

Firsthand Accounts from Russia

Huck, 10 Dec 1922

My dear countrymen from Huck! I have received repeated letters from friends, relatives and acquaintances in North and South America asking questions about the deaths of their relatives here in Huck and general questions about the lives of those still here and those who have departed their old homeland. Many wish to have their letters forwarded or to have their letters given to others. For over a year now, I have written many separate letters and now and then sent them to newspapers. I don't know if my last letter reached all of you.

I am overwhelmed by a letter I received from The D. F. F. stating it had been taken out of print.

I recently received some letters, in which I was asked to share what I had heard with the "Welt Post." However, none of the senders gave me an address for the newspaper. I am sending this open letter by my dear friend and brother Georg Ph. Schaaf, hopefully he will bring it to the correct place.

Ahead of everything else I must make some remarks, I am no longer able to answer every letter because I am overloaded with work and also, more importantly to you, must find material.

It has now become so expensive to send mail out of the country though our postal system, that it now impossible for me to answer every letter. One of the consequences of these letters, my countrymen, is cost!

As I have often remarked in my letters and newspaper accounts, since March of this year after Indian corn (*ed. note: Maize*) and many other products were donated by America, the large number of people suffering starvation and disease and in hospital awaiting death that was heard about, one could say, for the present has been contained.

In addition to that, there was a moderately good crop of grain, vegetables and fruit, but in comparison with earlier times it leaves a lot to be desired. The chief needs now are meat and lard. During the hard years of the civil war we were allowed to keep very few cattle. Pigs and livestock remain most difficult to obtain. Yet again, a number of our residents have a need for bread and that is what the following account is about.

In the early part of the year we sowed and worked the cattle, but the taxes that we now have on our portions of land are so many that we are unable to own a sufficient number of cattle or work our land. On account of this, there is little grown. Now everything must be surrendered.

He who had a fair amount of cattle and thereupon had a good yield now is required to surrender a very little of his crop. Chiefly, the so-called "Biggies" (*ed. note: "Grossern" translated as "Biggies" probably refers to those who were eventually labeled "Kulaks." by the Bolsheviks*) who had larger portions had the smallest of taxes. Generally, it is a very complicated thing, that I must say, none of us understand. Z.B. (*ed. note: most likely the abbreviation of the expression "Zu Befehl," which is "at your service" or "yours to command"*). I, without a tail to herd, without any standing corn, from one Dessatine (*Ed. Note: 1 Dessatine is just under 3 acres*) am supposed to chisel out, 1 Dessatine of Rye, some Millet and Sunflowers, must next surrender 70 Pud of grain. (*Ed. Note: 1 Pud is about 32.5 US lbs*) This much and not much more the farmers who have ten times more land than I are also to surrender. He, who by fate falls behind, and has little or nothing left, is again in the same position much like the previous year, with the difference that

many pumpkins, cabbage, beets and the like possessions that he had in the previous year are all gone.

To my knowledge, there is no way I can accuse our government from here. There is in this country a commonly held precept that one has a duty to share the land, to which we and our opponents made an exception, chiefly for stock herding. These things must be reexamined. As far as we know, our sitting village council was made aware of these things. Since of the members of our village council are of the aforementioned "Biggies," they remain cold and in opposition to the proposal and leave everything as it is, "as the government has set it up."

Our biggest deficiency is now the shortage of clothing, shoes and boots. One sees a parade of repulsive pictures. One comes to many houses where most of the children are shamefully dressed, to say nothing of going out, particularly in the winter time. I am deputy for the children's kitchen of the A. R. A. (*Ed. note: American Relief Agency*) here in Huck. We recently opened this kitchen for the poor children and I ask their names and the names of their parents. I go to their houses and have found two to three children there with the clothing of Adam, (*Ed. note: naked*), living like animals and hiding themselves away, the sight of such things tears at one's heart and guts!

How do you give help when there is nothing?

It's not much better with the old people.

The school is again in session but most of the children lack clothing.

A more remote need remains the need for fuel. There is a fuel shortage here as well as throughout the country, for most there is only a small amount to be had because there are very few head of cattle on hand. (*Ed. Note: Cow chips were customarily used for fuel*). As for wood cut from the forest, very little was permitted. One heats with many things, mostly straw but there is not enough to go around. As the crisis was in the past with food, so it appears to be this winter with burning materials. Sure, sure, it is apparent that we have, apart from that, have much to wrestle with for our lives. Whatever happens one must be patient. According to the words of the poets, "Patience is necessary, when there is sickness," and so forth and so on.

No. 783. The spiritual life will be better. Church, as well as "meeting" (*Ed. Note: Versammlung translates as "meeting" and refers to the mid-week gathering of the Bruderschaft or Brotherhood for prayer, testimony and singing*) are fairly well attended again. Though when one looks around, many dear souls are gone to take their regular place for a shorter time in eternity. With melancholy heart, one remembers bygone days when we together believed in the pilgrimage. Still we will not begrudge them their rest with their buried thoughts (words obscured)...with God...(words obscured) closed up. Who can stand against you?

