FOR EVERYTHING A SEASON

A History of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule

by
T.D. REGEHR
with the assistance of
J.I. REGEHR

FOR EVERYTHING A SEASON

No other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:11

This verse hung for many years in the teachers' room of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, on the wall opposite the entrance. It was often the first thing seen by a person entering the room.

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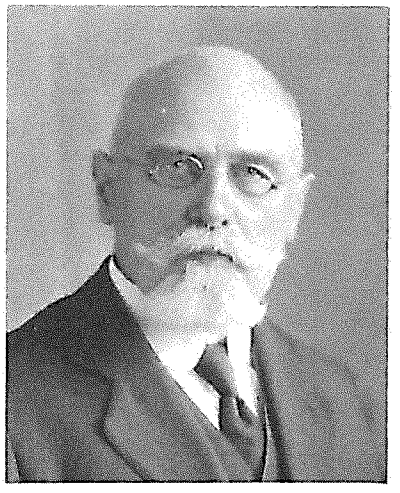
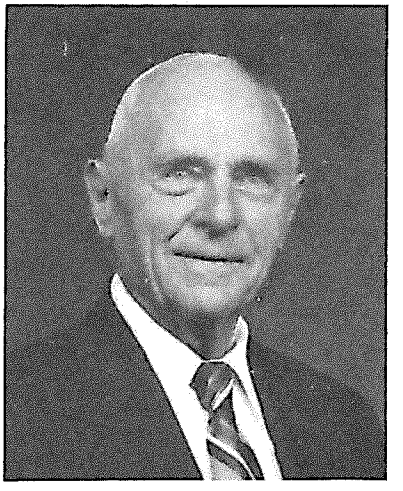
Dedication

To the memory and legacy of our fathers



Isaak P. Regehr, 1864-1930



Isaak I. Regehr, 1892-1983

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Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this manuscript was inspired and greatly assisted by Jacob I. Regehr. He is the last known surviving teacher of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule and provided many relevant documents, memories and insights. He was also a great source of inspiration and encouragement.

A number of former students at the school granted interviews and provided very valuable information and documentary materials. I am particularly grateful to those who shared their experiences of the last very difficult and tragic years of the school's existence. The telling of their story was painful, but it provided the personal and local context for events which otherwise, would have been subject to a rather factual and impersonal treatment.

The extensive archival materials which I inherited on the death of my father in 1983 were also of great value. These materials, and the opportunity to discuss them with my father, were made available to me when I prepared biographical sketches for a family reunion, and for the celebration some years later of my father's 90th birthday.

A work of this kind inevitably involves many hours of archival research. Hence a particular word of thanks must be extended to the very helpful and enthusiastic manner in which the staff at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, the librarian of the Ost-Europa Sammlung of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, the archivists at the Deutsche Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, and the librarians at the Institut fuer Auslandsbeziehungen in Stuttgart provided relevant information.

Professors Michael Haydon of the University of Saskatchewan, Harry Loewen of the University of Winnipeg, John B. Toews of the University of Calgary, graduate student Edmund Pries of the University of Waterloo, and Anne Kornelsen of Coaldale, Alberta, and Maria Huebert of Leamington, Ontario, both retired, all read and commented on the manuscript. Their assistance is very gratefully acknowledged.

Introduction

On a bright and sunny April Sunday afternoon in 1906 a large crowd of people gathered in a pasture on the eastern edge of the Russian Mennonite village of Alexanderkrone. This village was one of the more than 50 Mennonite villages which comprised the Molotschna Mennonite colony or settlement in the province of Taurida, approximately 65 kilometres north of the Sea of Azov. Alexanderkrone had been founded in 1857, when the land was laid out in typical Russian Mennonite fashion. The village had 40 full farms, each of which had approximately 70 hectares of land.[1] In the 1860s twenty smaller (half) farms were added. The village had a population of approximately 550 people.

The gathering in April of 1906 was a happy occasion marking the beginning of construction of a new Mennonite *Zentralschule* (literally Central School), which would offer training at roughly the same academic level as a North American junior high school.[2] Two lengthy sermons, several prayers, much hymn singing, and several short but vigorous addresses were followed by the actual turning of the first sod.[3] The new school would give male students who had completed their elementary education in an appropriate village school the opportunity to continue their education. This was the fourth and last school of this type built by the Mennonites of the Molotschna settlement. It would serve the southern and most recently settled tier of villages of that settlement. Great optimism, faith and confidence were in evidence and were clearly expressed by the chairman of the sponsoring voluntary Mennonite school society who confidently quoted Psalm 25:3: "Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed."[4]

The subsequent history of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule is the subject of this book. That history was marked by both success and turbulence and ended in terrible tragedy in 1941. It is part of a unique chapter of Mennonite history.

Indicative of the political and ideological turbulence of its history are the several names under which the school operated. It was first a *Zentralschule.* In 1913 it became a *Handelsschule* (trade school) in order to escape supervision and interference by the Russian Ministry of Education. This was an intermediate school very similar to the *Zentralschule,* except that it was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade. Bookkeeping and some other commercial subjects were added to the curriculum.[5] After the Russian Revolution, in accordance with the prevailing political ideology, the school became an *Arbeitsschule* (Workers' School) and its curriculum and teaching methods were gradually but radically changed to meet the new political realities. In the early 1930s it once again became a *Zentralschule.* Some pre-revolutionary teaching methods were restored, the curriculum was substantially altered and the program was expanded. These name changes point to fundamental changes in the school and its activities. It was constructed for and dedicated to the building of the Kingdom of

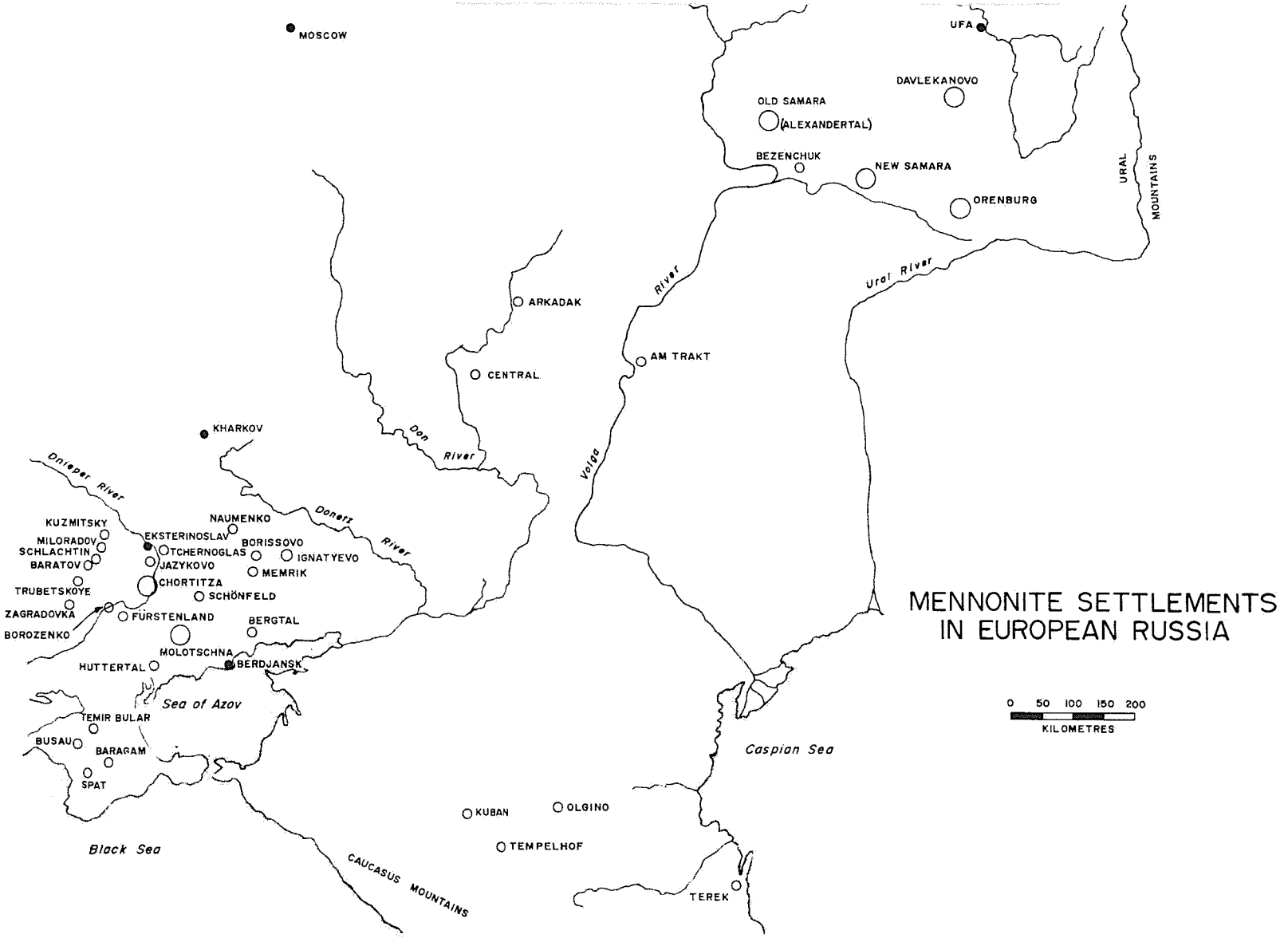
God, as understood by the Russian Mennonites. It became a Soviet school dedicated to the promotion of communism, atheism, and Russian nationalism, as defined and dictated by Soviet officials.

This is a story of success and failure, of triumph and tragedy, of great optimism and unfathomed despair. It is a story which raises fundamental questions about the human condition, about God, about history, about justice, and about the conflict between good and evil.

Those who are a part of this history did not find definitive answers to the many problems and questions of their day. David Dick, the man of strong faith and action who spoke with great confidence at the groundbreaking ceremony in 1906, was brutally murdered, together with his wife, during the desperate days in October of 1919 when Nestor Makhno and his bandits terrorized the countryside. Mortally wounded, but fully conscious and rational for more than twenty-four hours, Dick suffered very intense personal, spiritual doubts and agonies before finally finding his peace in surrender to the will of God, and in death. The struggles of men like David Dick, and the admittedly incomplete answers they found to the burning questions of their day, should nevertheless be remembered.

This book seeks to tell the story of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule as clearly and as honestly as the surviving documents, memories, and the writer's abilities allow. Readers are invited to relive a part of Mennonite history and learn how Mennonite people of another time and place experienced both faith and doubt, success and failure, good and evil, and how they sought their individual and collective salvation in good times and in times of great tribulation. The author tries to explain why and how some things happened, but readers must provide their own answers to the most fundamental questions of life and death, salvation and damnation, which are at the centre of the story of the thirty-five year history of this school.

Both of the people involved in the preparation of this manuscript have strong personal interests in this history. Jacob I. Regehr was a former student and teacher at the school, and the son of Isaak P. Regehr who was the school's first teacher of German and Religion. Theodore (T.D.) Regehr was born in another time and on another continent; he is the grandson of Isaak P. Regehr and a son of Isaak I. Regehr who was a student in the first class and also taught for six years at the school.


MOSCOW
UFA
DAVLEKANOVO
OLD SAMARA
(ALEXANDERTAL)
BEZENCHUK
NEW SAMARA
ORENBURG
URAL MOUNTAINS
ARKADAK
CENTRAL
AM TRAKT
Volga River
Ural River
Don River
KHARKOV
Dnieper River
Donetz River
NAUMENKO
KUZMITSKY
MILORADOV
SCHLACHTIN
BARATOV
EKSTERINOSLAV
TCHERNOGLAS
BORISSOVO
IGNATYEVO
JAZYKOVO
MEMRIK
CHORTITZA
SCHÖNFELD
TRUBETSKOYE
ZAGRADOVKA
BOROZENKO
FÜRSTENLAND
BERGTAL
MOLOTSCHNA
HUTTERTAL
BERDJANSK
Sea of Azov
TEMIR BULAR
BUSAU
BARAGAM
SPAT
Black Sea
CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS
KUBAN
OLGINO
TEMPELHOF
TEREK
Caspian Sea
MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS
IN EUROPEAN RUSSIA
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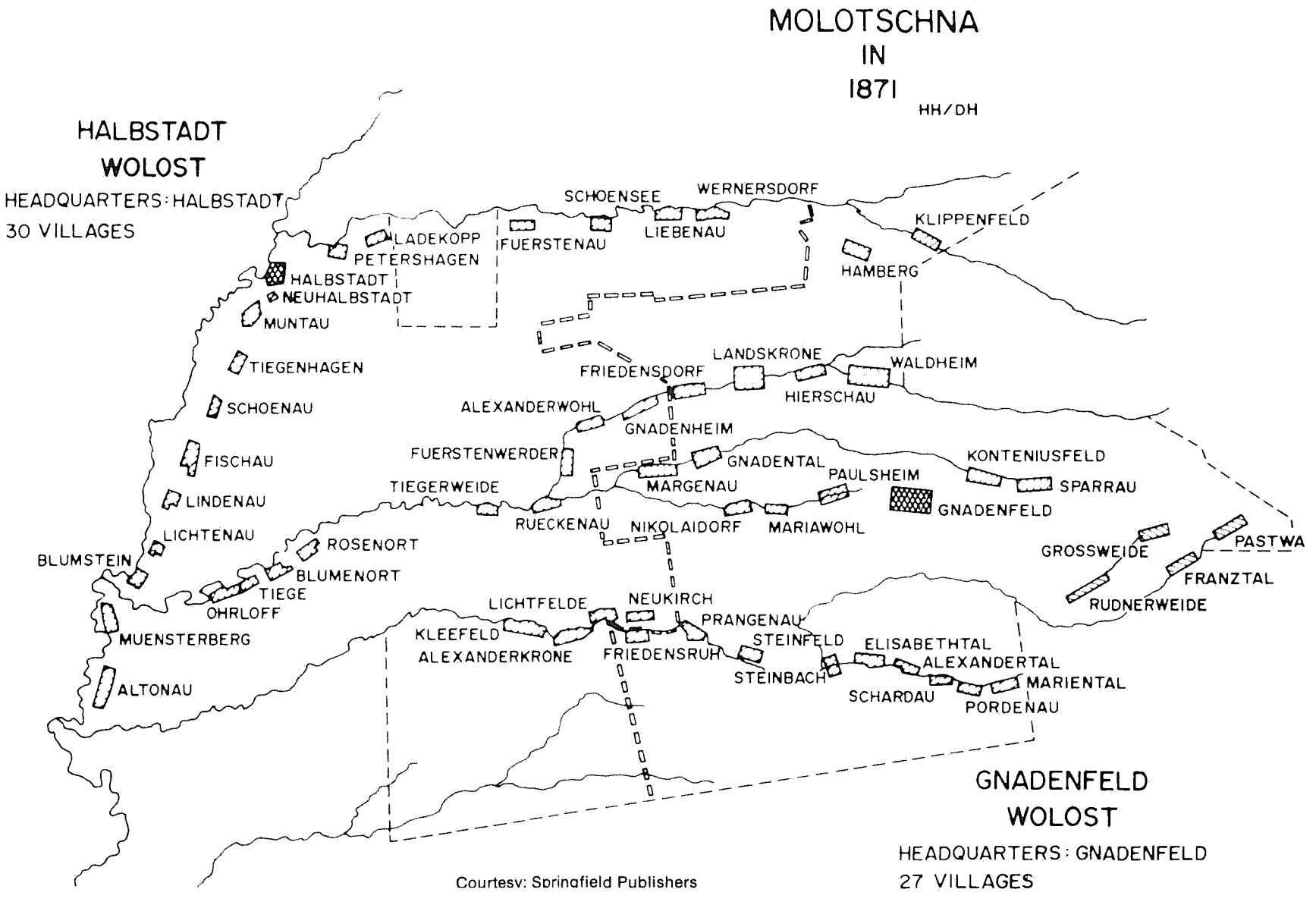
KILOMETRES


MOLOTSCHNA
IN
1871
HH/DH
HALBSTADT
WOLOST
HEADQUARTERS: HALBSTADT
30 VILLAGES
SCHOENSEE
WERNERSDORF
KLIPPENFELD
LADEKOPP
PETERSHAGEN
FUERSTENAU
LIEBENAU
HAMBERG
HALBSTADT
NEUHALBSTADT
MUNTAU
TIEGENHAGEN
SCHOENAU
FISCHAU
LINDENAU
LICHTENAU
BLUMSTEIN
ROSENORT
BLUMENORT
TIEGE
OHRLOFF
MUENSTERBERG
ALTONAU
LANDSKRONE
FRIEDENSDORF
WALDHEIM
HIERSCHAU
ALEXANDERWOHL
GNADENHEIM
FUERSTENWERDER
GNADENTAL
KONTENIUSFELD
PAULSHEIM
SPARRAU
TIEGERWEIDE
MARGENAU
GNADENFELD
RUECKENAU
NIKOLAIDORF
MARIAWOHL
GROSSWEIDE
PASTWA
FRANZTAL
RUDNERWEIDE
LICHTFELDE
NEUKIRCH
PRANGENAU
KLEEFELD
ALEXANDERKRONE
FRIEDENSRUH
STEINFELD
ELISABETHTAL
ALEXANDERTAL
STEINBACH
MARIENTAL
SCHARDAU
PORDENAU
GNADENFELD
WOLOST
HEADQUARTERS: GNADENFELD
27 VILLAGES
Courtesy: Springfield Publishers

Chapter I
Educational Needs and Opportunities in 1906

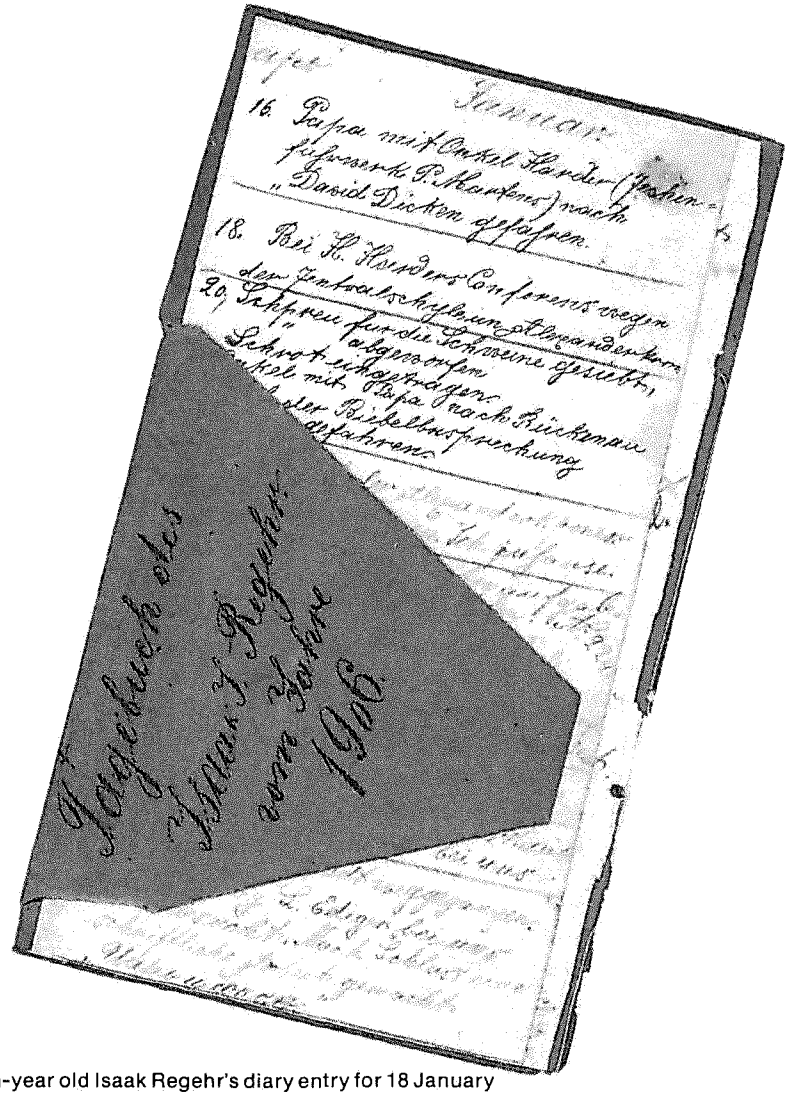
Russian Mennonites in 1906 talked and wrote a great deal about the need for better and more extensive educational facilities. Many factors contributed to a rapidly growing Mennonite demand for improved education at all levels. There were insistent complaints about deplorably low standards and the inadequate qualifications of many village school teachers. The most spectacular educational changes, however, occurred at the intermediate level, served by the Mennonite *Zentralschulen.* In 1905 and 1906 no fewer than six new Mennonite *Zentralschulen* were started, thereby doubling the number of such institutions in Russia. In addition, there were determined attempts to establish a Mennonite "Middle School," which would offer more advanced instruction at the high school level. The establishment of the new *Zentralschule* in Alexanderkrone was, thus, part of a larger educational renaissance among the Mennonites of southern Russia.

The official history of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule began on 19 November 1905.[1] On that day a public meeting took place in the Mennonite Church in Alexanderkrone. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the establishment of an intermediate school which would provide educational instruction beyond the level provided in the village schools. The inhabitants of the southerly villages of the Molotschna Mennonite settlement, together with wealthy Mennonite estate owners living at Apanlee on Juschanlee Creek, were particularly interested in establishing the new school.

At the first meeting some differences of opinion arose regarding the best location for the proposed school and the most appropriate organizational structure for this new endeavour. There was, however, general support for a strategic location which would make the school accessible to most of the residents of the southern villages. The location and accessibility of the other three Mennonite *Zentralschulen* in the Molotschna settlement, at Ohrloff, Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld, also made it logical to locate the new school in one of the southern villages.

