. Earlier you had our address from, but since then our youngest son had to spend some time at a health resort so we sold our home. We like it here--everything is green and the air is fresh and clean. -- many friends. We are close to the Railroad station and many tourists from Europe come to go to the mountain of Elbrus. Not too many years ago I was at the top of the mountain. You should come to visit us. Who is the oldest child? Martha did a lot of sewing but now that we are older and on pension we play more cards and visit with our old friends. Hopefully things are better in the U.S. and you will write and please check on the Frick's in Colorado. We were guests of Elizabeth, Uncle Phillip Kindsvater's daughter in 1968. It is good with them. My son Albert lives in Ural and Edwin here. Edwin pleads with you to write.

Love Martha & George Frick