We have since 1 December built a kitchen for 150 children through the A. R. A. It was told to us at the inception to wait to enlarge the kitchen until we got through half of this past year. Through Mr. Volz (*Jacob Volz was the on-site representative for the American Volga Relief Society from Lincoln, Nebraska*) much clothing was received, for the most part for predetermined people. For general distribution there has been little received. It should be loudly declared that Mr. Volz is expecting still more. There is still a great need. One can certainly still shop in the villages for clothing but it is so shockingly costly and the material that can be had here is of really poor quality and the colors to say the least, wholly unworthy of mention

Conditions of health here are generally good. A remarkable statement to publish after the starvation around here. All of the people, those who suffered the most from hunger, who came through with their lives, now that the simple diet of wholemeal bread, flour, pumpkin, beans and the like is consumed, seem fit and lively. So that one often stops and asks them "is that really him, or her?" Clear evidence that for of the containment of

hunger and sickness a large midsection serves people well. Many of the afflicted around her stood with distended stomachs the entire year and now, after the famine procedures, are totally healed.

I will close my writing for now and only add a personal note:

-- The poor widow Katharina Sack, born of Ph. Sack, house no. 348, with 5 children (3 Herdt, 2 Sack). turns to her relatives in Argentina, Uncle Adam Sittner (mother's brother), Jacob Michel (mother's stepbrother) with her warmest plea, wants them to send help.

-- Another poor widow Anna Margar. Hausch. nee Lenenschmidt, house nr. 453, wants to know the address of her brother Johannes Leneschmidt and brother-in-law Adam Fein. She received 1 Food Draft and 3 Pud of products and asks for more help.

-- Oswald Weigandt (in front of Ernst) asks after his brother Jacob Weigandt, South America from whom, in spite of his letters, he hasn't received any letters.

--Conrad Neu, Row 4, nr. 226, asks for help from his father-in-law Philipp together with his sons-in-law Jacob Euler and Jacob Schlotthauer.

--The son of the above mentioned Conrad Neu, Georg Neu, from his uncle Johannes Koch (DamerKoch).

--The wife of Conrad Neu, Margarete, born Frick, from Elisabetha Eckerdt, born Frick, all of them in Argentina.

--The family of old Ph. Sack, Row 5, nr.270, wishes information and assistance from their friends the Sack family in San Antonio, Argentina.

--Georg Hein, Row 3, nr 145, received 2 packages of products (2 Food Drafts) from Philipp Hein at 3715 Weslio St., Michigan, he sends his heartfelt thanks and asks for further assistance, if possible, composed of manufactures. (*Ed. Note: used the noun "manufakturen" for which I am unable to otherwise translate a meaning*)

--In an issue of the Welt-Post, there was seen a letter from Jacob Wilhelm, La Crosse, Kansas, from the 17th of September. It luckily came into the hands of his two sisters, Christina Zitterkopf and Maria Elisabeth Michel, born Wilhelm. The day before yesterday, with much sobbing and weeping, Christina gave me the letter with the following plea: "I beg you, for God's Sake, to write an answer to my brother." I will do this now with a glad heart. Your sister Christina's husband Conrad Zitterkopf died last year and she has a young child at home and things are going pretty badly for them. It is a wonder that she did not lose the child last winter with all the hunger that there was. It goes better with sister Maria Elisabetha. Her husband, Jacob Michel, a blacksmith, always earns something, though they also thirst for help. Joh. Wilhelm is still alive and is generally doing well. He has twice now been chairman of the village council. The Civil War nearly cost him his life. Joh. Schlotthauer came near in the Great War (WWI). (*Ed. Note: recall that this letter was written in Feb. 1923, the war ended in 1918.*)

--I received your letter, brother Ph. Schäfer, San Antonio, Argentina, of 27 August. My warmest thanks for thinking of us. My sister-in-law Elisabetha, your comrade Charlotte was wedded to Heinrich Schreiner, a tailor from Kautz. It goes with them as it goes with most of us, poorly. Your Schäfer people just as Koch are doing moderately well.

--Jacob Leneschmidt, nr. 153. wife Katharina, born Glanz from Norka ask their friends on the wife's side: uncle Jacob Glanz and Ph. Kaiser, and sisters Anna Maria and Margaretha for information and help.

--Georg Schäfer, wife Katharina, nee Burbach from Norka seeks help and information from the brothers Johannes and Heinrich Burbach and sister married to Georg Fries, Portland,Oregon, RFD 5, Box 194.

--Widow Kath. Marg. Bohl, nee Weber, nr. 105, with 5 children asks for help from her brother-in-law and sister-in-law Jacob and Katharina Neu. The daughter of the same Maria, their parents: Kath. Elis. Sittner, Adam Koch and Maria Schnell.

--Katharina Kindsvater, wife of the deceased Johannes (Johannes Sr.'s eldest son) asks for help from Oswald Koch (Glosser).

--Joh. Ad. Michel, wife Elisabeth, nee Michel, nr. 208, would very much like to have information and help from Jacob Michel (wife's brother), and his wife Barbara, nee Eckerdt. We haven't heard from them in 18 years. Your brothers Philipp and Georg have been listed as deceased.

To all my dear Huckers, as well as other friends and acquaintances, my warmest greetings and kisses.

With love, your well-known village comrade,

Philipp Kindsvater