The question regarding location was, in fact, resolved rather easily when the village of Alexanderkrone donated an appropriate piece of land. This land lay at the eastern edge of the village on a small triangular field near Juschanlee Creek. Prior to 1906 this land was a pasture for the calves of village farmers. There was enough land for the school building, for outbuildings to accommodate the horses of students who might ride in daily from nearby villages, and for a teacherage with necessary outbuildings. Sufficient land remained to create an attractive park.[2]

The organizational structure for the proposed new school was also resolved without serious difficulty. Funding and support for the elementary schools in

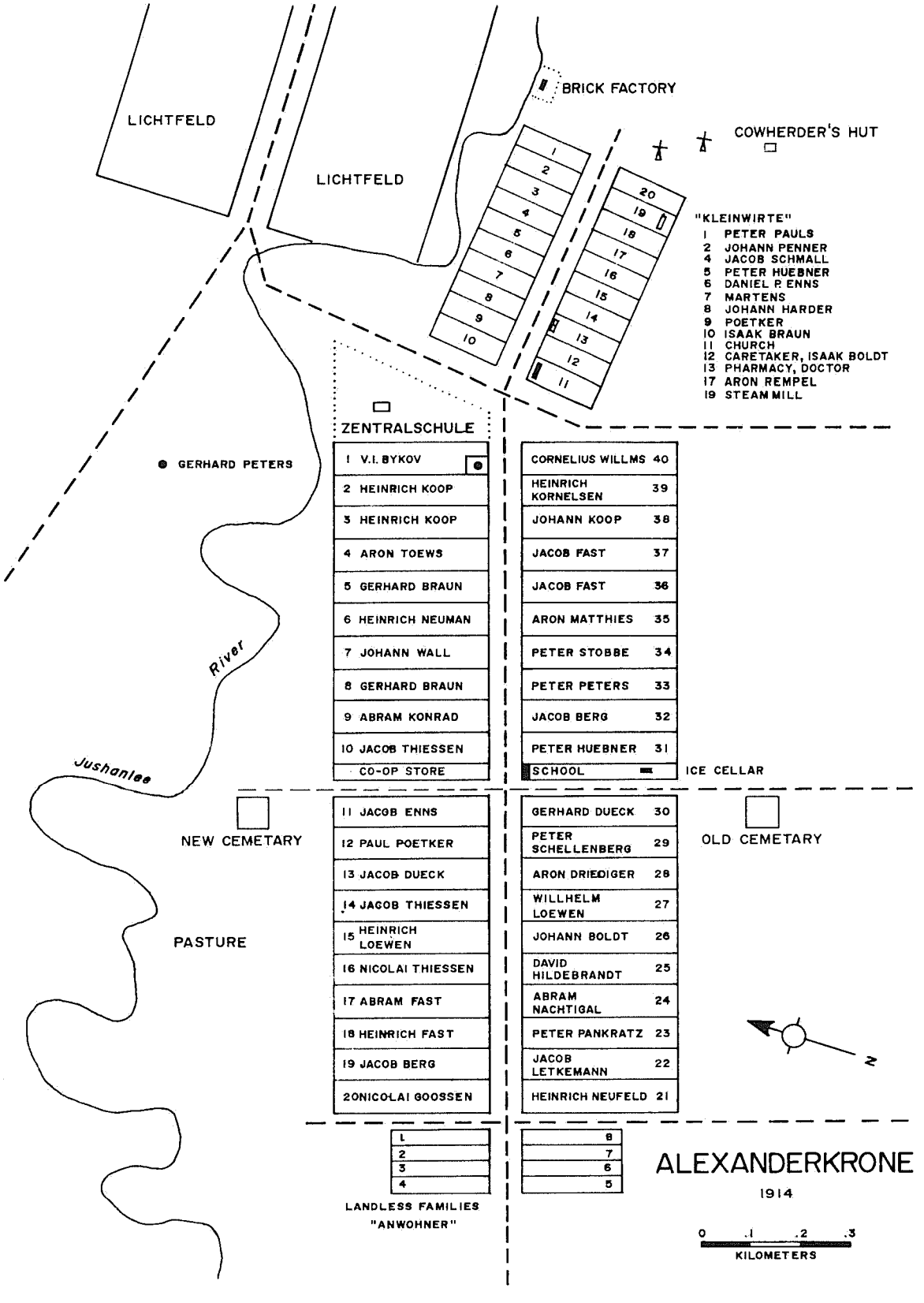


Thirteen-year old Isaak Regehr's diary entry for 18 January 1906 refers to an early meeting related to the founding of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule.

each of the villages were the responsibility of the local administration, but the intermediate schools posed an administrative problem. Only three had been built in the Molotschna settlement before 1906. They were obviously not equally accessible to everyone and were not supported by all villages. They were, in fact, sometimes viewed with considerable suspicion by the more conservative elements in the community.

Initially the organizers considered a municipally supported organization, similar to the one in Gnadenfeld, but they quickly concluded that such a structure would prove cumbersome. Instead they decided to organize a voluntary school society which would solicit funds and look after the affairs of their proposed school. They did not, however, exclude from membership entire villages interested in the new school.[3] Normally school society members paid or pledged an initial sum for construction purposes, and then paid annual membership fees.[4] Member villages generally contributed a small annual levy.

Such a voluntary school society was formed in 1905 under the name of the


LICHTFELD
LICHTFELD
BRICK FACTORY
COWHERDER'S HUT
"KLEINWIRTE"
1 PETER PAULS
2 JOHANN PENNER
4 JACOB SCHMALL
5 PETER HUEBNER
6 DANIEL P. ENNS
7 MARTENS
8 JOHANN HARDER
9 POETKER
10 ISAAK BRAUN
11 CHURCH
12 CARETAKER, ISAAK BOLDT
13 PHARMACY, DOCTOR
17 ARON REMPEL
19 STEAM MILL
ZENTRALSCHULE
GERHARD PETERS
1 V.I. BYKOV
2 HEINRICH KOOP
3 HEINRICH KOOP
4 ARON TOEWS
5 GERHARD BRAUN
6 HEINRICH NEUMAN
7 JOHANN WALL
8 GERHARD BRAUN
9 ABRAM KONRAD
10 JACOB THIESSEN
CO-OP STORE
CORNELIUS WILLMS 40
HEINRICH KORNELSEN 39
JOHANN KOOP 38
JACOB FAST 37
JACOB FAST 36
ARON MATTHIES 35
PETER STOBBE 34
PETER PETERS 33
JACOB BERG 32
PETER HUEBNER 31
SCHOOL
ICE CELLAR
River
Jushanlee
NEW CEMETARY
OLD CEMETARY
PASTURE
11 JACOB ENNS
12 PAUL POETKER
13 JACOB DUECK
14 JACOB THIESSEN
15 HEINRICH LOEWEN
16 NICOLAI THIESSEN
17 ABRAM FAST
18 HEINRICH FAST
19 JACOB BERG
20 NICOLAI GOOSSEN
GERHARD DUECK 30
PETER SCHELLENBERG 29
ARON DRIEDIGER 28
WILLHELM LOEWEN 27
JOHANN BOLDT 26
DAVID HILDEBRANDT 25
ABRAM NACHTIGAL 24
PETER PANKRATZ 23
JACOB LETKEMANN 22
HEINRICH NEUFELD 21
N
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LANDLESS FAMILIES
"ANWOHNER"
ALEXANDERKRONE
1914
0 .1 .2 .3
KILOMETERS

Alexanderkroner *Schulverein.* Ten men are listed as the founding members of this school society. They were Apanlee estate owners David Dick and Jacob Sudermann, estate owner Heinrich Guenther from Ohrloff, farmer and preacher Heinrich Harder from Kleefeld, teacher and preacher Isaak Regehr from Kleefeld, farmer and preacher Heinrich Koop from Alexanderkrone, farmer and preacher Jacob Esau from Lichtfelde, farmer Gerhard Epp from Lichtfelde, farmer and preacher Jacob Reimer from Rueckenau, and estate owner and farmer Nikolai Schmidt from Steinbach. David Dick was elected as chairman, and Jacob Esau as secretary-treasurer.[5]

Once formally organized, the Alexanderkrone School Society acted with remarkable dispatch. Minimum individual contributions of 50 rubles per member were solicited, as were numerous other one-time donations. Several of the supporting estate owners were very wealthy, and made substantial contributions. David Dick, for example, reportedly had an annual net income of 150,000 rubles and was a major benefactor of numerous Russian Mennonite institutions.[6] The support of such individuals made it possible to raise the required money, complete construction, and officially open the new school building, all within nine months. Before discussing these activities, however, it is useful to consider in greater detail the educational, social, political and economic contexts within which the society did its work.

Russian education in 1906 still involved a number of separate systems.[7] At least four government departments — Education, Crown Lands, Trade, and Defence — operated or supported and supervised schools. There were also many different kinds of private and church schools. The central government had tried for years to establish some control and to provide some direction, but inadequate funds and the lack of any compulsory school attendance legislation, coupled with increasing bureaucratic confusion and interference, had created an inefficient and unsatisfactory educational system.

The Mennonites had been granted complete control over the education of their children when they first emigrated to southern Russia (Ukraine) in the decades after 1789.[8] That control had initially been in the hands of church leaders, but the deprivations of the early and very difficult pioneer years, combined with incompetent, quarrelsome and antiquated Mennonite church leadership, left Russian Mennonite education in a deplorable state for decades.

Major economic and educational reforms were initiated in the Molotschna Colony in the 1840s. The leader in these reforms was Johann Cornies, who was familiar with and tried to apply the pedagogical ideas and teachings of Friedrich Froebel and Johann Pestalozzi. Curriculum concerns like *Heimatkunde* and *Naturkunde* were taken directly from Pestalozzi, as were some of the methodological principles enunciated in Pestalozzi's *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children.*

Johann Cornies incorporated these ideas into his own series of 87 specific recommendations and principles for school teachers.[9] His primary objective was to replace the deadly methods of memorization, rote learning, and decorative art and penmanship with more enlightened and progressive learning of basic concepts and essential skills, all based on accurate observations of actual objects.

In an effort to implement his ideas Cornies recruited qualified teachers from Prussia where Pestalozzi's influence was greatest and where Froebel and Herbart, both followers of Pestalozzi's ideas, also had strong support. Under Cornies' influence the first Mennonite *Zentralschulen* were opened and encouraged to offer special pedagogical courses for prospective teachers. Special teachers' conferences with model school lessons, followed by intense discussion and criticism, were also organized. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, elementary school education was made compulsory in the large Russian Mennonite colonies of Molotschna and Chortitza.

The results of all these reforms were impressive, as is confirmed by the fact that at the turn of the century more than 90 percent of Russian Mennonites could read and write, while only 25 percent of the Russian populace generally could do so. These impressive reforms, however, did not protect the Mennonite schools from growing governmental pressures. The Russian reformist sentiment which led to the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 also led to criticism of all special privileges, including the right of the Mennonites to operate their own schools and their exemption from compulsory military service. The Mennonites, working through the *Molotschnaer Mennoniten Schulrat,* substantially revised their school curriculum in 1876. But in 1881 the very lax control exercised by the Ministry of Crown Lands over Mennonite schools in the two oldest and largest Mennonite colonies was replaced by much more vigorous supervision and control by the Ministry of Education.

Increased russification of the entire educational system was the avowed policy of the Ministry of Education, but it was enforced at varying paces in different places. By 1906, however, instruction in history, literature and arithmetic in all the Molotschna Mennonite elementary schools had to be in the Russian language. All schools with more than one teacher were required to have at least one teacher who was of Russian ethnic background. In the intermediate schools the primary language of instruction had to be Russian in all subjects except German and Religion.

The woefully inadequate qualifications of many school teachers was also a matter of very grave concern. Most Mennonite elementary school teachers in 1906 had received some training at one of the existing *Zentralschulen,* and many had completed the two year pedagogical course offered at the schools in Halbstadt and Chortitza. Teachers at the *Zentralschulen* either had to be graduates of an approved pedagogical course, (the pedagogical courses offered at Halbstadt and Chortitza were not officially approved in 1906), or they had to pass an appropriate proficiency examination *(Hauslehrerexamen)* in the subjects they were to teach. These proficiency examinations were administered by the Ministry of Education, which also had the power to deny official status to schools which did not meet its requirements. That power, however, was significantly weakened by the fact that there was no national compulsory school attendance legislation, and by the lack of significant government financial support for most approved schools. Ministry approval of their schools was, nonetheless, important to young Mennonite teachers because they could discharge their peacetime military or alternative service obligations by teaching for a fixed number of years

in an approved school.

The long-term trend in Russian Mennonite education after 1861 was a gradual weakening of local autonomy and a strengthening of governmental supervision and involvement. The Mennonites responded to this trend with numerous requests for greater local autonomy, and in 1907 they drafted a proposed government statute incorporating their system of *Zentralschulen* which followed German rather than Russian models.[10] When the government failed to pass their proposed statute, Mennonite leaders initiated meetings with representatives from other German colonies in Russia to draft legislation covering all German intermediate schools. That legislation was eventually passed in amended form.[11]

Mennonite demands for enhanced educational facilities increased rapidly after 1900, in spite of increased government interest and interference in educational matters. Both the Molotschna and Chortitza colonies faced severe land shortages. There was a good deal of comment in the press that it was most unfortunate that Mennonites had to avail themselves of the professional services of outsiders while their own young people encountered increasing difficulty in making a living. Entry into the professions or business, however, required better and more education.[12]

The economic motives were complemented by important religious and theological concerns. In the last half of the nineteenth century the Russian Mennonite colonies experienced major religious revivals,[13] which had very important educational consequences. As the debates and disputes about religious interpretations intensified, many Mennonites came to see in education a means both to resolve some of the troublesome questions of their day and to perpetuate and propagate the newly rediscovered religious faith.[14] Many of the revivalist preachers emphasized an uncritical faith and a legalistic interpretation of Scripture. They were certainly not interested in anything that might be called a "liberal" education. However, the religious energy and enthusiasm of the day did lead to a sharply increased interest in theological discussions and a recognition of the need for theological training, particularly when some of the more zealous converts fell into highly embarrassing excesses of zeal and enthusiasm.[15]

Teachers themselves fostered and encouraged this increased interest in education when, in 1907, they formed the Molotschna Teachers' Federation. Heavy teaching loads, inadequate salaries, the lack of any teachers' pension plans, teacher qualifications, the establishment of scholarships for prospective teachers, and the inadequate physical facilities in many village schools, were all concerns raised by this federation.[16]

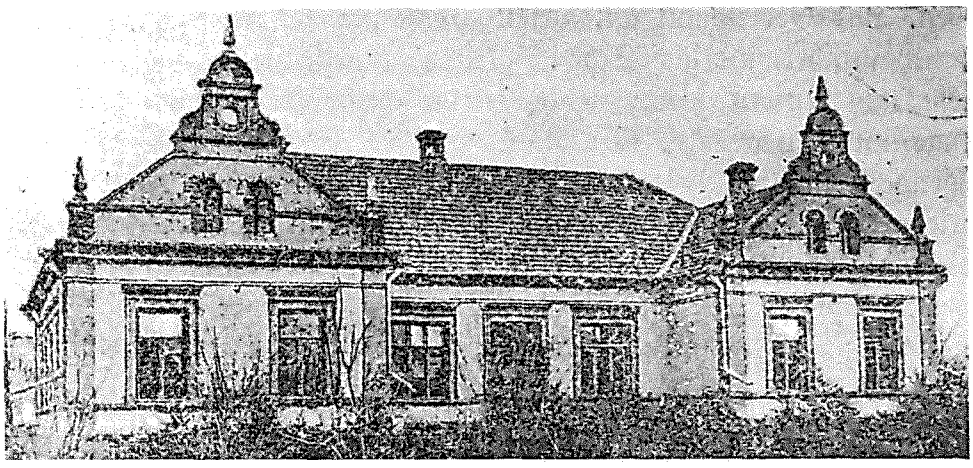
National political troubles and tensions, particularly after the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, also greatly increased the demand for further education. Several Mennonite writers attributed the Russian defeat entirely to the backwardness of the Russian educational system. They went so far as to claim that both the German victory in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, and the Japanese victory in 1905, were the work of German and Japanese schoolmasters rather than of the soldiers and sailors.[17] That was a comfortable, though dubious, interpretation which suited the spirit of the times.

Following the Russian defeat, political disturbances, in which university and secondary school students played a very prominent part, placed great emphasis on education, and increased the suspicions of Ministry officials and their determination to increase its control. Political dissent was frequently accompanied by a wide range of terrorist tactics, which, together with other political events were reported in detail in the local Mennonite press.

The Mennonite press claimed that education, preferably under Mennonite control, or at least very strongly influenced by Mennonite ideals and teachings, provided a means to understand and find appropriate ways to deal with the problems of the new and dangerous conditions which had been created in Russia after the military defeat.[18]

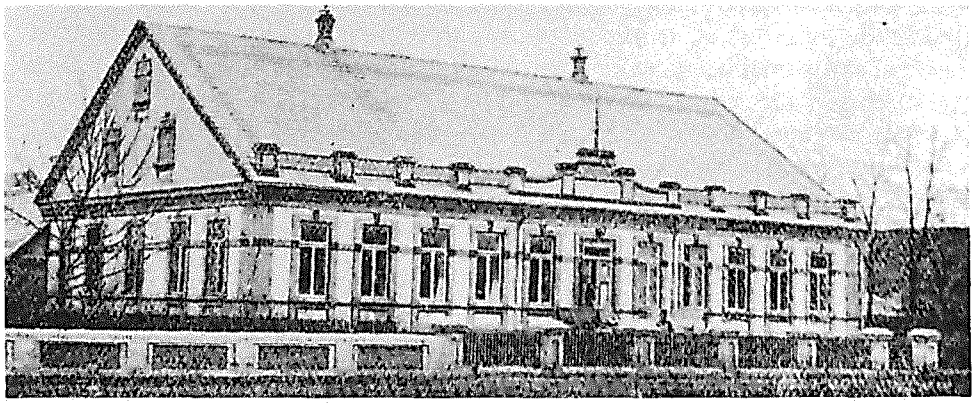
In 1904 the local news and devotional paper, *Die Friedensstimme,* compiled detailed educational statistics, based on a questionnaire sent to every Russian Mennonite village. These returns showed that in 1904 there were 310 Mennonite village schools throughout Russia, with a total of 11,496 students. In addition, there were nine intermediate Mennonite educational institutions, including five clearly identified as *Zentralschulen,* two that were described as *Ministerialschulen* (Ministerial schools), and two *Mädchenschulen* (girls' schools). A total of 566 male and 128 female students received instruction in these nine intermediate Mennonite schools. Three of the *Zentralschulen* and one of the *Mädchenschulen* were in the Molotschna colony. The *Zentralschule* at Halbstadt in the Molotschna Colony, and the one at Chortitza in the Chortitza Colony, also offered, in addition to their regular program, a two-year pedagogical course where future village teachers were trained.[19]

School for the Deaf (Marien-Taubstummenschule) in Tiege, founded 1881.
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives



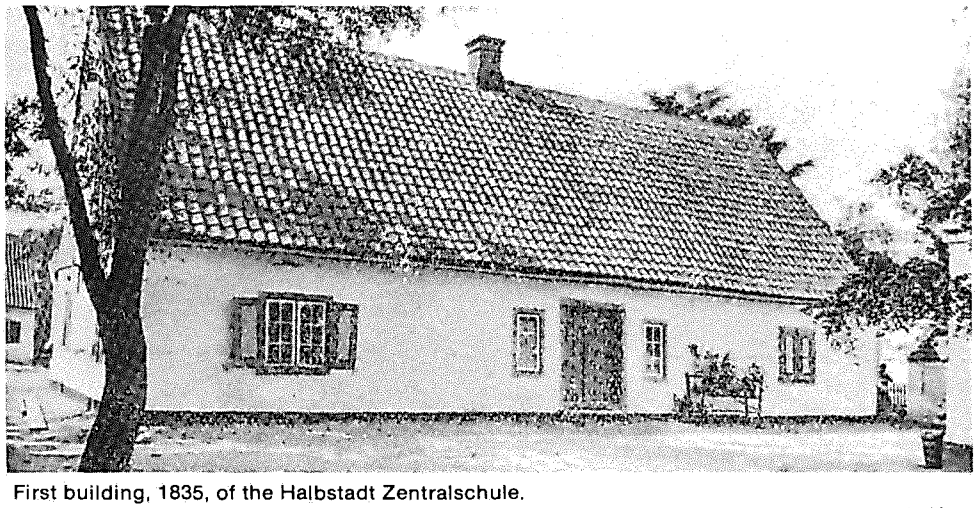
The Neuhalbstadt Maedchenschule, founded 1874, became a Progymnasium in 1910.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives



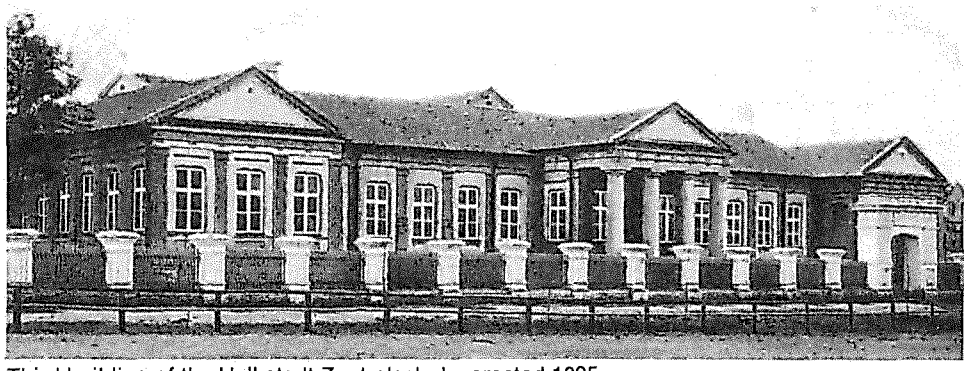
The Ohrloff Maedchenschule in Tiege, founded 1907.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives



First building, 1835, of the Halbstadt Zentralschule.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives



Third building of the Halbstadt Zentralschule, erected 1895.

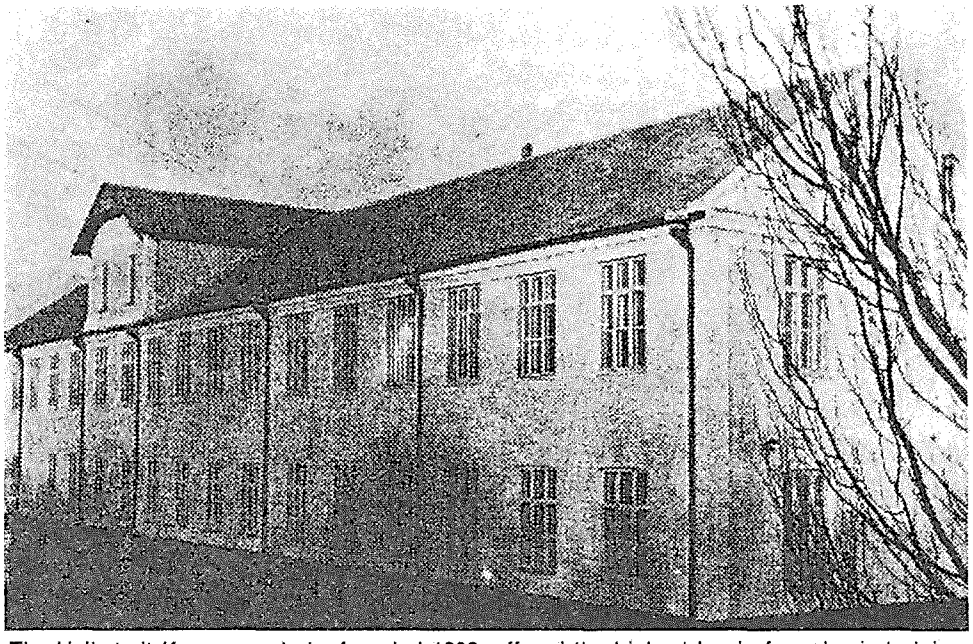
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

The Ohrloff Zentralschule, founded 1860, successor to the Vereinsschule (1822-47).

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

The Gnadenfeld Zentralschule, organized 1873, successor to the Bruderschule founded 1857.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives



The Halbstadt Kommerzschule, founded 1908, offered the highest level of academic training (approximately high school level) of any schools operated by Mennonites in Russia.

Photo courtesy of Aaron Klassen

Teachers and board members of the Halbstadt Kommerzschule.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

The village schools offered between five and seven years of instruction. The intermediate schools in the Molotschna Colony offered three years of instruction beyond the village school level, while those in the Chortitza Colony had a four-year program of instruction. Three of the *Zentralschulen* and both girls' schools were supported and administered by privately organized school societies.

The two *Ministerialschulen* were in the newer Mennonite colonies where local government responsibilities, including the support of schools, were still under the Ministry of Crown Lands. These ministerial schools were administered directly by officials of the Ministry of Crown Lands, but the interest and influence of distant bureaucrats were sufficiently limited to permit these schools to operate in much the same way as the other Mennonite intermediate schools.[20]

The remaining two Mennonite *Zentralschulen* in 1904 were *Gemeindeschulen.* They received their funding from, and were under the immediate administrative direction of, the local municipal government *(Volost).* Funds were raised through both voluntary solicitations and local taxes or levies approved by senior government authorities.[21]

The Mennonite educational system, particularly at the intermediate level, experienced a remarkable expansion in 1905 and 1906. No fewer than six new *Zentralschulen* were established in those two years,[22] thus doubling the number of such schools in Russia. Mennonite leaders recognized that the demand for further education in order to meet economic, religious, political and social problems, could probably not be stopped.

It was also reported in 1906 that at least 150 Russian Mennonite young people were studying at non-Mennonite secondary and post-secondary institutions of learning.[23] Many were breaking out of old community structures and seeking their own economic and educational opportunities. But if Mennonite young people attended non-Mennonite institutions, they might well imbibe alien religious, social, intellectual and political ideas and attitudes.

The radicalism and revolutionary fervour of many secondary school and university students during the 1905 political disturbances were regarded with suspicion and fear by many Mennonite leaders who believed that great danger lurked in the various Russian cities and institutions of higher learning. They consequently urged that more and better Mennonite intermediate and secondary schools be established so that young people would not be exposed to undesirable outside influences and temptations. Schools with academically trained teachers who also held genuinely pietistic and German-nationalistic feelings therefore gained strong support.[24]

In addition to the six new Mennonite *Zentralschulen* established in 1905 and 1906, a Mennonite named Abram Neufeld established his own private secondary school in Berdjansk (referred to as either a *Realschule* or a *Mittelschule*). Neufeld, with government permission, organized his own private society to support his school. Neufeld's work was cut short, however, by his premature death only three years later.[25]

At the same time another private educational society was organized in Halbstadt with the objective of establishing a Mennonite secondary school there.[26]

Conference of teachers and supporters of higher education held in Schoenwiese near Alexandrovsk, Ukraine, 1908. At this conference the delegates worked out a new statute to govern all German *Zentralschulen* in Ukraine. The proposed statute was sent to representatives in the *Duma* for action. *Die Friedensstimme* reported at length on these deliberations (see note #1).

Neufeld's secondary school in Berdjansk and the proposed Mennonite secondary school in Halbstadt were both designed for graduates of the *Zentralschulen* who either wished to enter the professions or go on to technical or university training.

In 1905 and 1906 both the Chortitza and Molotschna authorities also established special fellowships for prospective teachers who wished to study in St. Petersburg or at other Russian pedagogical institutions or universities.[27] These fellowships were awarded on the condition that the individual assisted would return to the colonies to teach in one of the village or intermediate schools. By 1914 the number of Mennonites studying in St. Petersburg alone stood at more than seventy.[28] A new university established at Simferopol in the Crimea deliberately sought to cater to the needs and interests of Mennonite students.

The founding of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule in 1906 was clearly part of

Aus deutſchen Anſiedlungen.

Schulgründungen.

Es iſt jedenfalls ein wohnliches Zeichen von Bildungsſtreben, daß an verſchiedenen Orten der Bau neuer Zentralſchulen in Angriff genommen wird. Man fängt mehr wie je in unſern Dörfern an, den Wert einer beſſern Bildung einzuſehen. Jedenfalls können unſre deutſchen Anſiedler bei gutem Willen in dieſer Richtung viel ausrichten. Unſre Leute ſind aber im Großen und Ganzen zu wenig an reichliches Geben gewöhnt. Die vielen Schulen erfordern aber nicht blos ein einmaliges Opfer zur Aufführung der Bauten, ſie erfordern zur Unterhaltung der Lehrkräfte u. verſch. and. fortlaufende Opfer, welche vorausſichtlich durch das in Frage kommende Schulgeld nicht gedeckt werden. Deshalb befürchtet man ſchon, ob nicht grade jetzt des Guten zu viel getan wird, ob überhaupt die Koſten gehörig überſchlagen werden. Wir zählen hier einige Schulgründungen auf, wobei wir aber glauben, daß uns keinenfalls erſchöpfendes Material zur Verfügung ſteht, daß hie und da Gründungen geſchehen ſind oder geſchehen, von denen wir nicht wiſſen. Unter den Mennoniten ſind im vorigen Jahr gegründet und werden in dieſem Jahr gegründet: Die Zentralſchulen in New York, Nikolaipol, Alexanderkrone, Karaſan, Spat und wahrſcheinlich im Orenburgiſchen Gouvernement. Außerdem beſtehenden kleinere Schmierſurſe und Mädchenſchulen. In Neuſelb, einem kapt. Dorfe im Gouv. Cherſon wurde eine Fortbildungsſchule gegründet. In Karlsruhe bei Nikolajew ſoll im nächſten Jahr ein Progymnaſium gegründet werden. In Großliebenthal bei Chersa wurde im vorigen Jahr eine Mädchenſchule eröffnet. In St. [illegible] bei Chersa wird ein Fond geſammelt zur Errichtung einer Mädchen-

News item regarding the founding of several *Zentralschulen*, including the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, in southern Russia from *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 18 (6 May 1906): p. 187.

a more general interest in, and enthusiasm for, education among the Russian Mennonites. The new schools were expected to meet economic, religious, social and political as well as educational objectives, and there was widespread support for their establishment. It was, however, also the case that the establishment of six new intermediate schools, one and possibly two new secondary schools, and several other specialized institutions, placed very great burdens on the supporting constituency. Thus *Die Friedensstimme,* while expressing strong support for more education, began to raise serious questions whether the establishment of six new *Zentralschulen* all at once might not be too much of a good thing.[29] The problems confronting the new schools, including the one in Alexanderkrone, soon proved the wisdom of those words of caution.

Chapter II
A Difficult Beginning, 1906-1907

The Alexanderkrone Mennonite School Society was organized on 8 December of 1905, following a preliminary meeting on 19 November of that year. In several months time the new society members had drafted a constitution and by-laws for their organization and raised a very impressive amount of money. Donations or pledges for 9,500 rubles in cash, and a further 30,000 rubles in 4 percent government bonds were obtained. This encouraging financial response allowed the promoters to commission architect John Peters of Neuhalbstadt to draw appropriate building plans. The necessary lumber and bricks were purchased. Much of the building material was on site when the official groundbreaking ceremony took place in April 1906.[1]

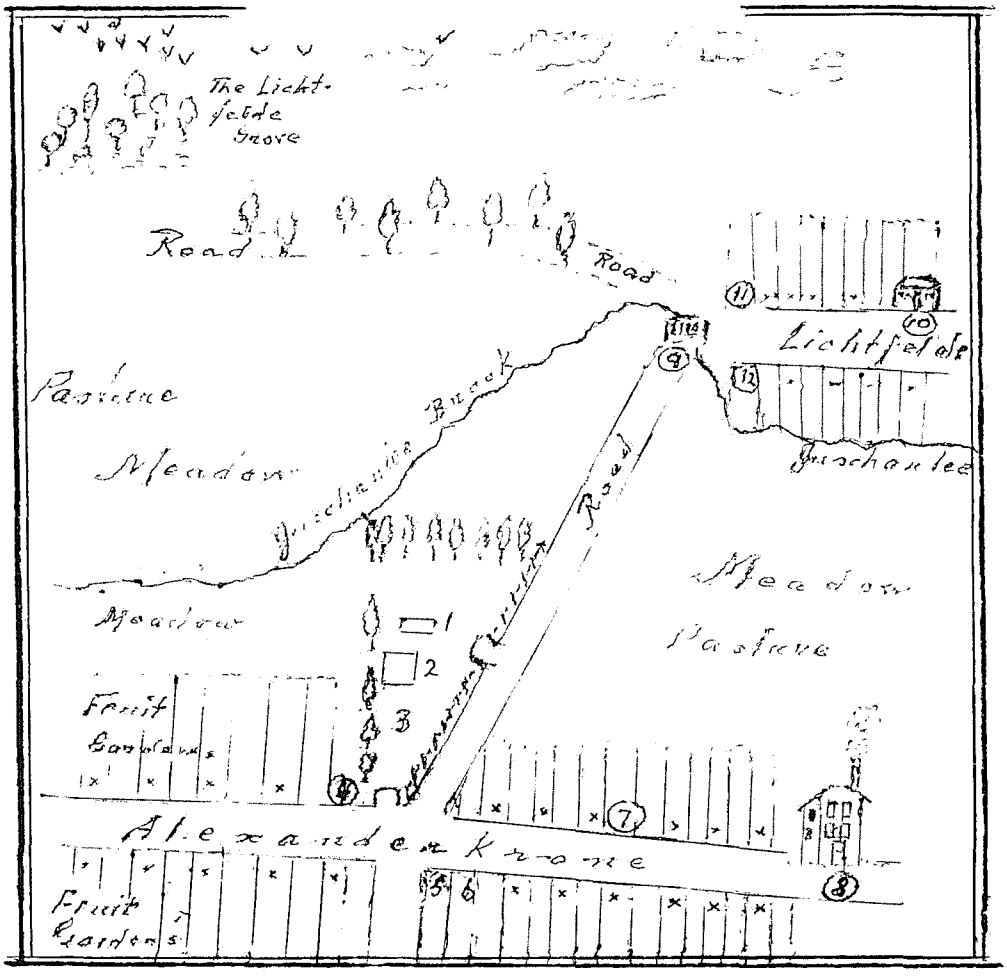
The person charged with responsibility for construction was a highly regarded local Russian entrepreneur whose family name was Matjvai. Matjvai was reportedly very devout and sincere, as well as a competent builder. According to one report he was entirely overcome with pious emotion during the groundbreaking ceremonies. Jacob Esau, the society's very vigorous secretary-treasurer and a preacher from the neighbouring village of Lichtfelde, delivered an address which so moved the Russian builder that he repeatedly crossed himself and invoked all the blessings of the Almighty, using his own religious forms.[2]

In addition to his deep religious feelings, however, Matjvai was also an exceptionally able contractor and workman who saw to it that the new school was built properly. He relied mainly on voluntary labour provided by the Mennonite villagers. He was also assisted by his two sons. Both were attending university, but earned the money they needed for their studies by working for their father during the summers.

The building plans, as drawn, called for the construction of a substantial plastered brick building. An impressive entrance, with extensive wood fretwork and imposing pillars gave the structure a sturdy and attractive appearance. The foyer opened into a general assembly area with a raised platform or stage at the far end. Since classes of up to 50 students were regarded as acceptable, the three classrooms were designed to accommodate that many students. There was also a small teachers' room.

The organization, fundraising, and construction work were carried forward with great energy and determination. Wealthy individuals, notably estate owners David Dick and Jacob Sudermann of Apanlee, provided financial stability, while Jacob Esau provided much of the organizational and emotional energy needed to get the construction project completed. Esau, together with Isaak Wiens of Alexanderkrone, were named as building supervisors by the school society. They mobilized the necessary volunteer labour in their villages to haul needed

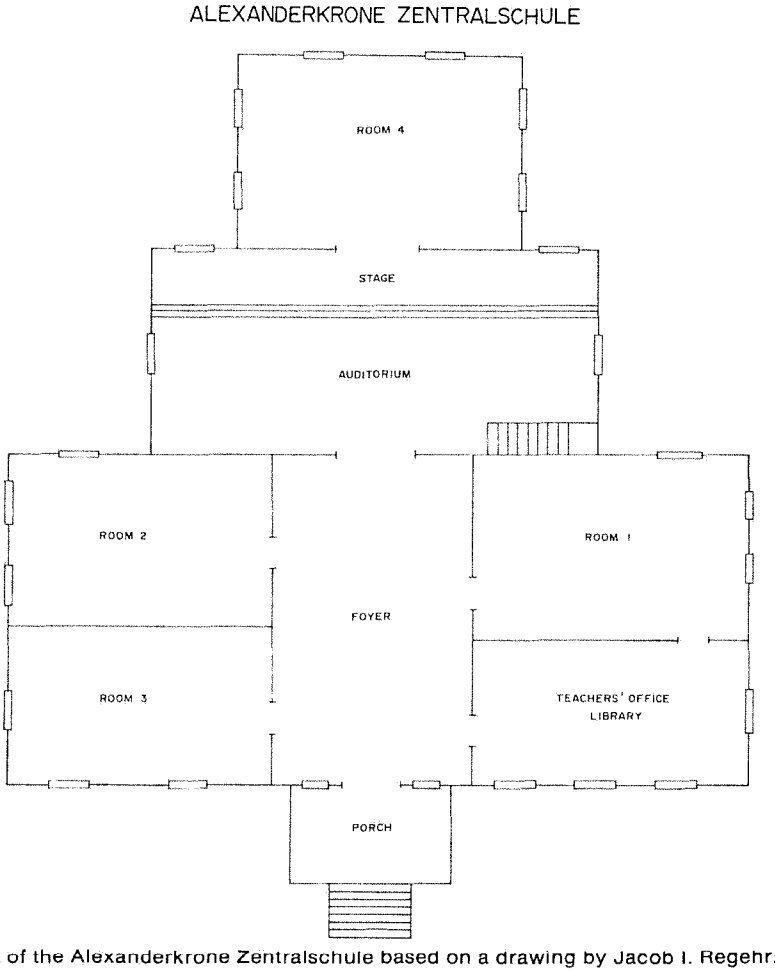
*** The School in Relation to ***
*** Alexanderkrone and Lichtfelde ***



1.The Regehr Teacher.
2.The Central School
3.The School Park
4.Bykov Teacherage
5.Conference Church
6.Doctor,s Office
7. Third Teacherage
8. Mill, Dampfmühle
9.Bridge
10.Alliance Church
11.H.Reimer Place
12.J.Dick Place

The area 1,2,3 was aptly dubbed " The Triangle " (Der Dreieck).

Diagram of the area surrounding the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule as recalled by Jacob I. Regehr.



Floor plan of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule based on a drawing by Jacob I. Regehr.

Isaak, Anna, Elisabeth, Liese, Jakob, Mariechen (sitting), Tina and Isaak P. Regehr in 1917.

bricks, mortar and lumber, and to do the actual construction work. During the busy spring seeding season the two supervisors had to use fairly heavy pressure to ensure that construction continued as planned. Both the proposed new school building and a teacherage were built simultaneously. Esau later wrote that "there were times when we did not have a single load of bricks or mortar for the next day's work, but the Lord always provided help at the right time in wonderful ways."[3]

Construction was evidently of very high quality, as several generations of youthful students, occasional military bombardments, and the later "scorched earth" policies of retreating Soviet and Nazi military forces proved. It was, nevertheless, a very tight construction schedule. Much of the work did not get finished before September when the school was to be opened for instruction. In the school building proper, much of the finishing work had to be done after the school was officially opened, creating numerous disturbances during the first year of instruction.

The new teacherage, into which the school's first teacher of German and religion, Isaak P. Regehr, moved with his family in early November of 1906, needed even more work. From September until November the Regehr family lived in one of the smaller buildings *(Nebenhaus)* on the farm of Johann Dick in Lichtfelde. His farm was the most westerly one in Lichtfelde and hence very close to the Alexanderkrone school.[4]

The teacherage followed fairly conventional Mennonite housing plans. Like the other houses in the village it had a small attached barn which could accommodate two cows and two horses. There was also another smaller barn, half of which was a chicken coop, the other half a small pig pen. Construction of all of these buildings was not entirely completed by the time the 1906-07 school year began.

The fall of 1906 was rainy and cool. Storm windows were not installed in either the school or the teacherage in the first year, and newly plastered interior walls dried very slowly and somewhat unevenly, creating a very damp and chilly atmosphere in both the school and the teacherage. Partly as a result of these adverse conditions, the youngest child of the Regehr family, a four-year-old boy named Peter, contracted pneumonia and died. The death of this child elicited sympathy and helped to forge a strong bond among the community, the school and the teacher.

The discomfort of teachers and pupils was further increased by the lack of landscaping, sanding and sidewalks. The school and the teacherage were surrounded by a sea of mud.

The problems of the Regehr family were, however, no more serious than those of the other teachers. The school's first mathematics and science teacher, Herman Rempel, had to find accommodation in the village of Lichtfelde for the first months of the school year. The path from Lichtfelde to Alexanderkrone had numerous mud hazards that year. Once the teacherage was more or less fit for occupancy, the unmarried Rempel moved into an upstairs room, while the Regehr family occupied the main floor. The school society's secretary-treasurer readily admitted that the accommodation was very spartan. Franz Thiessen, the

school's first principal and teacher of Russian language and literature, found accommodation with one of the more prosperous farmers in the village.

Despite the serious initial inconveniences, the physical facilities of the new Alexanderkrone school were superior to those of some other new Mennonite *Zentralschulen,* although not equal to the facilities of the older and larger schools at Ohrloff, Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld. The Mennonite *Zentralschule* at Nikolaijevka (Kronstadt), for example, began with only one teacher working in a private house.[5]

During the first six months of its existence the Alexanderkrone School Society was concerned almost entirely with organizational and fundraising matters and with the construction of the new school and teacherage. In that regard, despite imperfections, a good deal was accomplished. Matters were much less satisfactory when the Society turned its attention to consideration of the curriculum, and to the recruitment of suitable teachers for the new school and to the accreditation of their school by appropriate officials of the Ministry of Education.

The surviving documents give no indication that the promoters or teachers of the Alexanderkrone school gave serious thought to the curriculum. It was assumed from the outset that the new school would follow the three-year curriculum of the other three *Zentralschulen* then operating in the Molotschna Colony. The main subjects covered in those intermediate schools were religious studies, German language and literature, mathematics, Russian language and literature, geography, history and science. Science was generally referred to as nature studies or nature history studies, but included elements of zoology, botany, physics, and chemistry.[6] As far as the Alexanderkrone School Society was concerned, there was an official and approved curriculum for Mennonite *Zentralschulen,* and that curriculum was satisfactory. In 1906 there were no serious government objections regarding the specific curriculum offered at Alexanderkrone, although a number of meetings were held regarding the curriculum of all the German or Mennonite *Zentralschulen* in Russia at that time.

It was generally recognized that there was a serious shortage of properly trained teachers in the Russian Mennonite colonies, particularly of teachers qualified to teach at the intermediate level. There also seems to have been a remarkable inclination on the part of some school promoters, including the members of the Alexanderkrone School Society, to regard the matter of academic credentials rather lightly. This, perhaps, explains why the search for appropriate teachers began only after construction of the buildings was well advanced. As a result, the school became embroiled in a series of very unpleasant disputes with officials of the Ministry of Education.[7]

The first teacher appointed by the Alexanderkrone School Society was Franz Thiessen, a village school teacher who had only passed the necessary qualifying examination to teach geography at the intermediate level. He was appointed in July of 1906, to begin instruction in September of the same year. He was not, however, appointed to teach geography. Instead, taking into account prevailing nationalist requirements, the Society hired Thiessen to teach Russian language, literature and history. The fact that Thiessen had no academic qualifications to teach those subjects did not particularly concern Society members.

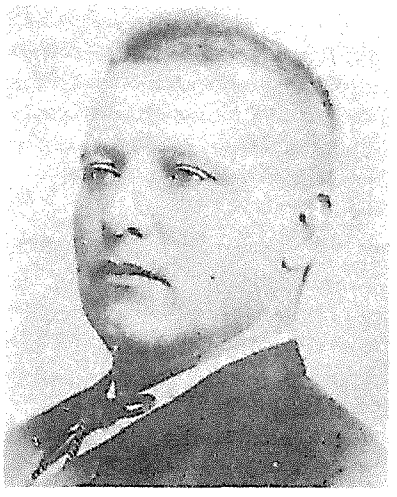
Franz Thiessen, 1881-1950

The second teacher engaged by the society was Isaak P. Regehr who had 25 years experience as a village school teacher, twenty-one of them in the nearby village of Kleefeld. He was to teach religion and German language and literature, but his formal training beyond the village school level was very limited. He had only attended the Gnadenfeld Zentralschule for one year. He had not passed any qualifying examinations to teach anything at the intermediate level.[8]

The School Society believed that experience and practice were much more relevant than book learning, and that Regehr therefore probably enjoyed better qualifications than others who had passed the required subject examinations set by the Ministry of Education. That, however, was not an argument which carried much weight with Russian educational officials. The matter of Regehr's academic qualifications need not, however, have become a matter of immediate dispute since officials of the Ministry of Education rarely made any attempts to interfere in the appointments of teachers of religion and ethnic or minority languages.[9]

Since the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule was to offer a three-year curriculum, it was expected that at least three teachers would be hired, even though only the first two years would be offered in the 1906-07 school year.[10] Herman Rempel, the village school teacher in Lichtfelde, was particularly interested, but had not passed qualifying examinations in mathematics. He was hired as the school's third teacher. This final appointment came within days of the official opening of instruction in September of 1906.

The appropriate local officials of the Ministry of Education inevitably raised questions regarding the qualifications of the proposed teachers. There were delays, and eventually the local inspector referred the matter to his superior, the director, in Berdjansk. This development created some concern for School Society members and, just two days before the commencement of instruction, Jacob Esau and another Society member, Jacob Reimer, obtained an appointment to discuss the matter with the inspector.[11] When informed that the matter had been referred to the director for what Jacob Esau described as "some kind of



Jacob Esau

meaningless reasons", ("aus irgendwelchen nichtssagenden Gründen") they felt a need for serious prayers to God, followed by a visit to, and lengthy and intensive discussions with, the director. The outcome of these discussions was an unofficial intimation by the director that Franz Thiessen would be given permission to teach Russian and Herman Rempel and Isaak Regehr would obtain one-year interim authorizations to teach, provided they would write the required examinations within one year, which both had promised to do. If these teachers did not write and pass the necessary examinations, other qualified teachers would need to be appointed for the second year of instruction. These intimations, however, were only verbal, and the Society still had no formal written approval of its constitution or of its teachers.

The salaries normally paid to teachers of the *Zentralschule* were significantly higher than those earned by most village school teachers. Indeed, the village school teachers' salaries in the Molotschna Colony were usually between 400 and 450 rubles. Such salaries were barely sufficient to sustain a teacher and his family.[12] The salary and benefits paid often took into account the marital status of the teacher. In addition, married teachers with families were often given the use of village land to raise some crops and domestic animals. Other teachers were offered supplementary employment, either as special tutors or other necessary tasks which often included secretarial and bookkeeping work. In the early years teachers had sometimes been asked to serve as shepherds or cowherds during the summer months. The assumption apparently was that such work required disciplinary skills similar to those needed in the classroom.

Intermediate school teachers in 1906 generally received salaries double to three times the value of those paid to village school teachers. As a result, these teachers did not find it necessary to supplement their income through farming activities or other part-time employment.

The Alexanderkrone School Society paid its teachers 800 rubles per year in 1906 and also provided basic accommodation. The salary was raised to 1,200 rubles per year in 1908-09, but was reduced to 800 rubles when an additional

teacher was hired in 1909-10. The following year, and thereafter until the 1916-17 school year the salary was 1,300 rubles per year.[13]

In addition to the salary he earned, Isaak P. Regehr, who had a growing family and the strongest local connections, was also provided with a teacherage. He was also given very considerable freedom to use and develop the yard and adjacent land as he saw fit. A portion of this land was used for a vegetable garden, while the remainder was developed as a park. Large poplar and other trees, lawn, and flowers were planted. In order to augment his salary, Regehr was also granted the right to cultivate, or rent out, six *desjatins* of village land. A similar amount of land had been made available to him when he taught in the Kleefeld village school. The slightly higher salary offered in Alexanderkrone spared him the trouble of actually working those six *desjatins* himself, as he had done previously in Kleefeld.[14]

The salaries of the Alexanderkrone teachers were soon increased to match those offered at the other intermediate schools. After 1910 positions at Alexanderkrone were sufficiently attractive to draw excellent teachers from other institutions.

In the meantime, in 1906, the new school year began. On September 15 of that year, after placing appropriate advertisements in the Mennonite papers, but with its official status and the certification of its teachers still unresolved, the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule held its first entrance examinations for prospective students. These examinations turned out to be a disaster, with almost half of those applying for admission failing the examinations. Many of the prospective students had not completed the village school course, while others had attended village schools with inadequate standards of instruction.[15]

The Alexanderkrone School Society faced a serious dilemma. The financial viability of the school could be seriously undermined if not enough fee-paying students were admitted. Certainly many of those who failed the entrance examinations had fathers who could pay the 25-ruble annual tuition fees and who otherwise supported the school. The Society therefore decided to admit all applicants, irrespective of their performance on the entrance examinations.

Some students who performed reasonably well in the entrance examinations, or who had obtained some previous training at the intermediate level, were admitted into the second class. Isaak I. Regehr, son of teacher Isaak P. Regehr, for example, had just completed the elementary school, but during the last year his father had given him some private lessons, on the basis of which he was admitted to the second year or grade of the new Alexanderkrone school in 1906.[16] There is, in fact, evidence that those administering the school tended to regard the first year as a preparatory or qualifying year.[17]

Instruction began on 18 September with 53 students in the lower class and 16 in the second class.[18] It was probably not unusual for the conditions of that day that the School Society had not provided the teachers with any teaching aids or books. Initially the library consisted entirely of books owned and made available by the teachers and individual School Society members. It was perhaps in an attempt to safeguard his books that Isaak P. Regehr accepted general responsibility for the library and housed it in the staff room of the school.[19] The local book

Ohrloff.

Die Verwaltung des **Ohrloffer Schulvereins** bringt hiermit zur **Kenntnis, daß die diesjährigen Aufnahmeprüfungen** in der

Ohrloffer Zentralschule

vom 21.—23. August

stattfinden werden. Beginn des Unterrichts am 24. Aug. Außer Mennoniten werden auch Schüler anderer evangelischer **Konfessionen** aufgenommen. **Anmeldungen sind zu richten** an d. l. Lehrer Joh. Bräul (Post Halbstadt, Ohrloff).

Am 1. September d. J. soll, so Gott will, im Dorfe

Alexanderkron eine

3-klassige Zentralschule

eröffnet werden

Schüleranmeldungen werden zu jeder Zeit entgegengenommen von Pred. **Jak. Esau, Lichtfelde,** Post Halbstadt, Gouv. Taurien.

Eine neue 3-klassige

Zentralschule in Spat,

Station Sarabus, wird am 1. September d. J.

eröffnet.

Anmeldungen zu richten an August Strauß **oder** Nikolai Wall, Spat, Gouv. Taurien.

Brauchen Sie ein **Harmonium?**

Bestellen Sie direkt bei der Fabrik, da haben Sie den **billigsten** Preis, größte Auswahl und

leichte Zahlung.

Bach & Schugt,
Orgel- und Harmoniumbauer.
Odessa, Канатная № 10.

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The announcement regarding the opening of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule appeared in *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 25 (24 June 1906): 268. Although the announcement cites the opening for 1 September, the school in fact opened 15 September 1906.

printing and selling facilities of H. J. Braun in Halbstadt, with subagencies in Schoenwiese and Tokmak, sold the required textbooks, paper, pens, ink, and slates for the students.[20]

On one important point, however, the School Society did itself and its students proud. Apparently the first and most important acquisition of intermediate, secondary and post-secondary school students in Russia at that time was the purchase of appropriate uniforms, particularly the appropriate and impressive pseudo-military caps and shirts or jackets. Mennonite *Zentralschulen* generally provided a cap on which the Mennonite anchor was embroidered, symbolizing both religious faith and the mercantile activities of religious refugees in the old German free cities of the Hanseatic League. And so it was with the Alexanderkrone School Society.

There was nothing particularly grand or stylish about the uniform. It consisted of a dark overshirt or jacket trimmed with green piping on the collar and sleeves. Outer coats or jackets did not adhere to any established form. For the boys the caps were most important. Later, when girls were admitted to the school, they were required to wear dresses of dark green material and black aprons.[21] The school lacked maps, test tubes and a well-stocked library, but the students had the uniforms which provided a very large measure of prestige and *esprit de corps.*[22]

At the official opening of the school on 17 September 1906 Jacob Esau began the festivities with a sermon on the topic, "A House to the Glory of God," followed by sermons by Jacob Reimer of Rueckenau and by teacher Isaak P. Regehr. David Dick of Apanlee made some appropriate concluding remarks. According to a correspondent, all the sermons were spirited, inspired, and brought renewal and blessing to the listeners. One woman was overheard saying to her husband, "I had always resented that you had pledged 50 rubles for the school building project, but now I no longer regret it."[23]

Despite the spiritual blessings and public good-will expressed at the official opening, the administrative and academic problems remained, and soon intensified. Teacher Herman Rempel, unmarried and young, was subject to military or alternative service. He could, however, discharge his military obligations by teaching at a properly accredited school for a period of not less than five years. Shortly after the beginning of the 1906-07 school term, the military authorities asked Rempel to provide evidence that he was indeed teaching at a properly accredited school. The Alexanderkrone school was not yet properly accredited, and Rempel was teaching classes for which he had no proper academic qualifications. He was, therefore, faced with the threat of immediate military or alternative service.

It fell to the beleaguered, very energetic, but rather abrasive Jacob Esau to travel to Berdjansk to discuss and negotiate the matter with the educational authorities.[24] The director was not impressed with developments at the Alexanderkrone school. Esau tried to remind him, "rather forcefully," ("etwas nachdrücklich") of the discussions held during the summer at which, according to Esau, the director had promised to grant interim or provisional authorization for Thiessen to teach Russian language, literature and history, and for Rempel

and Regehr to teach the subjects assigned to them, provided the latter two would write the required examinations within a year.

The director did not remember the earlier summer meeting in the same way, and once again simply stated which formal requirements had to be met if accreditation was to be granted. Esau found the director excessively legalistic, ("ein Formalist vom reinsten Wasser") but clearly realized the difficult situation in which Herman Rempel now found himself.

Esau proposed a rather novel way out of the difficulty. He sternly informed the director that the Mennonites still had the right to appoint their own religion teachers, without reference to, or approval by, the Ministry officials. He therefore proposed that Rempel be named officially as the religion teacher in the Alexanderkrone school, and in this way earn an exemption from military or alternative service. There was no reference to any of Rempel's qualifications to teach religion. Esau thought that was not a matter over which the director and, more generally, the Ministry of Education, had any jurisdiction.Nor should it be a matter of concern whether Rempel actually taught religion, just as long as he was officially named as the teacher of religion.

Esau also demanded that the other two teachers be given provisional one-year certificates, Thiessen to teach Russian and mathematics and Regehr to teach German. The director, apparently tired of the lengthy and acrimonious discussions, suggested that this proposal be made in writing so it could be considered formally. This Esau did, and then returned home.

Esau's proposal to change the official, but not necessarily the actual, teaching assignments of the teachers at the Alexanderkrone school came a full month after instruction had begun. On his return home, after reporting in detail on his trip, Esau instructed the teachers to continue teaching the subjects for which they were best qualified and which they had been assigned at the beginning of the year, subject to any unavoidable changes if his new proposals were accepted.

Before making any decision on Esau's proposal the director decided to visit the Alexanderkrone school and make a personal inspection. This visit, however, was prompted not only by Esau's latest request. A further important matter had been overlooked by the Alexanderkrone School Society, but had been drawn to the attention of the director and the local inspector by their superior, the curator, in Odessa.

It was the official policy of the Ministry of Education to insist that any schools which had more than one teacher must appoint at least one Russian national teacher. This requirement was still only being enforced in a rather selective and incomplete manner in 1906, but it clearly had relevance if a new school was proposing the appointment of unqualified German-speaking Mennonite teachers to teach Russian language, literature and history.

The situation was not made any easier by concurrent developments in the nearby Halbstadt Zentralschule. There, due entirely to pressure from the Ministry of Education, a qualified Russian national, Mr. Djokhterov, had been named as the leading teacher or principal. Tensions, related primarily to disciplinary methods but also involving curriculum concerns, had arisen. These led to Djokhterov's resignation late in 1906. There was very strong pressure from the

Mennonite constituency that a Mennonite be appointed to the vacated position. The Halbstadt School Society, nonetheless, appointed another Russian national to the position, only to see that teacher become embroiled immediately in a serious dispute with his fellow teachers. The issue in this case was related to discipline. Several students of the school had allegedly smoked in the presence of their teachers at a social function not related directly to the school. This, it was believed, demonstrated lack of respect for the teachers, and several of the Mennonite teachers demanded that the offending students be whipped or spanked. The new Russian principal opposed this and most other forms of corporal punishment which were then still widely practiced in Mennonite schools. There were charges that Germans (and Mennonites) were barbarians, intent on violent discipline, countered by charges that the new leading teacher was morally and educationally lax and spiritually inadequate. Most of the students of the Halbstadt school sided with their Russian teacher. This dispute clearly focussed the tensions that had arisen over the Ministry's russification policies.[25]

The Alexanderkrone School Society had not paid the slightest attention to the requirement that one of their teachers be a Russian national, and the director was obliged to draw this to their attention when he visited the school. He inquired whether the Society would agree to hire a Russian if teachers Thiessen and Rempel were given temporary accreditation. Esau, on behalf of the School Society, categorically refused this overture, and the director left Alexanderkrone without any resolution of the problem. Once back in Berdjansk, he wrote a short formal letter to the Alexanderkrone School Society, ordering that the school be immediately closed. He had, however, also referred the matter to his superior, the curator in Odessa.

The curator had general responsibility to ensure and promote educational improvements, and did not regard the closing of schools, even those without properly qualified teachers, as a satisfactory solution to problems such as those which had arisen in Alexanderkrone. Educational standards would not necessarily improve if rigorous enforcement of official policies made it impossible for societies, which were intent on providing improved education, to meet all the conditions of the Ministry. The curator therefore decided that if the local school society could not do it right he would intervene directly. He sent a formal communication to the Alexanderkrone School Society informing them that Rempel and Thiessen had been given temporary accreditation as requested, but that the Ministry had appointed a qualified Russian by the name of Netrakov from Simferopol as the third teacher in the place of Isaak Regehr.

Jacob Esau fulminated about the allegedly antedeluvian ("vorsintflutlich") qualifications of the new teacher, but he and the Society had to face the possibility that this unknown Russian would be teaching their children. And the respected and well-loved Isaak Regehr, who was just moving into the new teacherage and was also very active and appreciated in a variety of church and social activities, would be forced out of the school.

The reaction of the School Society was one of intense anger, outrage and indignation. The Ministry's unilateral appointment of Netrakov was regarded as a

violation of fundamental Mennonite rights and principles. The School Society resolved to do whatever was necessary to ensure that Netrakov would never teach in their school. Jacob Esau, the Society's secretary treasurer, was instructed to telegraph Netrakov immediately, telling him that he was not wanted and should not come to Alexanderkrone. Esau made a special trip to Halbstadt to send the telegram, but it was too late. When Esau returned from Halbstadt he was informed that Netrakov had already arrived, gone to the Alexanderkrone school, and introduced himself to the teachers and students. All of this, it should be noted, happened more than a month after instruction had begun, and at a time when the three teachers, without teaching aids and in a building where construction was still underway, were desperately trying to deal with the inadequate educational background of the majority of their students, hoping that at least some of their charges would give a good account of themselves and of the school in year-end examinations which would be administered by officials of the Ministry of Education.

Netrakov, as described by Esau, was a very unimpressive individual. He was shabbily dressed, obsequious and fawning in his behaviour, and utterly unfamiliar with the Mennonites and their way of life. Esau wondered whether Netrakov should even be granted basic courtesies, or if he should become the object on whom to lay the School Society's sense of indignation and outrage at the high-handed and arbitrary actions of the curator. Esau opted for the most direct approach. His words reflect the heat of his temper as he resolved "to expedite, head over heels, this impossible looking subject or object out the door" ("dieses einfach unmöglich aussehende Subjekt oder Objekt Hals über Kopf zur Türe hinausexpedieren").

Netrakov was naturally taken aback by this unpleasant turn of events. Eager to ingratiate himself with his new employers, he offered to convert immediately to Lutheranism if that would help. He also expressed a willingness to become a Mennonite once he knew what Mennonites were and how one might become one. Esau and other members of the Alexanderkrone School Society were furious, and their agitation increased with every word exchanged.

Fortunately for all concerned, the director from Berdjansk arrived on the scene at the height of the confrontation between School Society members and Netrakov. Esau thought this visit was coincidental, but that is doubtful. The Alexanderkrone school had become a matter of great concern and disagreement amongst the Russian educational authorities. The director had ordered it closed, but the curator had intervened and made the Netrakov appointment. Given the record of other incidents when he had sought to force the official russification policy in German intermediate schools, the curator must have been very well aware of the probable response in Alexanderkrone to his unilateral appointment of Netrakov, and alerted his subordinates of the need for some mediation.

If it had been the intention of the curator to impress upon the Alexanderkrone School Society the need to pay closer attention to the Ministry's requirements, he succeeded. The local inspector reported that the Alexanderkrone School Society was absolutely determined not to permit Netrakov to teach in their school, but had come to recognize the problem of appointing unqualified Mennonite

Students and teachers at Alexanderkrone Zentralschule in 1908. Teachers left to right are Franz Thiessen, Isaak P. Regehr and Alexander J. Friesen.

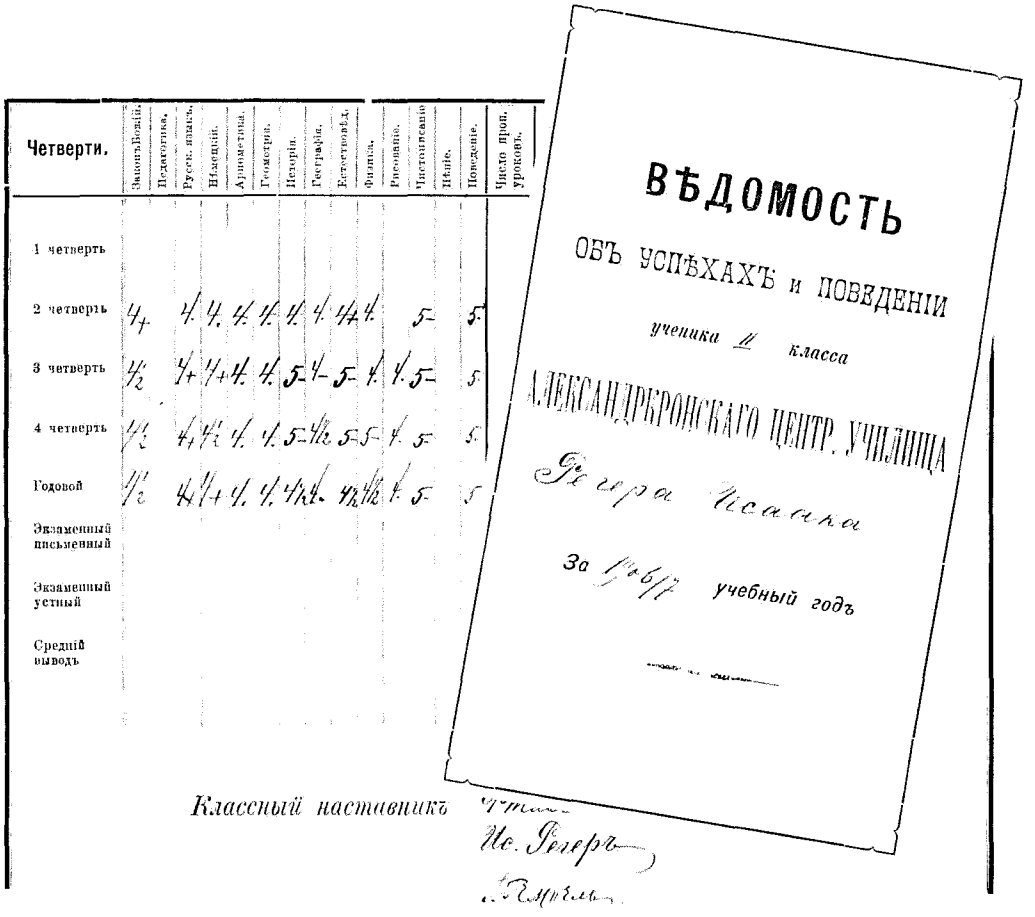
teachers. This left the Ministry with only two alternatives. They could confirm the decision of the director to close the school or they could negotiate a compromise. Both sides chose compromise.

The School Society insisted, and the director concurred, that Netrakov should be induced to resign the position to which he had been appointed. If he did so, the School Society should provide him with transportation back to Simferopol, together with a small allowance "for tea." Netrakov grumbled about the odd principles of some school societies, but accepted the proffered railway ticket plus one ruble and seven kopeken in cash, and resigned. But, to ensure that he would remember the Mennonites in an appropriate way, the School Society, this time without any prompting from the Ministry of Education, also gave him a Russian New Testament ("zum Andenken"). One can only wonder whether Netrakov ever read it, or what thoughts might have crossed his mind if he did read it.

Both the director and the local inspector visited the school several times in the following months. They repeatedly pointed out the various conditions that must be met if the school and its teachers were to gain formal accreditation. However, they were also generally impressed with the work which the Society and the teachers were doing, despite the inadequate qualifications of the teachers. As a result, following Netrakov's resignation, the curator agreed to provide a provisional certificate for the 1906-07 school year and also to grant permission to the three teachers to continue to teach the subjects they had originally been assigned and had continued to teach throughout the months of uncertainty, negotiation and dispute.

The school term ended in May, and the inspector made a careful visit on 5 May, at the time when the various examinations were being written. He was clearly impressed by the work of the teachers. In his official report he stated that the school had, in all respects, made a good impression on him. Unfortunately, the undiscriminating admissions policy of the previous fall had some unpleasant consequences. Many of those who had failed the entrance examinations were unable to pass their examinations in May as well. Eleven of the 53 students in the first class failed outright, while several others failed one or more subjects but were allowed to continue, provided they wrote and passed supplementary examinations during the summer. This was a most unpleasant surprise to the fathers of these students, several of whom were strong financial backers of the school. There was considerable grumbling and ill will about the high failure rate, and about the decision of the teachers not to ask the failing students any questions in the public examinations *(Prüfung)* which were part of the closing ceremonies. The fathers, and perhaps the sons, found this embarrassing, although they might have been even more embarrassed if the sons had been asked questions and been unable to provide the correct answers in public.

The high failure rate, as well as the formal academic and inspirational closing ceremonies on 19 May, marked the end of the first, troubled year in the history of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule. Impressive, though not entirely completed, physical facilities had been provided. A competent, though not formally qualified, teaching staff had been recruited. The student body, for the most part, had



ВѢДОМОСТЬ

ОБЪ УСПѢХАХЪ и ПОВѢДЕНІИ

ученика II класса

АЛЕКСАНДРОВСКАГО ЦЕНТР. УЧИЛИЩА

Регера Исаака

За 1906/7 учебный годъ

Четверти.	Законъ Божій.	Педагогика.	Русск. языкъ.	Нѣмецкій.	Ариѳметика.	Геометрія.	Исторія.	География.	Естествовѣд.	Физика.	Рисованіе.	Чистописаніе.	Пѣніе.	Поведеніе.	Число проп. уроковъ.
1 четверть															
2 четверть	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4		5			5	
3 четверть	4½	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4		4	5		5	
4 четверть	4½	4	4½	4	4	5	4½	5	5		4	5		5	
Годовой	4½	4	4½	4	4	4½	4½	4½	4		4	5		5	
Экзаменный письменный															
Экзаменный устный															
Средній выводъ															

Классный наставникъ

Ис. Регеръ

Директоръ

The 1906-07 report card of Isaak Regehr.

done satisfactory work which probably exceeded any reasonable prospects when the Society agreed to admit all applicants irrespective of their performance on the entrance examinations. A relieved Jacob Esau wrote in his year-end report that he hoped that in future qualifying examinations less consideration would be paid to pressure exerted by influential fathers, in order that there be a more normal beginners' class. He then praised "God, our refuge in the past, present and future, who has helped us thus far. To him be all thanks."[26]

Chapter III
The Long Struggle for Accreditation, 1908-1913

The school had survived one year of instruction, but there had been serious difficulties. As the Society looked to the future, its most serious concern and worry was the failure to meet all the requirements of the Ministry of Education in order to obtain full accreditation. That matter would in fact dominate and trouble the promoters of the school for the next four years.

The immediate concern for the 1907-08 school year was either to find properly qualified teachers,[1] or to ensure that the teachers already at the school would write the required examinations to obtain the needed qualifications.Isaak P. Regehr and Herman Rempel were still not qualified to teach anything at the intermediate level. Franz Thiessen, who was qualified to teach geography, was expected to write appropriate examinations if he was to continue to teach Russian language, literature and history.

In the difficult negotiations with Ministry officials in 1906-07 the Society had promised that both Regehr and Rempel would write their examinations in the spring of 1907. Franz Thiessen had told the Society that he could not write and pass the required examinations and that he would, therefore, not be able to continue his appointment. The Society had been very much impressed with Thiessen's work and wanted to retain his services in some capacity. It was, however, necessary to find a new qualified teacher for the Russian subjects.

The new teacher recruited to teach these subjects in 1907-08 was Alexander Ivanovich Friesen, who was a graduate of an accredited *Realschule,* had studied for two years at the university, and had passed the required teacher examinations. Friesen would ably fill the need for a qualified teacher in Russian, and was appointed both as teacher and principal of the school.

Once Friesen's services were secured, the Society met to make further plans for the next school year.It was decided that, rather than accept Thiessen's resignation, the school should operate with four teachers in 1907-08. Thiessen would teach geography for which he had the required accreditation, and history for which he had not passed the appropriate examinations. Regehr was to teach German and religion, while Rempel would teach mathematics and science.

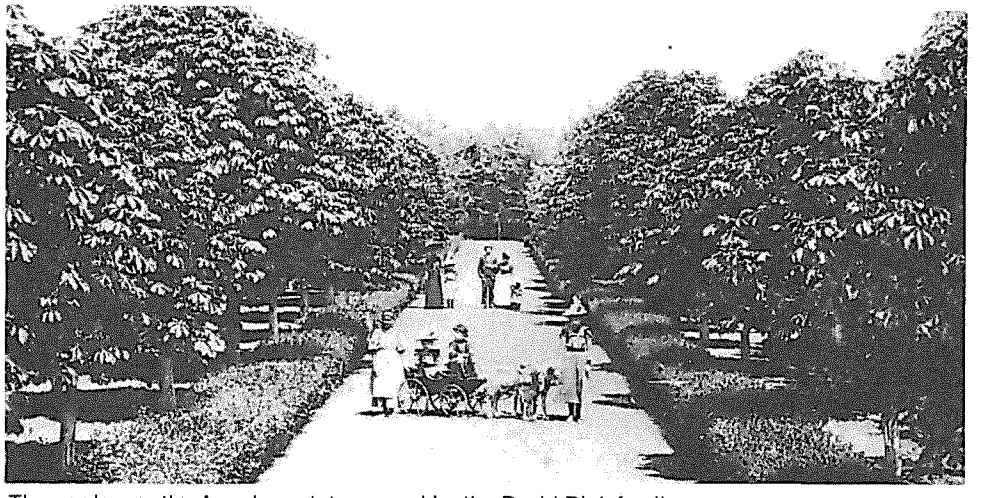
The plans seemed to be developing very well, but again a very serious problem arose. Rempel and Regehr did not fulfill their promises of writing the necessary examinations in the spring of 1907. They both asked for and obtained from the Society, but not from the Ministry, permission to defer their examinations until September, and to spend part of the summer in intensive study with the help of tutors in Berdjansk. But even with that delay, Rempel and Regehr did not attempt their examinations in September. Neither of these two teachers nor the School Society really understood or appreciated the importance of the

Alexander Ivanovich Friesen

required paper credentials. Regehr, for example, interrupted his studies in Berdjansk to respond to an invitation from David Dick, the first chairman of the Alexanderkrone School Society, to participate in a major Bible conference held on Dick's Apanlee estate to which a number of theologians and evangelists from abroad had been invited.

The result was unfortunate. When the initial plans for the second year were filed with the Ministry, the School Society had qualified teachers only for Russian language and literature and for geography.There were no qualified teachers for German, mathematics, history or science. Rather than propose the appointment of Thiessen, Rempel and Regehr, thus risking being reminded of earlier promises that the latter two would write the required examinations before the beginning of the new school term, the School Society decided that, for the time being, their positions be officially left vacant. An application for permission to operate the school with only one qualified teacher and three official vacancies was submitted to the Ministry in June of 1907.

The curator in Odessa, and the officials of the Ministry of Education who reported to him, responded to this request as they had responded the previous year. The qualified teacher, Alexander Friesen, was approved, and a qualified Russian teacher named Rymkus was appointed to fill the officially vacant position of the mathematics teacher. Again Jacob Esau, who had in the meantime become chairman of the Alexanderkrone School Society, and Society member Jacob Reimer, travelled to Berdjansk and Odessa to register their complaints and protests against this appointment of an unknown Russian national to teach in their school.Rymkus, Esau and Reimer discovered, was a Roman Catholic with only very mediocre qualifications and unenthusiastic recommendations from a school in Zuerichthal where he had previously taught. Again the Ministry officials were categorically informed that the Society would, under no circumstances, permit Rymkus to teach in their school. Jacob Esau then also took the liberty to write directly to the prospective teacher ordering him to withdraw his candidacy immediately, to disregard the appointment made by the curator, and



The garden on the Apanlee estate, owned by the David Dick family.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

A Bible conference held on the Apanlee estate of David Dick. The host is reclining on the right.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

not to incur any unnecessary travel costs since he would not be permitted, under any circumstances, to teach in the Alexanderkrone school. The Society was determined to have only teachers who were, from their point of view, theologically and culturally sound.

The curator and other Ministry officials were absolutely furious with Esau's preemptory action in writing directly to Rymkus, thus countermanding an official appointment made by the curator.

The immediate result was very serious trouble for teacher Rempel. During the summer months, while studying for his examination, Rempel had received an offer of employment as a teacher in a proposed new pedagogical institute in the village of Schoenfeld. His studies were not going well, and he feared that he would not pass the required examination to qualify him as a mathematics teacher at the intermediate level. No such examination was required to teach at the new pedagogical institute, which was to train prospective village school teachers. Adding to Rempel's worries was the fact that the curator had appointed Rymkus to teach the subjects which Rempel was to teach at Alexanderkrone, and there was little prospect of obtaining a further one-year interim certificate if his mathematics examination proved unsuccessful. Yet, if he had no approved teaching position, Rempel was still subject to the military draft or alternative forestry service. He clearly faced a difficult choice. If he declined the offer from Schoenfeld and failed his examination he would be drafted. Even if he passed the examination his situation at Alexanderkrone was very tenuous because of the Rymkus appointment. But if he accepted the Schoenfeld offer the Alexanderkrone School Society would almost certainly be stuck with Rymkus.

Early in August of 1907 Rempel made his decision and notified the Alexanderkrone School Society that he had accepted the Schoenfeld offer. The Society was now in very serious difficulty, even though Rymkus had in the meantime accepted another appointment. As Society members reviewed their position and recast their plans, they decided to continue their search for a qualified mathematics and science teacher, but in the meantime to apply for authorization to operate their school with only the three remaining Mennonite teachers. Friesen was to become the leading teacher or principal and teach the Russian subjects. Regehr was to teach religion and German, and Thiessen would teach geography and history. Until a suitable teacher could be found the science and mathematics classes were simply not taught. On this basis, without either approval or an outright refusal from the curator, the school held its second series of entrance examinations during the third week of August of 1907, and then began instruction early in September.

In late September the Society thought it had located a suitable teacher for the mathematics and science classes. A student of German ancestry from the nearby village of Tokmak was about to write his qualifying examinations and expressed interest in coming to the Alexanderkrone school. Before the appointment could be made, however, the prospective new teacher attempted and failed his examinations. This did not particularly discourage the Alexanderkrone School Society which proposed that the appointment be made anyway, but the educational officials categorically refused. The School Society then suggested that, for the

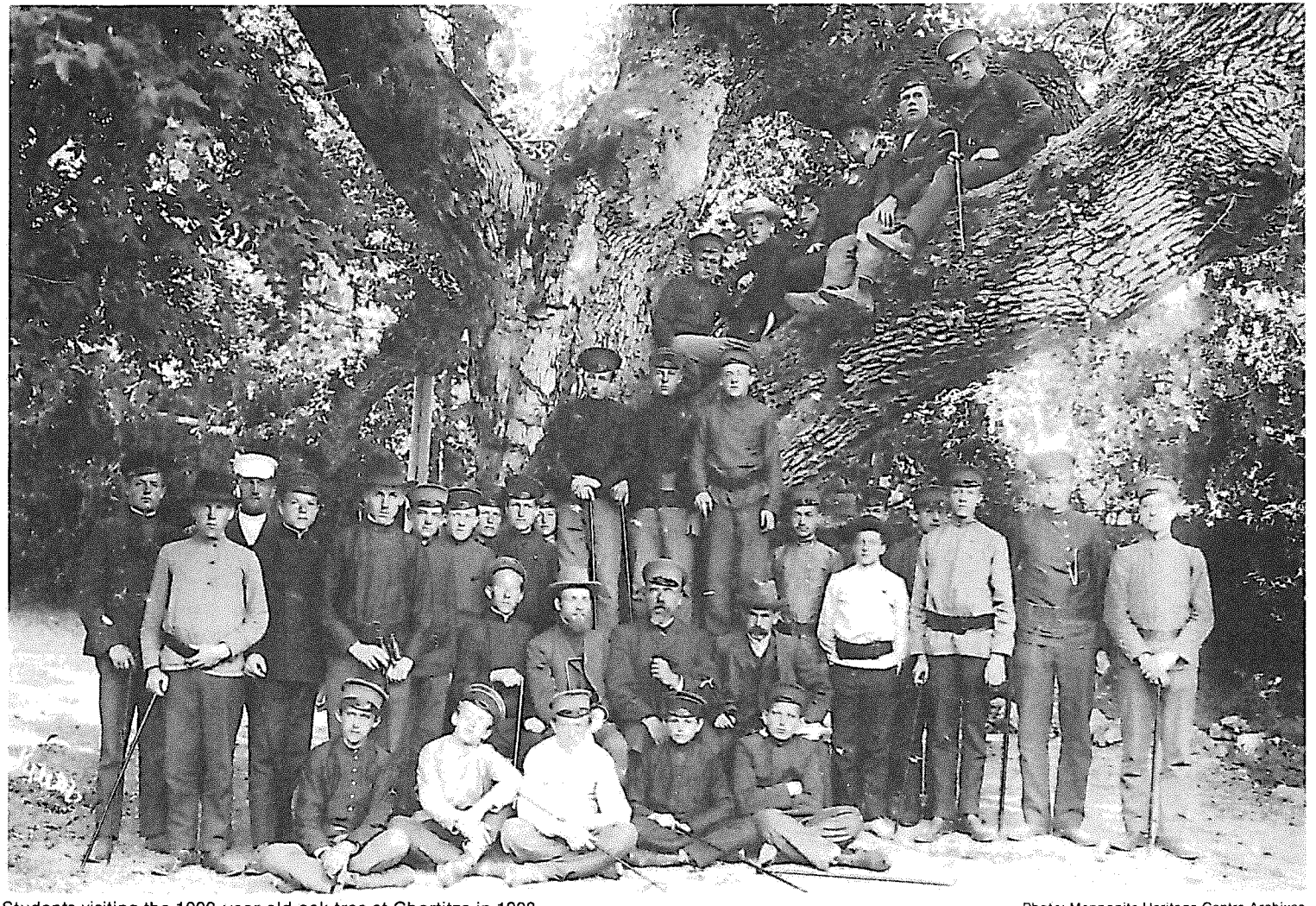
1907-08 school year only, Thiessen and Friesen be allowed to teach mathematics and science in addition to their regular teaching assignments. In the meantime instruction in the other subjects continued in the best way the Society and the teachers could manage.

The officials of the Ministry of Education were very angry about all these developments. They were particularly incensed about the letter Jacob Esau had written to Rymkus advising him that the Society would not permit him to teach in their school, and that he should incur no travel expenses. Rymkus had naturally been offended, sent a copy of the letter to the Ministry officials who had appointed him, and filed an official complaint. All of this had created very considerable bureaucratic confusion and agitation, and several of the officials made up their minds that Esau personally was the biggest obstacle to a satisfactory resolution of the problems at Alexanderkrone.

The resulting action of the Ministry officials was ruthless but effective. Official notice was sent to the School Society informing it that the school did not meet Ministry standards, and that therefore none of the students in the graduating class would be allowed to write approved and Ministry-supervised examinations. That harsh official message, however, was very considerably softened when several Ministry officials came to visit the school.Alexander Friesen, the leading teacher, and several School Society members were clearly given to understand that the authorities might admit graduating students to the examinations, provided much more serious attempts were made to obtain properly qualified teachers. They also indicated that they wanted no further dealings with Jacob Esau.

Esau's position had also been weakened by other local and internal matters. As Secretary-Treasurer of the School Society in 1906-07 and Chairman in 1907-08, he had made it a practice to sit in on various classes whenever possible. Such visits were often productive of much unsolicited critical advice and instruction to the teachers who, in Esau's opinion, did not provide sufficient supervision, particularly after regular school hours, and whose disciplinary methods seemed to him to be altogether too relaxed. These issues were all very greatly exacerbated when it was discovered that two of the students sharing a room in one of the village farmhouses had become involved in a "dirty and immoral homosexual love affair."[2] Esau was inclined to place much of the blame for this unfortunate affair on the teachers who naturally resented the accusation. Very strong pressure from the fathers of the boys persuaded the School Society not to expel the two, although one soon thereafter withdrew because of mental illness.

The school's principal, Alexander Friesen, like the officials of the Ministry of Education, had difficulty getting along with Esau and recognized that it had become critical to the survival of the school that teachers with proper qualifications be found. At his urging, and with strong encouragement from the Ministry, Isaak P. Regehr was ordered to write his German examination immediately. When he protested that he was not ready to do so, he was ordered to take an immediate leave of absence in the middle of the school term and not to return until he had completed the examinations. Regehr immediately went to Kharkov where he engaged a private tutor and spent almost all of March 1908 in intensive



Students visiting the 1000-year old oak tree at Chortitza in 1908.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

preparations for the examinations. He wrote and passed the examinations late in March. During Regehr's absence the two remaining teachers, Friesen and Thiessen, had to look after all teaching in the school.

These highly irregular teaching arrangements, combined with the continuing refusal of the Ministry to admit any Alexanderkrone students to officially approved and supervised examinations, unless there were fundamental changes at the school, led to decisive action on 6 May 1908. The immediate issue in dispute at that meeting was another difference of opinion between Jacob Esau and the teachers. Esau wanted formal religious closing exercises, abounding in sermons and appropriate moral instruction, together with lengthy student recitations of religious and academic material which they had memorized for the occasion. Friesen and Thiessen were much more concerned about the Ministry-supervised examinations which they still hoped their students would be allowed to write. Memorization of material suitable for the public closing exercises of the school year comprised education on the level of the village school educated Jacob Esau and his friends, but did not necessarily enhance student chances of success in Ministry-supervised examinations.

The discussions about the closing exercises for the school term were soon subsumed in other more substantive and emotional issues. According to Esau, several incendiary issues which had been accumulating for a long time exploded at that meeting and a rather unedifying scene occurred ("Es gab eine ziemlich unerquickliche Szene"). The result, however, was entirely predictable. When the meeting was over Jacob Esau was no longer the Chairman of the School Society. In his recollections Esau wrote that he found this humiliation and defeat every bit as difficult to bear as the death and burial of six of his sons in childbirth or early childhood.[3] Thanks, however, to the supportive and sympathetic intervention of David Dick of Apanlee, a reconciliation between Esau, the teachers, and some of the Society members was later effected. When the new chairman, elected in absentia at the meeting of 6 May, refused to serve, Esau was even allowed to continue in office until the end of the school term. It was clear, however, that the teachers and officials of the Ministry would henceforth have more effective control over the academic standards and affairs of the school.

Matters were very considerably eased when, almost immediately after the meeting of 6 May, Ministry officials agreed to send an examiner and to admit all the third-year students of the Alexanderkrone school to the official examinations. There is no official explanation why the Ministry changed its position regarding the examinations.Esau's removal, and several inspections of the school which had impressed inspectors from the Ministry, apparently made the difference.

The results of the examinations by the students completing the third class or grade were very encouraging, particularly since they had studied mostly with unqualified teachers, had themselves been admitted under dubious circumstances, and had their teaching program repeatedly disrupted as teachers struggled to obtain their own proper qualifications. Of the 16 students who wrote the third-year examinations, 15 were successful.This clearly indicated that, despite the continuing difficulties, some very good work was being done at the

school.

The results in the other two classes were not as encouraging. Of the 38 students in the first class at the end of the term, only 27 were promoted to the second class; and of the 38 students in the second class at the end of the school term, 25 were promoted to the third class. This was still an unacceptably high failure rate in these two grades, but the success of the students in the third class, the very first class to complete the curriculum of the school, was very gratifying.[4]

This success provided the school and its supporters with a firmer basis on which to build for the coming year. The opportunity to improve the situation was, however, very nearly lost. Esau's removal from the chairmanship of the School Society left the affairs of the school in the hands of others who lacked Esau's energy, drive and determination. At the meeting on 6 May Jacob Dick of Steinfeld was elected as chairman, but he refused to serve. The office then reverted to the school's chief benefactor, David Dick, whose time and energy were taken up with a multitude of concerns. He was the senior elected official charged with supervision of the Mennonite forestry service where Mennonite young men could discharge their military service obligations. He was also chairman of the society which was trying, in the face of very serious difficulties, to establish a new Mennonite high school *(Mittelschule)* in Halbstadt. Here graduates of the *Zentralschulen* could obtain further training which would qualify them for admission to technical schools and, with additional study in subjects not taught in Halbstadt, for admission to state universities.

David Dick's preoccupation with other matters left him very little time to deal with the problems of the Alexanderkrone school. Throughout the spring and summer months of 1908, when properly qualified teachers should have been recruited, very little was done. This, despite the fact that the Ministry of Education had given the School Society a very clear warning that for the 1908-09 school year only qualified teachers must be appointed. The fact that such teachers were very difficult to find was no longer regarded as an adequate excuse.

There was, of course, no problem regarding the qualifications of Alexander Friesen. Isaak Regehr now also had the accreditation he needed. Franz Thiessen, however, was only qualified to teach geography, but was regularly appointed to teach several other subjects as well. His incomplete qualifications were a problem, and then there was the hope that at least one additional teacher would be hired. Unfortunately, little or nothing was done to upgrade Thiessen's qualifications, or to hire an additional teacher. The Society did, however, establish contact with another prospective teacher named Peter Friesen, who hoped to complete his studies and write the required examinations within a year.

As the summer months wore on, the irrepressible Jacob Esau became increasingly frantic. Early in July he and Jacob Reimer obtained authorization from the School Society to visit the curator in Odessa and seek his permission to operate the school for another year with the three available teachers. The good results obtained by the students in the Ministry-sponsored final examinations, and prospects of obtaining the services of Peter Friesen the following year, were cited as reasons for continuing operation with the available teachers.

The curator was not impressed or sympathetic, charging that the Alexander-

krone School Society was guilty of a systematic disregard of basic Ministerial requirements and instructions. The two emissaries from Alexanderkrone were, however, allowed to leave a written request for approval of their proposal with the curator. They then returned to await an official response. When no further word arrived within a month, Jacob Esau and Isaak P. Regehr travelled to Melitopol and from there sent a lengthy telegram to the curator, requesting official authorization to proceed on the basis of the proposal submitted in July. There was, however, no immediate response, and on 18 August members of the School Society met to decide whether to hold the usual entrance examinations and to begin instruction. The Society members expressed their belief that "the Lord our God will not allow his work to perish."[5] The three available teachers were therefore instructed to hold the entrance examinations, and to begin instruction while waiting to see just how the Lord would help.

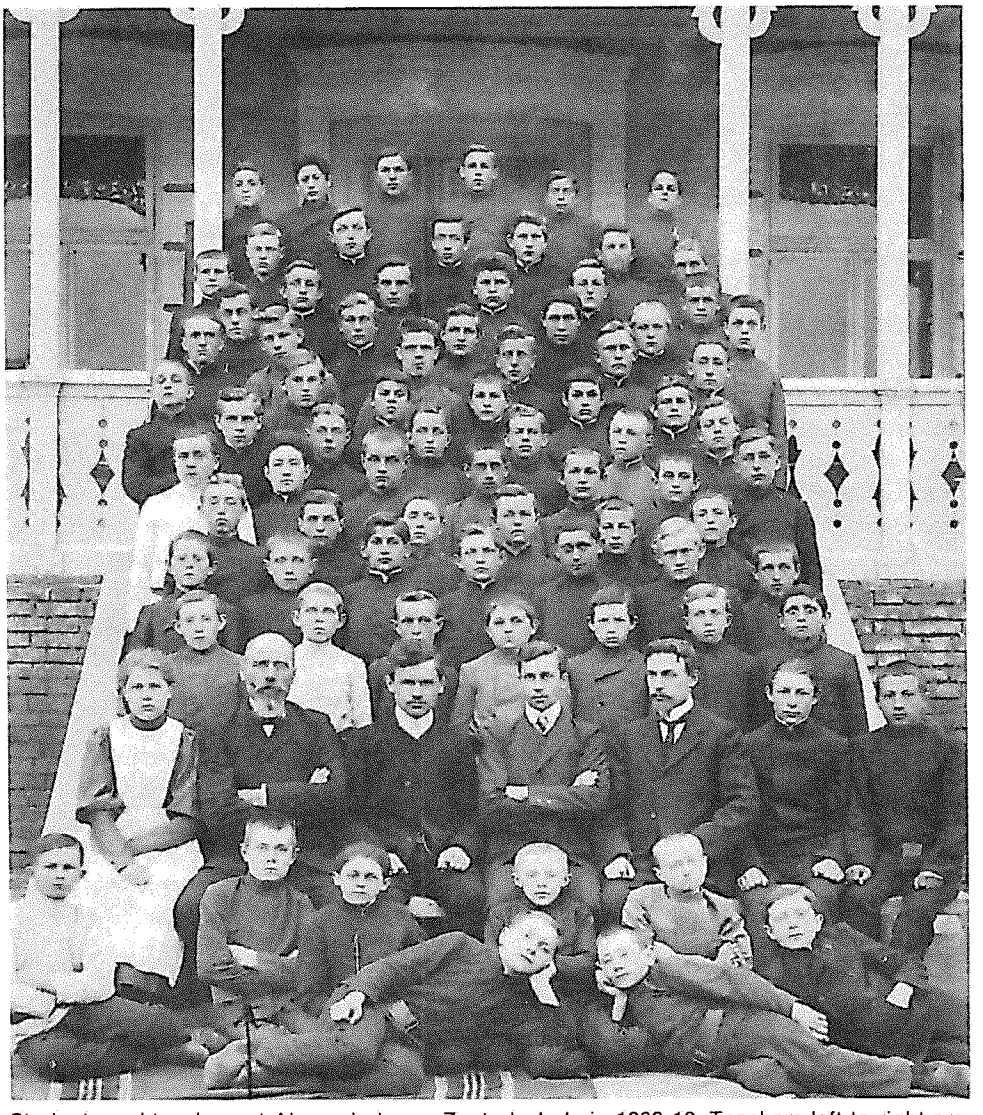
Several days later, on 23 August, the Society was informed that the curator had made a decision, which had been communicated to the inspector with appropriate instructions. Early in September, just as instruction was getting underway, the Society received the official decision and instructions from the inspector. Those instructions were unequivocal. The Society must immediately propose a full slate of properly qualified teachers. Failing that, the school would be ordered closed on 1 January 1909. This gave the school a scant four months in which to find another fully qualified teacher.

The subsequent events and developments in the last four months of 1908 are not very well documented. The *Aufzeichnungen* kept by Isaak P. Regehr, indicate that Franz Thiessen taught at the school for 2 ½ years, which would mean that he left on 1 January 1909. In another list of all the teachers of the Alexanderkrone school, Isaak Regehr listed four teachers for 1908-09, the fourth being a teacher named Ludwig Festa who apparently taught for only half of the year. No other information about, or references to Festa can be found in the surviving documents.[6]

The school, however, operated for the entire 1908-09 school year.

Planning and the recruitment of teachers for the 1909-10 school year went a little better. The Society was able to secure the services of Peter Friesen who had already been contacted a year earlier, but that was largely offset by the departure of Alexander Friesen. The services of Heinrich P. Neufeld, a young, single, but not yet fully qualified teacher were also obtained, and apparently just before the beginning of the school year a partially qualified teacher named H. D. Neufeld was also hired. As a result, the situation regarding teacher qualifications in 1909-10 was still not entirely satisfactory, but significantly improved over that of the previous years.

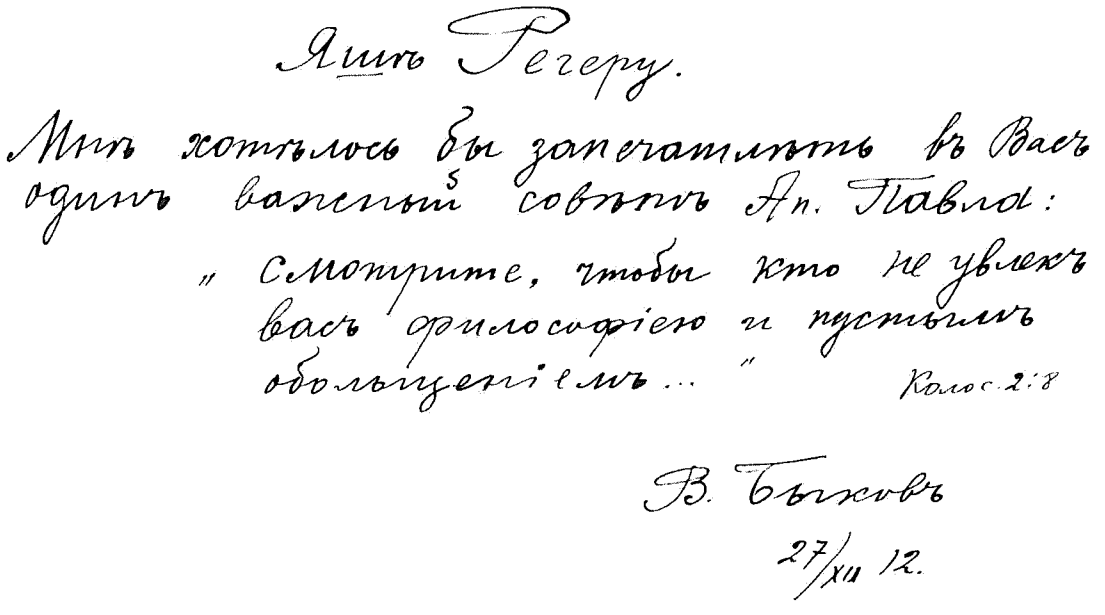
There was some further juggling of teaching assignments in the next several years, the most notable being the appointment of Peter Dirks to teach at the school for two years while Heinrich P. Neufeld, with limited assistance from the Society, studied for and then wrote the required qualifying examinations. The Society also began a more serious search for a fully qualified teacher who was a Russian national. Such a teacher was found in 1911 when Viatcheslav Ivanovich Bykov was appointed as a teacher and principal of the school. Bykov was a



Students and teachers at Alexanderkrone Zentralschule in 1909-10. Teachers left to right are Isaak P. Regehr, Heinrich P. Neufeld, P. Friesen, H.D. Neufeld.

graduate of a prestigious German *Realschule* in St. Petersburg and of an engineering polytechnicum in the same city. He was a very devout Baptist, and taught physics, mathematics, drafting and related subjects at Alexanderkrone.

It is not entirely clear why he decided to abandon an engineering career and instead accept a position as the principal of a small and struggling intermediate school in southern Russia. By all accounts he was a man of very strong but simple evangelical faith. He was good-natured, easy-going, and fit exceptionally well into the Mennonite environment of Alexanderkrone. He was young, married, and the father of several small children. He was also willing to preach occasionally in the *Allianz Gemeinde* in Lichtfelde and took a much more active part in


Якову Регеру.

Мнѣ хотѣлось бы запечатлѣть въ Васъ одинъ важный совѣтъ Ап. Павла:

„Смотрите, чтобы кто не увлекъ васъ философіею и пустымъ обольщеніемъ ..." Колос. 2:8

В. Быковъ

27/XII 12.

The entry of V.I. Bykov in Jacob I. Regehr's autograph book quotes Colossians 2:8.

the daily devotions of the school than had some of the earlier principals.

Bykov's religious compatibility was matched by his academic qualifications and by the fact that as a Russian national he obviously met the important nationalist concerns of the educational authorities. He was one of the relatively rare Russians who commanded both the respect and genuine affection of the Mennonite people and the sometimes grudging admiration of the educational authorities.

The appointment of Bykov should have eased the often-strained relations between the Alexanderkrone School Society and the Ministry of Education. The local inspectors, directors and the curator nevertheless remained skeptical. Periodic inspections often resulted in advice and instructions that were not welcome in Alexanderkrone. This, however, was certainly not unique to the Alexanderkrone situation. Other Mennonite intermediate schools throughout most of Russia encountered similar problems. The fundamental problem was that the German and Mennonite *Zentralschulen* did not follow the same curriculum and therefore did not really fit into the Russian educational system.

There was, however, a way to escape entirely from the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Trade had jurisdiction over trade and commercial schools which could be very similar to the intermediate and secondary schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Trade, however, had no effective or co-ordinated bureaucracy to control and regulate the schools under its jurisdiction. Therefore, if an intermediate or secondary school transformed itself into a trade or commercial school it could escape the heavy hand of the Ministry of Education.

The Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, despite the recurring frustrations with

educational officials, might have remained a *Zentralschule,* had it not been for more serious educational problems and developments in Halbstadt. There, as already indicated, a Mennonite-dominated School Society chaired by David Dick of Apanlee had established a Mittelschule along the lines of similar schools in Germany and in the larger German colonies of the Black Sea region. This school would offer training beyond the intermediate level. The Mennonite *Zentralschulen* at Alexanderkrone and Gnadenfeld, as well as the one in Halbstadt, were expected to be the major feeder schools for the new and more advanced school in Halbstadt.

Those promoting the new *Mittelschule* encountered far more difficulty, both within their own constituency and from officials of the Ministry of Education, than had the Alexanderkrone School Society. As a result, these men explored the possibility of establishing and operating their new school as a *Kommerzschule* under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade.[7] When that happened the *Zentralschulen* at Gnadenfeld and Alexanderkrone reconsidered their position. They too were thoroughly frustrated with the demands and interference of the Ministry of Education. One writer later charged that the local educational director had been fanatically determined to ruin and destroy all the existing Mennonite *Zentralschulen.*[8]

The official approval whereby the Alexanderkrone school was transformed from a *Zentralschule* under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education into a *Handelsschule* under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade was granted on 12 December 1912 and went into effect with the beginning of the 1913-14 school year. According to the official announcement of this change it entailed only one major change. The curriculum of the school was expanded from a three- to a four-year program.

This program would still encompass the official *Zentralschul* program "in its entirety," but new courses in bookkeeping, marketing, business correspondence and other similar business subjects would be added. At least in the first year of the new program all the business classes were taught in the last year of study, the first three years remaining entirely unchanged.[9]

The most serious disadvantages associated with these changes was the fact that successful graduates of schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade did not enjoy the automatic right to be admitted to more advanced institutions of learning under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The most important problem in this regard was the fact that competence in Latin was required for admission to the universities, but Latin was not taught in any of the Mennonite intermediate *(Zentral)* and secondary *(Mittel)* schools in the pre-war period. Students had to hire private tutors and take independent examinations in Latin before they could be admitted to the university. Even then, graduates of comparable Russian secondary schools under the Ministry of Education were often given preference by university admissions officers over students from Mennonite schools.

In order to accommodate the additional class, the School Society built an additional classroom at the rear of the original building, and obtained the services of an additional teacher, Daniel Petrovich Enns, to teach the commercial

and bookkeeping subjects. The fourth class, however, remained comparatively small for many years. There were several reasons for this. Those students that wanted to go on to the Halbstadt Kommerzschule could enter one of the preparatory classes there before completing the fourth class at Alexanderkrone. Those who did not intend to pursue their studies beyond the intermediate level, or had little interest in the commercial subjects, did not necessarily complete the fourth year; those who wanted to go on to university often chose to take their last year at a school accredited by the Ministry of Education, thus meeting the admission requirements of the higher institutions of learning in the country.

The new bookkeeping and commercial courses enjoyed very considerable popularity in the Mennonite communities. The students were obviously learning some useful skills which they might apply in future careers. Many of these new commercial courses also fit very well into, and reinforced, prevailing teaching style and methods in the Mennonite schools. Bookkeeping and accounting, financial administration, and business management, had fundamental rules or principles which must be learned or memorized and then applied consistently. Mennonite concepts of orderliness were reinforced by such learning. In Daniel P. Enns the school had a strict and very well-trained and competent teacher of the commercial subjects. Graduates of the program were well prepared for a variety of office jobs.

The administrative change of 1913 allowed the teachers, supporters and students of the Alexanderkrone school to develop the school more or less as they wished. The early accreditation problems had focussed primarily on the lack of qualifications of some of the teachers. After 1913 that was no longer a problem, since the School Society was able to obtain the services of a very able and well-trained teaching staff. In the ensuing years the school established a record for very good academic achievement, and many of its graduates went on to further training and to distinguished careers. Now the school could really develop into the "plantation in the Kingdom of God," as Jacob Esau had enthusiastically promised in his last official report as chairman of the School Society in 1908.

Chapter IV
Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, 1908-1917

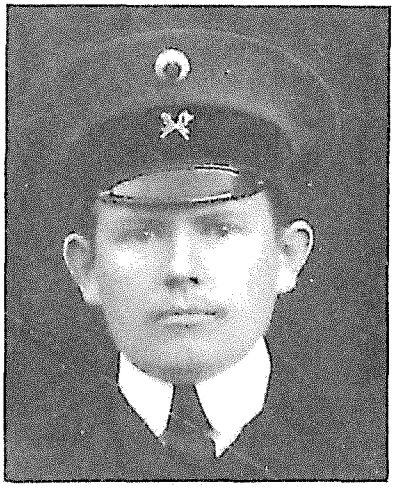
The long dispute between the Alexanderkrone School Society and officials of the Ministry of Education had focussed specifically on the qualifications and competence of the teachers appointed by the Society, and more generally on the curriculum and the entire nature of the school which the Society hoped to build. Both sides clearly recognized that their objectives differed to a very considerable degree. Both wanted high academic standards, but the Ministry was trying to promote the building of schools which would fit into the Russian educational system and promote Russian nationalism. The Mennonites, on the other hand, looked to German models when building their schools and hoped to perpetuate their unique religious, cultural and linguistic heritage.

The members of the School Society and the teachers of the school worked consistently and with determination to create their kind of school. Interference by the Ministry was ignored or strongly resented, but did not deter these men. When given the opportunity they escaped the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education entirely. They really wanted to build the school as a plantation in God's Kingdom, as they understood it. From 1908 until at least 1917, they were able to do so.

The most important people in the building of any school are the teachers. School Society members, as already indicated, were absolutely determined to have only teachers who shared their religious, cultural and linguistic values. In the first several years there was a good deal of turmoil and there were many changes in the teaching staff. However, eventually the school obtained the services of a very strong and dedicated teaching faculty which met the expectations of the Society and of the larger Mennonite community served by the school.

One of the most important, though also somewhat unusual members of the teaching faculty was the school's long-time principal, V.I. Bykov. This young teacher fulfilled Ministry expectations and as a devout evangelical Baptist he also met the religious expectations and demands of the Mennonite community. As a well-trained engineer, he met and probably surpassed the academic expectations and demands.

Students remember Bykov affectionately as a kind and easy-going teacher who gave them a glimpse into the larger world far removed from the parochialism of a rural Mennonite village.[1] Jacob I. Regehr, for example, remembers that as a young student he and several other boys had been playing or running around in the vegetable garden. In the process they had trampled some of the leaves and vines of the pumpkin plants. Principal Bykov came upon the scene and the boys fully expected a proper scolding. But, instead, Bykov explained in some detail



V.I. Bykov

the process of photosynthesis and the very important function that the leaves and vines had in that process. This opened a whole new world of understanding of plant life to the boys and, seemingly incidentally, also taught them not to trample vegetables in the garden. They left greatly enriched in knowledge, understanding, and esteem for their teacher. Bykov also had a very sensitive eye for students encountering difficulties in their school work. It was not his manner to publicly embarrass or humiliate a student.Instead he was more likely to suggest that the student come see him and have the matter explained. Jacob I. Regehr, for example, recalls that at one point the mysteries of compound interest had him completely confused. Bykov noticed this and offered some private help after class. Gerhard Lohrenz, in his published memoirs, recounts how Bykov dealt with him when he had prompted a weaker student who did not know an answer. Bykov was certainly willing to help his students, but knew that the kind of help Lohrenz was providing was not appropriate. He sought to impress this on Lohrenz by lowering, but then on appeal raising his own mark.

Bykov and his wife and young children lived in a house immediately adjacent to the school grounds. He was generally regarded as less rigid in the enforcement of codes of behaviour than were the Mennonite teachers. There was in the psyche of many of the Mennonite teachers at Alexanderkrone a spiritual anxiety which Bykov seemingly did not share and helped to counteract in the school. He was, nevertheless, also a person who took great care to dress immaculately, and the special uniform he was proud to wear on festive occasions greatly impressed many of the students.[2] He joined the teaching staff in Alexanderkrone in 1911 and remained there until the summer of 1921.[3]

The second and also rather unusual teacher at the school was Isaak P. Regehr. He served not only as the teacher of religion and German, but also as the school's business manager and its most influential public relations agent. Regehr, as already indicated, had been a village school teacher who had obtained the required minimum qualifications to teach at the intermediate level only after repeated and frustrating delays. His primary interests were not academic,

Isaak P. Regehr

although he held academic pursuits in very high regard. His talents were undoubtedly multifaceted. As a village school teacher he had, of necessity, been engaged in part-time farming activities.He also acquired an interest in a nearby flour mill, became a partner of the Neuhalbstadt publishing firm Raduga Verlag, and purchased several small tracts of land, apparently as an investment in lieu of any teachers' pension.[4]

At the school Isaak P. Regehr looked after a variety of administrative matters. He collected funds from members of the sponsoring society, handled the annual tuition fees,[5] and also registered the students. Various disciplinary and custodial matters also became his responsibility, and he was generally the first person called if something went wrong at the school. Living in the new teacherage on the school yard, the beautification of that yard became a particular labour of love for him and his family. He did, however, have available to him the services of a Russian servant who lived in a small room in the basement of the school and looked after routine custodial matters.

The role of the sponsoring School Society decreased substantially after Jacob Esau ceased to be chairman. The school and its teachers increasingly looked after more and more of the ongoing administrative matters, and by 1913 the School Society operated only as a Board of Trustees.[6] In the 1920s, after the death of David Dick, the teachers were so completely in charge that Jacob I. Regehr no longer remembers whether the School Society ever met while he taught at the school.

Former students almost unanimously refer to Isaak P. Regehr with great affection.[7] His effectiveness as a teacher was rooted in a kindly but shrewd and, if necessary, tough approach to his students. Most former students interviewed emphatically identified him as their favourite teacher. He was one of those shrewd teachers who could sense what was going on and who was misbehaving, even when his back was turned to the class while he was writing something on the blackboard. Many former students were eager to relate anecdotes about him, only a few of which can be repeated here.

In the early years of the school one particular student tried, as students have from time immemorial, to test the outside limits of the established rules of the school. Smoking was forbidden, and the student was caught, interviewed by the teachers, and sentenced to a spanking ("eine Tracht Prügel").[8] The student was ordered to bend over a bench, and Regehr administered the punishment. The pain and indignity of the situation bred defiance, and the boy noisily threatened to report the matter to his father who was a known and generous supporter of the school. After listening calmly to these threats Regehr expressed his regret that it was now necessary for the student to bend over once more. A more vigorous application of discipline followed, after which student and teacher had a much better understanding of the situation.

Gerhard Lohrenz told another quite different story about his former teacher. During the period of rampant monetary inflation after the revolution, the local Russian postmaster reported that one of the students had passed him a rare government interest certificate. The certificate had been accepted by the uneducated postmaster for the full value of the principal amount of 40 rubles, rather than only for the interest on that sum which was worth approximately 1.5 rubles. Attempts by the teachers to identify the guilty student proved fruitless. They did discover that a student with a very dubious reputation had been in possession of one of the rare interest certificates, but when pressed by the teachers, this student produced written evidence that he had cashed his certificate in another store in his home village of Tiegerweide. When confronted with this evidence, teacher Regehr told the student, "I certainly thought it was you, but I must have been wrong this time."

The student promptly and uncharacteristically responded, stating emphatically, "If you really suspect me, I will immediately go to the postmaster and pay him the money. I hope that will put an end to the matter."

Hearing this, Regehr looked sternly at the student and then said, "Goertzen, I tell you now to your face that you did it. I do not know how you did it, but I know you did it. You are so greedy that you would never offer to pay that kind of money if you were innocent. You are a deceiver. Come with me into the teachers' room, and there you will tell me the truth."

Once in the teachers' room the student confessed that he had actually had two of the rare certificates, using one in the store and the other at the post office.[9] It was this kind of shrewd intuition, coupled with a generally kind disposition, which endeared Regehr to many of his students.

Isaak P. Regehr was also a Mennonite Brethren preacher and Bible teacher who travelled extensively to preach and conduct special Bible studies and conferences in the various Molotschna villages and in the Crimea where his in-laws lived. He was a taciturn individual whose preaching style was certainly not flamboyant, but he had the knack of saying things succinctly, simply, and in a manner that people could understand and recall distinctly many years later. Unlike many of the more emotional and enthusiastic Mennonite Brethren preachers, Regehr rarely resorted to overt pressure tactics to force his listeners to make a religious commitment. He believed that every individual must experience a personal conversion, but was not inclined to pressure anyone to make

that decision before he or she had considered the matter very carefully and was in a position to make an informed and responsible decision. His sermons and teaching were rooted in the practical realities of everyday life, and in a personal code of conduct marked by integrity, honour and shrewdness.[10]

Aside from his teaching, preaching and Bible studies, Isaak P. Regehr also had a strong interest in, and commitment to music, specifically to choir singing. He was the person in charge of the school choir. He experienced both the joys and frustrations common to those trying to teach adolescent boys to sing when they would rather be absent without leave.[11] In addition, he founded a volunteer choir — the Concordia Chor. This choir had only indirect links with the school, drawing adult singers from the villages of Alexanderkrone, Kleefeld and Lichtfelde. One of the notable features of this choir, and indeed of the entire Alexanderkrone school atmosphere, was the fact that it drew strong support and participation from all three major Mennonite factions or denominations in those villages.[12] They sang mainly from the so-called *Liederperlen*, a collection of pietistic and evangelical hymns, anthems and gospel songs. The choir accepted invitations from various churches and also had occasional special programs.[13]

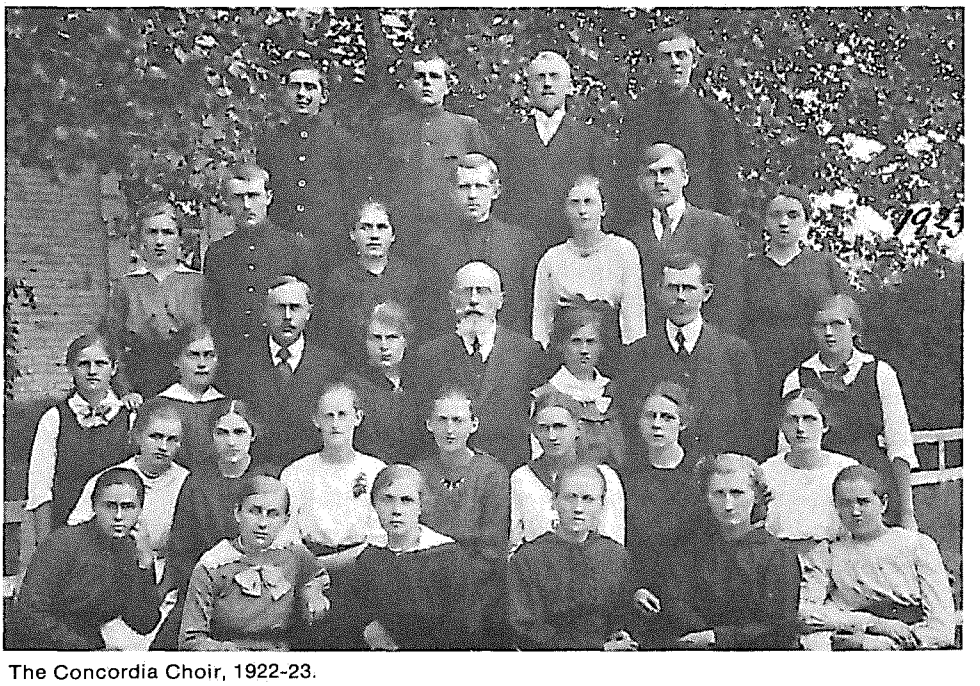
Isaak P. Regehr's extensive extra-curricular activities helped to build the image of the Alexanderkrone school in the surrounding villages. But they probably limited the amount of time and energy he could devote to his teaching. Gerhard Lohrenz, in sharing his less than flattering account of his teacher of German and religion, noted that:

> Teacher Regehr was an honourable man. Our people very much appreciated his Bible studies, but, as is often the case with us, he was loaded down with too much work: preaching, Bible studies, administrative duties in the school. As a result his teaching became routine and, for me at least, lacked freshness, interest and enthusiasm.[14]

Certainly during the decade before the revolution Viatcheslav Ivanovich Bykov and Isaak P. Regehr were the two most influential teachers in Alexanderkrone. Bykov served from 1911 until 1921, while Regehr taught at the school from 1906 until 1923. No other teacher taught there that long, but three other teachers did serve for many years and contributed very substantially to the development and operation of the school.

The first of these three was Heinrich Petrovich Neufeld, who was first appointed as a teacher in Alexanderkrone in 1909. He taught for two years, then studied for two years to pass the required examinations, and returned to the school in 1913 with full qualifications. Neufeld was, by all accounts, a somewhat unusual and even eccentric character. He was the teacher of Russian history, language and literature at the school, and his teaching was marked with sufficient vigour and enthusiasm that it sometimes evoked amusement. He was one of a comparatively small minority of Russian Mennonites who developed both an understanding and a deep affection for the language, literature and culture of the Russian people. The great Russian poets and novelists of the nineteenth century were read and interpreted with enthusiasm. This appreciation and enthusiasm for Russian culture and literature became an important and some-

The Concordia Choir 1916



The Concordia Choir, 1922-23.

Daniel P. Enns, 1877-1946

what unique feature of the Alexanderkrone school. It is noteworthy that many of the teachers worked comfortably and competently in the Russian language, even to the extent that not only their official duties, but also their preferred language of communication, and the language they often used in their diaries, was Russian rather than German. Some of these men undoubtedly harboured many of the same condescending attitudes toward the Russian peasantry that were common in the Mennonite villages, but it is difficult to find any evidence that they regarded Russian literature and culture as inferior to German.

Heinrich P. Neufeld lived alone in a small house at the far end of the village, which the owner made available to the School Society at a very modest cost. Of obvious interest to many of Neufeld's students, and to many adult villagers as well, were his romantic and near-marital hopes and misadventures. Neufeld was a single man during the years he taught at Alexanderkrone, but he allegedly was engaged to be married several times. In each case, however, the wedding was called off, on at least one occasion after invitations had already been issued.[15] There was a feeling that some of Neufeld's enthusiastic teaching of particular Russian literary writers was, in part at least, rooted in his own troubled emotional experiences. His teaching was, however, highly regarded.

Several former students also noted that amongst the four or five teachers only Neufeld consistently refused to lead the short daily devotions in the school or to pray in public.[16] Participation in these religious exercises was not required of any of the teachers, but it is clear that there was considerable pressure and that teachers like Neufeld who did not participate were regarded with somewhat critical curiosity.

When the school adopted a four-year program in 1913 an additional teacher was recruited to teach the new commercial subjects which were part of the expanded curriculum. The new teacher was Daniel Petrovich Enns, a graduate of the teacher training school in Halbstadt, who had then just completed a further course of studies at a commercial institute in St. Petersburg.[17] Enns quickly established a reputation as a very strict disciplinarian. He was a person who

Heinrich P. Neufeld

tolerated no nonsense, but one former student noted that "the students were impressed with his accuracy in throwing a piece of chalk at a daydreaming, unsuspecting student."[18] Enns, like several of the other teachers, reportedly had a short temper which sometimes found expression in colourful verbal and sometimes corporal punishment.

Among the Alexanderkrone teachers, Enns was the most prominent and active in both political and educational organizations. He later became a very influential promoter of Mennonite emigration from Russia.[19]

The third new teacher, who also remained for many years, was Gerhard H. Peters, also appointed in 1913. Peters was appointed to teach mathematics and some of the sciences — the teaching of the latter he shared with Principal Bykov whose specialty was physics while Peters was more interested in the biological sciences. Peters also had strong literary interests, and was a poet of greater than usual accomplishments within the Mennonite community. His poetry was published many years later under the title *Blumen am Wegrand.*[20]

In school Peters was often very intense and rigid. There was no question about his competence in the subject materials he presented, nor about his dedication and concern for his students, but one former student expressed a general student and collegial perception when he said that Peters had a difficult or heavy personality.[21] Another noted that difficult childhood and adolescent experiences had left Peters without much flexibility or the ability to understand those with whom he disagreed.[22] Peters had a very quick temper, and was rather easily irritated. In such situations, his short, staccato-like steps became the manifestation of the intensity of his personality.

Peters later achieved wider recognition in Canada when he prepared and duplicated the lecture or class notes for his special classes in character training at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna. His approach was unequivocal:

> The training of a good character concerns itself with the liberation of human personality from the bonds of the lower instincts; it is the

Gerhard H. Peters

development and manifestation of the image of God, imparted to man at the creation.[23]

The essence of the Christian life often seemed for Gerhard Peters, and to a lesser extent for his colleagues, to be a serious conflict between his lower instincts and the nobler aspirations of his soul. Instead of making people whole and fully integrated individuals, religion sometimes set these people at war with themselves. Self-denial, and the suppression of basic aspects of their being, consumed much creative and emotional energy. The inevitable failures in completely curbing natural instincts and drives left them with a lingering sense of guilt and inadequacy.

The duality of human nature was probably accepted by all the teachers at Alexanderkrone, but some, notably V.I. Bykov, were much more easy-going, while others, notably, Isaak P. Regehr, could work very happily and contentedly without worrying unduly about failures and imperfections. But for Gerhard Peters and some of the other teachers the internal tensions were not constructive, and fostered stiff, difficult and sometimes volatile behaviour despite their best intentions and motivations. This, however, should not obscure the fact that Peters, like his colleagues, was industrious and did much excellent work.

Peters was appointed to teach at the Alexanderkrone school in 1913. The School Society looked after his housing and other needs in typical fashion. Money was gathered and volunteer labour solicited to build a small house on the same village lot on which the house for V.I. Bykov was situated. Peters was allowed to prepare the plans and designs for the new house, but construction was not entirely completed when the Peters moved in. By the time of Peters' appointment, the salary arrangements for the teachers had been improved to the point that they were fully competitive with those offered at the other Mennonite intermediate schools. And those arrangements no longer included the grant of several *desjatins* of land on which the teacher might pursue a part-time farming career. Peters, Enns, and Neufeld raised neither chickens, pigs and cows, nor did they plant more than a small vegetable garden and a few fruit trees for their own

use. The Bykov family had a vegetable garden, but all the teachers were, by that time, getting sufficient remuneration so they did not need to resort to part-time farming.[24]

After his first year at Alexanderkrone Peters married. The couple went to St. Petersburg for their honeymoon, and were in that city when World War I broke out. For a short time he was denied permission to leave the city and feared that he would be drafted for military service. After several days of anxiety he was, however, allowed to return to Alexanderkrone and given an exemption from military service. Together with Bykov, Regehr, Neufeld, and Enns, Peters taught in Alexanderkrone throughout the war, revolution, and civil war.

These five competent and highly respected teachers formed the core of the teaching staff throughout the second decade of the century, and certainly helped to raise the reputation and acceptance of their school. It was, however, the policy of the School Society to appoint at least one teacher more than the number of classrooms in the school, and for several years after 1913 the school divided its first-year class into two sections, thus requiring the services of an additional teacher.[25]

One teacher in particular was used frequently in the Alexanderkrone school to teach additional enrollment-related classes. He was Heinrich Reimer from the neighbouring village of Lichtfelde, who lived at home, but taught at Alexanderkrone as opportunity offered. He also provided private instruction to students in need of such assistance. Reimer was drafted during the war, but returned to teach for at least a year or two after the war. He was released when student enrollments fell sharply during the period of the famine in the 1920s. One student, however, recalls that Heinrich Reimer of Lichtfelde again returned to teach at the school for at least one year in the early 1930s.[26] One other teacher, Peter Regehr, a nephew of Isaak P. Regehr, was also hired for one year.

The general style of teaching during the prerevolutionary period tended to stress memorization and rote learning. It was customary to assign the things students were to learn, and then ask them to recite what they had learned, or to answer specific questions asked by the teacher. Today this style of teaching seems rather unimaginative and tedious, but there were compelling reasons why teachers in Russia in the early decades of the twentieth century followed such an approach, even though many would have preferred other teaching methods.

The first and most important problem faced by the teachers was the fact that the schools generally lacked significant textbook and supportive educational materials. If, for example, the teacher has only one basic book of readings to work from for a period of four years, instruction inevitably becomes somewhat stilted. In addition, basic writing materials were very scarce and expensive. Instead of paper and pens or pencils, the students still used the old-fashioned slates on which they wrote their assignments, laboriously copied from the blackboard. Most modern teachers would find teaching without pens or pencils and paper impossible, and it was certainly difficult in the early 1900s. There was also a problem of numbers and of maintaining discipline in large classrooms. Given the rather undiscriminating admission policies of the school, individual

attention to students having problems was essential, but could only be provided if the rest of the class was working on an appropriate assignment.

The relatively weak academic training of many village school teachers dictated this type of learning at the elementary level. When some of the teachers with elementary school teaching experience moved up to the intermediate level they continued the teaching methods which had served them at the elementary level. As more teachers with advanced training were appointed, efforts were certainly made to improve the style of teaching, but some of the factors already mentioned hampered such efforts. So a relatively mechanical and formalistic style of teaching and learning persisted, on the basis of which students were questioned daily in the school, and publicly at the year's end closing ceremonies, then called *Prüfungen.* The basic rules of spelling and grammar were stressed, as was neat and tidy handwriting.

Students graduating from the school were certainly capable of some graceful and elegant prose, but much of it had a mechanical and formalistic style which is rather easily recognized. Written assignments were almost invariably of the short essay or article variety, with all the basic elements in place, but without much capacity to develop and expand new or original ideas or to analyze and discuss diverse and complex material. A single idea, cogently developed in essays of 2,000 words or less, marked both the strengths and weaknesses of these assignments and of the writing skills acquired by the graduates of Russian Mennonite schools.[27] These essays had the characteristics of an encyclopedia. They were full of factual information, gracefully expressed, but presented in a fragmented manner.

The members of the School Society and the teachers, particularly those who served for many years, gave the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule its character. They were convinced that the school was indeed a plantation in the Kingdom of God, but they were also very strongly committed to academic excellence and to the perpetuation of the structure and ideals of the Russian Mennonite commonwealth. These men established the atmosphere which dominated the school for many years.

Chapter V
The School and the Larger Mennonite Community, 1908-1917

The teachers, sponsors and students of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule were never an entity unto themselves. They were part of a larger community with which they constantly interacted, from which they drew their students and into which they sent their graduates. The school certainly did not challenge any of the fundamental aspects of the Mennonite community of which they were a part. School and community shared and supported the ideology of the Russian Mennonite commonwealth, and sought to support and strengthen what they regarded as its best and most attractive features.

The most obvious and direct interaction between school and community can be seen in the religious instruction offered at the school. Such instruction was certainly a very important part of the pre-revolutionary curriculum at Alexanderkrone. At its most superficial level religious instruction consisted of the learning of Bible stories and of the catechism. A single book of Bible stories and the catechism were used in all four grades. Rote learning was often a requirement.

The religious instruction at Alexanderkrone, however, had a much more important, though not always explicitly stated objective. Its primary objective was to train young people to become useful and productive citizens of their Mennonite communities. It is not easy to define clearly the cultural and spiritual ethos of what has sometimes been called the Russian Mennonite commonwealth.[1] What is quite clear is that the religious instruction at Alexanderkrone and other Mennonite intermediate and secondary schools was essentially practical and social rather than overtly theological. It certainly did not include overt pressure on students to make specific religious commitments. Gerhard Lohrenz described the approach very clearly:

> In the *Zentralschule* (as well as later in the *Handelsschule)* we had daily religious instruction. . . . We were told very clearly how to become reconciled to God. But never to my recollection were we encouraged to make this all-important decision right then, at the school. The way it was presented was that we must make the decision some day, but it seemed that that day lay somewhere in the nebulous future. . . . Of the eighty or so boys in the *Zentralschule* [the reference here is to a *Zentralschule* Lohrenz attended before going to the *Handelsschule* at Alexanderkrone] only two claimed to be born-again Christians.[2]

It is not particularly difficult to understand this lack of religious pressure. The

Alexanderkrone school, like all the other intermediate Mennonite schools, served students from all Mennonite factions and groups in Russia. No overt pressure could be exerted to force students to opt for the religious experience or confession of faith of only one of these factions. The schools also admitted students of non-Mennonite background, although these formed only a small minority in the early years.[3] What was the right and proper religious experience for a student of Russian, Jewish, German or other religious background? Overt and specific pressure of the sort exerted in many North American Mennonite schools, would have made co-operative Mennonite school ventures in Russia difficult or impossible, as they have been in North America.

Overt religious pressure in the schools would almost certainly also have brought further and perhaps vigorous government intervention. The government officials probably knew very little about the Mennonites and their various religious quarrels and disputes. But the disruptions caused by fanatics in the Russian Orthodox Church, and their attempts to gain greater influence in the schools sponsored by the official church, were very well-known to government officials. Practical realities of the time, and common sense, rather than fanaticism and overt proselytization, characterized the religious approach in the Mennonite schools in Russia.

Also to be considered is the fact that conversion and church membership for most Russian Mennonites did not usually come during the early or mid-teen years. Those were regarded as very serious matters, requiring maturity and understanding that was, at best, only incomplete amongst students at intermediate schools. For most Mennonite young people, particularly in the main established Mennonite church groups, membership came shortly before marriage. Irrevocable religious decisions certainly had to be made, but at the appropriate time when individuals had reached maturity. Adult, not juvenile baptism was the norm. The intermediate and secondary schools[4] were the place where students learned the things they would need to know later when, as mature adults, they made their religious decisions and commitments.

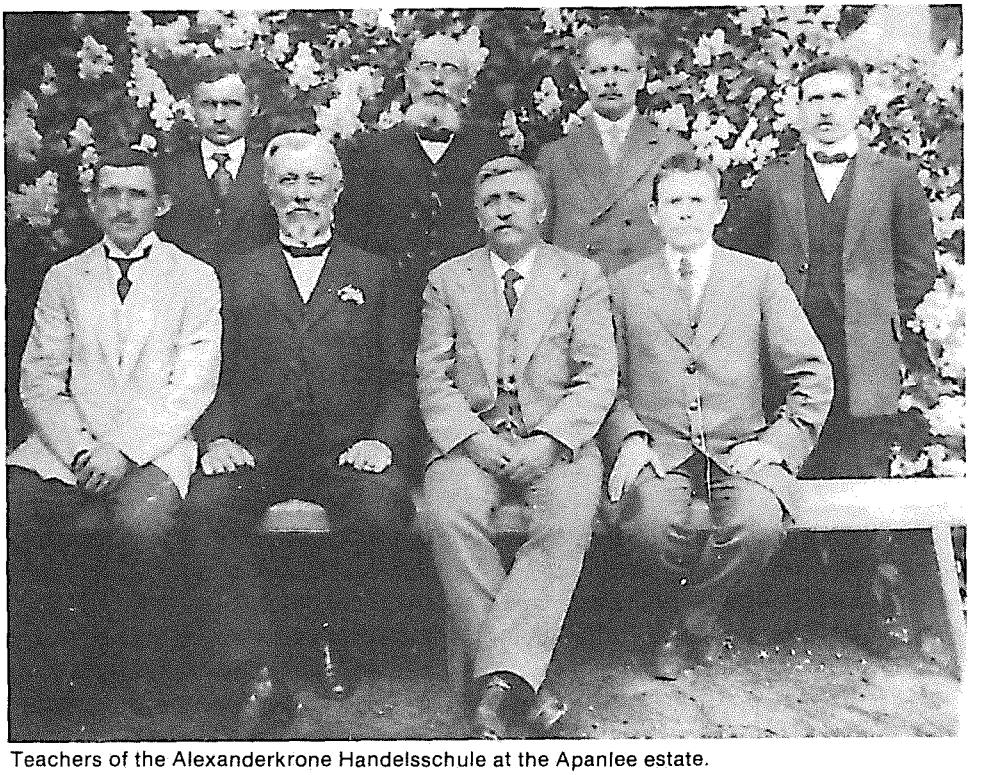
It should not be deduced from this that the teachers or the sponsoring Society members were indifferent to religious matters. Far from it. They would not have made the enormous sacrifices many of them did make, had it not been for a very strong religious motivation. But for these people religious faith was not a matter of some superficial and emotional conversion experience. Discipleship, stern moral codes, and a life lived with honour and integrity were the Christian virtues they cherished. They were still closely tied to their villages, in which all aspects of life had to be integrated and harmonized. There was a much greater emphasis on being a follower of Christ, rather than merely on being saved or converted. Converts whose lives did not manifest the required conduct were viewed with proper suspicion. Even students who expressed strong intellectual aversions to Christian teachings were rarely molested by school administrators and teachers, as long as their behaviour remained proper.

Competent teachers and a good curriculum or program of instruction are of vital importance in any school, but no school history is complete without accounts of student activities. The students at the Alexanderkrone school were,

Students and teachers of the Alexanderkrone Handelsschule at the Apanlee estate of David Dick.

of course, adolescents. But many of them were also very keenly interested in gaining a more advanced education. The early years, in particular, brought to the school many rural village children for whom the school opened up entirely new worlds of knowledge and opportunities. It was, however, often only available to the more talented children whose parents could afford the cost of the tuition and, if they lived some distance away, of accommodation during the school year. The student body was relatively small, and a strong sense of pride and achievement can be detected in the recollections of many former students.

The teachers were, above all, to be respected, and some were also regarded with great affection and love. Class excursions to study various aspects of nature were common, particularly in early spring. Visits and picnics on the neighbouring estates of Society members David Dick and Jacob Sudermann, both of Apanlee, took place, but the highlight of most students' experiences at the school was the major excursion of the graduating class at the end of their last school year. These excursions could take seven to ten days. One of the favourite spots visited by a number of graduating classes were the rapids on the Dnjepr River. Such visits generally included stops at the old Mennonite settlement of Chortitza and at the 1000-year-old oak tree which had long been a landmark of that area. Here stories could be told of Cossacks who had gathered under that very tree before some of their skirmishes with Muscovite military forces. In other years a trip to the Crimea was arranged. All of these experiences helped to build exceptionally strong loyalties to, and affection for the school and its teachers. The school opened up exciting new worlds to these sons of Russian Mennonite



Teachers of the Alexanderkrone Handelsschule at the Apanlee estate.
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

farmers.

Initially the school admitted only boys. There were several parallel girls' schools, although most Mennonite farmers were very uncertain about the need or the value of having girls educated beyond the elementary school level unless they intended to become village school teachers. The Alexanderkrone school remained relatively small in comparison to the other Mennonite *Zentralschulen* in the Molotschna settlement, and no parallel girls' school was built, as was the case in Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld and Ohrloff. This, perhaps, accounts for the fact that the Alexanderkrone school began to admit girls relatively early. The first girl to attend the Alexanderkrone school was Tina Regehr, daughter of teacher Isaak P. Regehr, who appears on the 1909-10 school picture seated next to her father. This was apparently an exceptional arrangement since she was not officially admitted as a student.[5] By 1912, however, at least three girls, Elizabeth Huebner, Anna Reimer and Anna Regehr, the latter another daughter of Isaak P. Regehr, were admitted and they were properly registered.[6] A student who came to the school in 1913 remembers there were three female students at that time.[7] Several of the girls who did attend the school recall that it required a great deal of persuasion before their farmer fathers agreed to the additional expenditure.[8] Even in the case of the Isaak P. Regehr family, the oldest daughter, Liese, was sent to a special school where she was to learn cooking and sewing, while the younger three daughters all attended the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule.

The coeducational nature of the Alexanderkrone school apparently remained very strained for many years, and a strict separation between boys and girls was enforced throughout the school's history. Gerhard Lohrenz, who attended the school during the war years, later recalled that:

> The two sexes were kept strictly segregated. The girls had their own sidewalk leading through the park to the school; they entered through a door to which we boys were not permitted access. During recess the girls adjourned to a room into which again we boys were not permitted. In short, it was practically impossible to exchange a single sentence with the girls, except of course those who were in our classroom. In my room, for example, there was a Russian girl of Molokan persuasion. She was a fine girl who conducted herself with dignity and the boys respected her. This rigid segregation of the sexes may seem narrowly restrictive — even despotic — by today's standards, but it was certainly a more realistic kind of training for our carefully structured closed society in Russia than the almost unlimited freedom of today's schools would have been.[9]

Student attitudes of that time were apparently also quite different than those prevalent in North American high schools today. If many of the girls today might be criticized for having too much interest in boys, the opposite was apparently true at Alexanderkrone for many of the girls whose attitudes towards boys were decidedly giddy and silly.[10] Others simply reported that they were told not to clutter up their minds with romantic encounters. They should keep a clear head for studies, but, in the words of one former female student, "we still liked the boys and they liked us."[11] Most of the students of the Alexanderkrone school, however, were definitely not sexually sophisticated, promiscuous or liberated, as these terms are understood today.

Human nature cannot, however, be entirely denied and occasionally male students were caught making overtures of one sort or another to one of the girls. In this regard the situation in the Alexanderkrone school seemed to remain virtually unchanged from the time it first admitted girls until it was forcibly closed in 1941. Love letters, or love poems, were the primary means of illicit communication. If caught, the guilty student, before World War I or in the depths of the Stalinist terror, could expect to be called to make a public confession and apology before the entire student body. It is a matter of conjecture whether that form of punishment proved more embarrassing to the offending boy or to the intended person of his affection who had to sit through the reading of the letter or poem and the appropriate public apology.[12] Aside from the one homosexual incident mentioned earlier, there is no record of any major sexual transgressions by members of the student body during the pre-revolutionary period.

A school with anywhere between 64 and 156 students must inevitably have a major economic and social impact on a small rural village of approximately 600 people.[13] Many residents in Alexanderkrone, or in the villages of Lichtfelde and Kleefeld on either side of Alexanderkrone, had students (often relatives from other villages) or one of the teachers, boarding in their homes at one time or

Teachers and members of the 1913-14 graduating class of the Alexanderkrone Kommerzschule. Teachers left to right are H.P. Neufeld, Heinrich Reimer, V. Bykov, I.P. Regehr, D.P. Enns, G.H. Peters.

another. Many of the students from the slightly more remote villages rode horses or walked to school daily. It was assumed that the school and its teachers had a responsibility for the good behaviour of their students at all times. A 6:00 p.m. curfew was rigorously enforced.[14] Students going astray in the nearby Russian village of Tokmak could expect disciplinary repercussions from their teachers. Since both male and female students wore the mandatory student uniforms they were easily identified and treated in much the same way that soldiers or policemen in uniform are treated by their commanding officers.

There is no direct or indirect evidence of any serious conflict between the school and the village administration. The residents of Alexanderkrone generally regarded the school as a great asset for their village, even if some of them did not send their teenagers for further education.

The most important impact of the school, however, was cultural and intellectual rather than economic. The extra-curricular activities of Isaak Regehr as a choir leader and Bible study participant and organizer have already been mentioned. These activities, however, were only indirectly linked to the school. There were others which were an integral part of the school program. Both the ceremonies at the beginning of the school year and the closing exercises were major social events when the large hall and entrance of the school were often crowded beyond capacity. These exercises were, of course, primarily designed to show what the school was and what its students had learned. The school had a regular choir which rehearsed some fairly sophisticated music, including some of the choral works from oratorios by Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn. On occasion singers from the Concordia Choir were recruited to help with difficult numbers, but the musical education and appreciation of students and audience alike were greatly enriched. Another important aspect of most programs was the recitation of poetry or literary prose.

The school also had regular literary evenings in which appreciation and understanding of suitable literary works were promoted. These literary evenings sponsored by the school were obvious highlights for many villagers, as is demonstrated by the great care and attention the students gave to the preparation of the official programs. There was admittedly still a good deal of rote learning, but the intellectual horizons of students and adult community members were certainly greatly extended. That literary enthusiasm very definitely extended not only to German but also to Russian works, although, particularly for relaxed reading, the teachers probably enjoyed no author as much as Fritz Reuter.

It is often difficult to document how the intellectual and artistic horizons of a community are extended, but a few examples can be provided. Gerhard Lohrenz, in a personal letter, stated that his teacher, Isaak P. Regehr, lacked training and appreciation of German literature. When Lohrenz had suggested that he wanted to read the biographies of major German poets, such as Goethe, Regehr had exclaimed disapprovingly, "Goethe! a common adulterer or marriage breaker."[15] Yet that same teacher's son and pupil, Isaak I. Regehr, wrote enthusiastic short term papers at the Halbstadt Kommerzschule and the University in Simferopol, including at least one on Goethe's life and literary humanism.[16] In

Female students of the Alexanderkrone Handelsschule in 1918. Front row (l.-r.): Tina Dick (Hintz), ?, ?, Berta Goldberg, Justina Tomsen, ?, Mika Daniels. Second row: Anna Nickel, Anna Neufeld, Anna Wall, Tina Baerg, Tina Tiehlman, ?, Tina Dick (Koop), Tina Dick (Janzen), Mariechen Dick. Back row: Sara Harder, Greta Koop (Neufeld), Liese Dick (Reimer), Dina Panschenka, ? Bykov, ?, Tina Letkeman, ?, Mariechen Regehr, ?.

Members of the 1918 Alexanderkrone Handelsschule graduating class.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

1920, when Isaak I. Regehr was appointed as a teacher in Alexanderkrone he purchased more than 212 rubles worth of books, mostly works of literature and, as a result, found himself in debt for most of that year.[17] Six years later he selected many of those books, carefully listed them, and paid extra freight charges to take them along to Canada.[18] The Alexanderkrone school certainly broadened the intellectual horizons in at least that one family, and probably of many more students and villagers.

Many of the teachers, particularly Daniel Enns, also took a very active interest in world affairs. The early events of World War I, however, had very little direct effect on the school or the village. Teachers, particularly those in commercial schools, were exempt from military conscription, and all five teachers who were at the Alexanderkrone school in 1914 were still teaching there at war's end. Almost all the students at the school were too young to be drafted into military or alternative service, although many graduates were conscripted a year or two after they completed their studies. The school and the village nevertheless remained largely unaffected by the war until the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk late in 1918.

By 1917 it seemed that the future of the Alexanderkrone Handelsschule was secure. In that year a record 156 students were enrolled, thanks in large measure to a group of seventeen students who came as a group from Sagradovka.[19] Additional teachers had to be hired, including the brother of Viatcheslav Bykov who thus became the second Russian national to hold a fulltime teaching position in the school.[20] The war still seemed far away, but important concerns had become widespread in the Mennonite villages. The most troublesome issue was the official land policy of the Tsarist government and the apparent determination to confiscate or nationalize large portions of the lands owned by Russian Germans, including Mennonites.[21] The *Duma* was also at work preparing sweeping educational reforms that were viewed with skepticism and sometimes alarm by the Mennonites. Tsarist land and educational policies, when combined with growing and widespread suspicion of all German-speaking peoples in Russia and manifestations of administrative and military blunders, strengthened a desire for major governmental reform. That desire was certainly very strongly shared by the teachers and students in Alexanderkrone, who welcomed the February 1917 Russian Revolution with great enthusiasm. Many of those same issues, however, also contained the seeds of unprecedented disasters which were about to overtake the Mennonite villages and the school in Alexanderkrone.

Chapter VI
Soviet Continuity and Reforms, 1917-1926

The two revolutions which swept Russia in 1917 eventually changed or affected every aspect of life in that country. They ushered in a very difficult period of time for the Russian Mennonite colonies generally. From 1917 until the decisive victory of the Red Army over General Wrangel and his White Army on 2 November 1920, there was great political, military, social and educational instability. This was followed by determined Soviet attempts to revolutionize all of Russian society, including the educational system. The educational revolution in Alexanderkrone, however, did not occur suddenly. Rather, supporters, teachers and students faced relentless and constantly increasing pressure to conform to Soviet demands. By 1926 the last of those who had built the school and taught at it before the revolution left.

The overthrow of the Tsarist government in February of 1917, and the establishment of a new reform-minded Provisional Government, was greeted with very considerable enthusiasm and support in the Russian Mennonite communities. There was widespread recognition that major changes and reforms were necessary. Interest in, and early support for, the revolutionary cause was particularly strong in the Alexanderkrone school because of teacher Daniel Enns' very intense and influential involvement in the local political situation.[1] Enns, as already indicated, was elected chairman of the Alexanderkrone Electoral District, and also held important positions in a number of other major Mennonite administrative, political and educational organizations. He was certainly much better informed than most of the other villagers, and worked hard to make the new government and its reforms successful.[2]

The February 1917 revolution was certainly noted and discussed, but otherwise had relatively little immediate impact on students and teachers at Alexanderkrone. The October revolution, however, had more immediate and unsettling effects, particularly in Halbstadt. Here the local Mennonite government was replaced by a Soviet local government which resorted immediately to requisitions of various supplies. In the ensuing administrative confusion several leading citizens were arrested and executed. One of these was Jacob Sudermann, member of the the Alexanderkrone School Society and owner of a prosperous estate at Apanlee.[3]

These days of terror in Halbstadt left an important emotional impact on the Mennonite populace, but the situation was alleviated with the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the temporary occupation of the Molotschna area by German troops. The German troops restored Mennonite local government and did not interfere at all in the operations of the Mennonite schools. The Alexanderkrone Handelsschule operated throughout the German occupation with

David Dick

Katharina Dick

Photos: Aron A. Toews, *Mennonitische Maertyrer*

modest financial support from the villages of Alexanderkrone, Lichtfelde and Kleefeld. Most of its operating costs were covered by tuition fees paid by students or their parents.[4]

Major political and educational changes were only initiated after the new Soviet authorities had securely established themselves in power. In the Molotschna area that took almost exactly two years. From the time when the German troops withdrew in November of 1918 until the final defeat of the White Army early in November of 1920 there was great political and military instability as Red and White partisans, and anarchist bands loosely led by Nestor Makhno, struggled for control of the area. Several villages in the Molotschna allegedly changed hands as many as 23 times,[5] but the village of Alexanderkrone and its school experienced very little serious violence throughout that period. All the long-term teachers were able to remain at their posts.

The most traumatic and tragic experience of the civil war for the supporters of the Alexanderkrone school was undoubtedly the brutal murder of David Dick, the chairman and financial supporter of the School Society, and of his wife, on 30 October 1919. Dick was a wealthy estate owner and major Mennonite benefactor whose annual income before the revolution was estimated to be 150,000 rubles. He was an obvious target for the communists, although his first arrest in 1918 had elicited a petition with 7,000 signatures, mostly by persons of Russian nationality. As a result, he was released. His reputed wealth, however, led to another attack by at least six armed *Makhnovtsi* on 30 October 1919. Although he had received advance warning of the attack, Dick and his family remained on their estate, trusting in their reputation as model employers, businessmen and landowners, and the providence of God.

The marauding bandits demanded money, and when none was provided both David Dick and his wife were shot though not immediately killed. Several sons were able to escape, but when Mrs. Dick tried to escape two more shots were fired, the last shot killing her. David Dick feigned death, and thus survived the

initial attack, but he succumbed to his injuries after a day of very intense physical and spiritual suffering. His last words were an anguished prayer that he not lose faith at the end.[6] Both V.I. Bykov and Isaak P. Regehr preached at the very emotional double funeral held four days later. David and Katharina Dick were murdered less for their own transgressions than for the transgressions of the capitalist and landowner classes in Russia generally. Their deaths were particularly shocking in the entire region where they were very well-known, highly respected and loved.[7]

After David Dick's death the already quiet role and influence of the School Society rapidly declined. Thereafter the principal and the teachers themselves collected the appropriate student fees and solicited other assistance as needed to keep the school open. Beginning in 1919 tuition fees were calculated, but not necessarily collected, in *puds* of wheat.

Within two weeks of the murder of the Dicks on their Apanlee estate, another very serious and tragic event occurred in the Molotschna settlement. Local Mennonites, in defiance of their historic pacifism, had earlier organized a defence force *(Selbstschutz)* to protect their villages against the crimes and depredations of the *Makhnovtsi.* They had met with some initial success, but on 10 November 1919 the *Makhnovtsi* gained control of and massacred many of the male residents of the village of Blumenort, violated and raped many of the women, and then set the major buildings on fire. Villagers from Alexanderkrone could clearly see the red glow on the horizon as Blumenort went up in smoke and flames.

The perpetrators of the Blumenort massacre very quickly found themselves pursued by other hostile forces, in this case represented by both Red and White

Mourners at the mass grave in the village of Blumenort, Molotschna.
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

Nestor Makhno, 1889-1934
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

Armies, neither of which were willing to accept responsibility for the actions of the *Makhnovtsi* and both of which hoped to establish their control over the anarchists.

On the day after the Blumenort massacre, Jacob I. Regehr, then teaching in the Kleefeld village school had a very frightening experience. Retreating or fleeing *Makhnovtsi* rode into the village and several entered the school. One demanded that the teacher give him his gold watch and chain. The teacher protested that it would be impossible for him to maintain regular class hours if he did not have a watch. The *Makhnovtsi* cocked his rifle to reinforce his demand for the watch. This proved entirely persuasive. The *Makhnovtsi* got the watch, but instruction at the school continued after this frightening interruption.

Most of the *Makhnovtsi* involved in the Blumenort massacre were defeated and killed a short time later by a Cossack regiment affiliated with the White Army. Before that, however, they had exacted a substantial economic cost as they pillaged and plundered the villages. The Alexanderkrone school itself was spared major plundering, but Isaak P. Regehr lost a prized set of leather harnesses which he had hidden in the top rafters of the poorly lit barn. The *Makhnovtsi* had learned where the Mennonites were likely to store valuable items and, to the great chagrin of the family, immediately on entering the barn raised a lantern to discover what was hidden in the rafters. Such incidents, however, paled into insignificance when compared with events in other villages. A resident of Alexanderkrone in 1920 noted in her diary:

> How badly some of the Germans in other communities have been treated! How they have been annihilated and plundered. In contrast we have remained quite protected till now.[8]

That diary entry was written before a critical struggle between the White and Red Armies swept directly across Alexanderkrone in the last two weeks of June 1920. During those two weeks the White Army lost and then regained the village. But in the meantime the White commanders ordered an aerial bombardment of

the village. That bombardment by anti-Red pilots fell, for the most part, on White Army soldiers because of confused communications. At least six villagers and an unknown number of soldiers were killed during this bombardment of Alexanderkrone. One of the bombs hit very near the home of teacher Gerhard Peters,[9] but no harm came to any of the students, teachers, or buildings of the school, and none of these events forced lengthy disruptions of the teaching program at the school.

Those teaching programs did, however, face very serious change and disruption once the new Soviet government had firmly established power. Then sweeping reforms and radical changes became the order of the day since education was an early and very important concern of the new Soviet government.

The need for major educational reforms in Russia had been obvious for decades, perhaps for centuries. Paul Ignatiev, the last Tsarist Minister of Education, had tried very hard to make fundamental changes in the country's educational system, but had been overtaken by the exigencies of war and revolution.[10] His ideas, however, formed the basis of subsequent Soviet educational policies and reforms.[11]

Three basic concepts undergirded Ignatiev's prerevolutionary educational reforms. The first was the principle of a unified or standardized educational system. The old system under which some schools were controlled by the church, some by the military, others by private individuals or societies, and still others by various government ministries, led to confusion, inefficiency and, all too often, weak academic performance. A single unified educational system, under the control and supervision of the Ministry of Education, was needed. Such a unified system would eliminate much of the confusion about qualifications and entrance examinations.

The notion of a unified school system was buttressed by Ignatiev's view that education should be regarded as an objective in its own right, rather than simply as a matter of specific preparation for a particular career in the church, the civil service, the military, or in business. A well-educated individual should be able to apply what he had learned in a variety of work situations.

Ignatiev's third major concern was that the schools become effective instruments of nationalism. The teaching of the Russian language, literature and history was to be particularly encouraged, and school attendance was to be made compulsory.

Ignatiev's reform proposals, if they had been implemented, would have meant major changes in the program of the Alexanderkrone school. The old Mennonite school system consisted of a six- or seven-year elementary curriculum, followed by a three- or four-year *Zentral-* or *Handelsschul* curriculum, which in turn was followed by three or four years of study in the Halbstadt Kommerz- or Mittelschule. Graduates of this system had an education roughly equivalent to that of a student graduating from one of the better Russian schools with a combined ten-year program.[12] The new unified Russian schools were to have a four-year elementary curriculum, a combined elementary-intermediate seven-year *Semi-Letka,* and a combined ten-year elementary-intermediate-

Paul Ignatiev, the last Tsarist Minister of Education

secondary *Desjati-Letka.* Those who completed the seven-year course of instruction would be eligible for admission to a variety of specialized technical or trade schools, while those who completed the full ten-year program were eligible for admission to university.

After the revolution, Soviet educational authorities accepted the need for a unified national school system. Therefore, a People's Commissariat of Education *(Narkompros)* was established. Orders were issued that all other private and government agencies transfer their educational work to this new commissariat. Then work was begun on the preparation of a suitable new curriculum. The schools were also ordered to admit all qualified students of either sex and of all economic backgrounds. Tough new compulsory school attendance legislation was passed and the wearing of all special school uniforms was banned. The uniforms were regarded as symbols of special status or privilege.[13]

Narkompros reversed one important reform measure. Tsarist reformers had stressed russification, insisting that the language of instruction in all subjects, other than religion and the actual teaching of the minority language, must be in Russian. Communism, however, was ostensibly an international ideology which extended beyond and was expected to make national and linquistic differences and divisions obsolete.[14] Promises to national minorities that they would be allowed to conduct their schools in their own language had been one of the appeals of the Bolsheviks.

Immediately after the October Revolution there was a brief but sharp debate within party ranks before it was decreed that national minorities should conduct their schools in their own language. In matters of curriculum and overall administration the system was to be unified. It would not be unified in the language of instruction, although all schools were required to teach Russian, either as the first or as a second language. This meant that the primary language of instruction in the Alexanderkrone school, which had been Russian before 1917, would henceforth be German.[15]

The new Soviet government also, in one of its first official decrees, banned all

religious instruction in the school system.[16] Complete implementation of this decree, however, took many years and was not applied against teachers like Isaak P. Regehr at the Alexanderkrone school until 1923.

In their attempts to devise a new Marxist school curriculum *Narkompros* planners studied and freely borrowed pedagogical concepts and ideas from many sources.The writings of European and American educators, particularly those of the American educator John Dewey, gained great influence in the Soviet Union. Marx had emphasized the importance of combining education with productive labour, and the project- or activity-approaches and labour principles advocated by educators like John Dewey, Kerschensteiner, Ferriere and Montessori were particularly promising. *Narkompros* therefore decreed that Soviet schools, including the Alexanderkrone Handelsschule, had to become unified labour schools *(Arbeitsschulen).* In the case of the Alexanderkrone school, that decree had very little immediate impact on what was actually taught in the school.

In the early years following the October Revolution there was much theorizing and confusion about educational philosophy, methodology and theory. Eventually a consensus did emerge. A new teaching system concentrating on central themes or "complexes" was to replace all forms of teaching by subject matter. There are a number of descriptions and definitions of this method of teaching, including the following:

> Deriving its name from the Latin term *complexus,* this [was a] system of unified learning material around central themes, forming topics or "complexes". . . . Generally these programmes were organized in such a way that the child at first studied subjects and phenomena related to his immediate surroundings. His horizons were then gradually broadened to the whole community, the region, the country and eventually the world. Learning the three Rs was incidental, and was carried out only to the extent that the child needed them while working on various aspects of a central theme. The themes were often suggested by the children themselves. . . .
>
> The "Complex Programme" . . . was based on the study of man's labour, i.e. his struggle against nature with the help of tools of his own invention, and the study of his social relations resulting from labour. Thus the study of labour was fused with the study of the laws of nature, and of social superstructures to which the former gave rise. The whole programme was drawn up under three central headings: Nature, Labour, Society, and provided a schematic and condensed form for the new culture and Marxist *Weltanschauung.*
>
> . . . Implicitly accepting the Gestalt theory of child psychology, the partisans of the complex programme maintained that it is not in the nature of the child to dissect the phenomena of life into separate systems as represented by separate school subjects, and that, therefore, it was necessary to take whole "slices" or "chunks" of life as they appear in reality, and study these. Such "chunks" were called "complexes," and were introduced into the curriculum as a series of

themes under titles such as "Our City," "Autumn Activities in the Village," etc.[17]

The new "complex" method of teaching and the preparation of appropriate detailed curricula with suitable local applications proceeded only slowly. It took four years of hard work and much debating in St. Petersburg and Moscow before any coherent new scheme was drafted, presented and adopted at a Scientific-Pedagogical session in 1922, and it was not until the late 1920s before a suitable curriculum was developed for use in schools where German was the language of instruction. Together with that curriculum, appropriate reference and support materials with the right political orientation also had to be developed.[18] In the meantime there was much confusion regarding the proposed new curriculum, and widespread resistance by many teachers who often did not know what was demanded of them, or if they did, lacked absolutely essential books and teaching aids, and therefore simply continued to teach more or less as they had before.

The Soviet government also resorted to administration changes which were designed to eliminate the influence of the economically prosperous and privileged classes. Henceforth the educational system was to be administered from the bottom up. Peasants, workers and students should be given control. The local Soviet, and student committees in each of the schools, were entrusted with a great deal of power and influence. Such student committees were certainly elected at Alexanderkrone — at first enthusiastically but later dutifully. In established villages such as Alexanderkrone, however, peer pressure was still sufficiently strong to prevent disruptive radical demands. During the difficult civil war period the teachers had given the Alexanderkrone school stability and continuity and their influence remained strong for years.

Soviet educational reforms were deliberately revolutionary. None, however, could be implemented easily or quickly. Across the land the changes occurred at a very uneven rate, proceeding much more quickly in a few model urban and village schools, but very slowly in self-contained and remote rural communities such as Alexanderkrone. In these rural areas external military and political circumstances and local resistance and isolation ensured that many of the Soviet school reforms would not immediately or radically affect the established program of instruction.

Serious economic problems, rather than political interference or educational reforms, created a very serious crisis at the Alexanderkrone school in the early 1920s. The depredations of the anarchists, the destruction resulting from the civil war, stringent Soviet requisitions of food supplies, and a major epidemic of typhus led to very sharp reductions in the number of students who were able to enroll and pay their tuition fees. In 1917-18 the school had achieved a record high enrollment of 156 students. In 1918-19 only 116 students enrolled and the following year the number was down to 74 students. In the 1920-21 school year only 53 students enrolled, and many of those were unable to complete the year because of famine and illness. In 1921-22 enrollment again increased to 72 students.

The most difficult school year of that period, however, was 1922-23. Starvation

and disease were so widespread that it proved impossible to open the school early in September, in part because the school's principal, V.I. Bykov, and his brother who had also taught briefly at the school, left in order to work with the All-Russian Evangelical Union in Leningrad. The Bykovs apparently left because of the desperate economic conditions in the settlement, rather than because of any educational reforms promulgated in Moscow or Leningrad. Bykov later starved to death during the 900-day World War II siege of Leningrad, and had to be taken to a mass grave in an open cart by his wife and daughter.

V.I. Bykov was not the first of the long-term teachers to leave the school. Heinrich Neufeld, still single but soon to be married, left in 1918 to take a position in a school in the Crimea. Neufeld's departure necessitated the appointment of a new teacher, preferably one who would not make many financial demands. Peter Regehr, a nephew of Isaak P. Regehr, was appointed and served for one year. Then, in 1920, Isaak I. Regehr, son of Isaak P. Regehr, was appointed.[19] He was single, could live in the teacherage with his parents, and had appropriate advanced training at the *Kommerzschule* in Halbstadt, a polytechnicum in St. Petersburg and at the new university in Simferopol. He was appointed to teach Russian literature and language and, inevitably, other assigned subjects.

With the departure of V.I. Bykov, Gerhard Peters was appointed as principal and served in that capacity from 1921 until his emigration to Canada in 1924. Peters' most immediate and pressing problems when he became principal were

Female students, ca. 1922, of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule with teachers Gerhard H. Peters, Isaak P. Regehr and Isaak I. Regehr.

economic. He guided the school through very difficult times, and it is a particular credit to his energy, determination, innovations and sheer stubbornness that the school survived the disastrous economic crises of the early 1920s.

During the years of Peters' principalship the school was essentially a ward of the charity of the surrounding and desperately impoverished community. The depredations of marauding anarchist bands in 1919 and 1920 came to an end after the Red Army gained firm control of the area in November of 1920, but they had inflicted enormous economic damage, and contributed greatly to the outbreak and very rapid spread of a typhus epidemic.

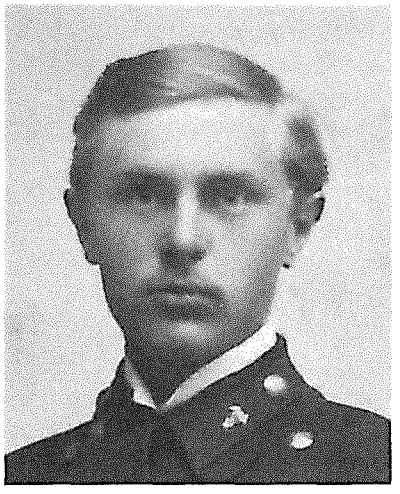
The miseries of the people were further increased by a prolonged drought in 1921 and 1922 which severely damaged all crops in the area. In addition, somewhat more systematic Soviet requisitions of all available food supplies replaced the earlier bandit incursions. When faced with the prospect of serious food shortages the new government decided, as a matter of policy, that the needs of urban workers should have priority in the allocation of the remaining food. Often the administrative competence to implement such a food policy was lacking, but all food supplies in the Molotschna area were requisitioned. The result was widespread starvation. Farming operations were severely hampered by the lack of horses, so that some families had to harness cows to their agricultural implements, or even use family members as draft animals. There was also a desperate shortage of clothing.

Gerhard Peters, in his unpublished memoirs, said that the school, like Elijah in the Old Testament, was kept alive during these difficult times only by "God's ravens." He specifically mentioned that he and his family personally received special food packages from distant relatives. These were shared with everyone else in the school, thereby averting impending closure of the school.[20]

The crisis at the school came to a head in September of 1922. Peters, in consultation with the other teachers, set the tuition fees at levels which aroused much criticism and led to a drastic reduction in the number of registered students. As a result, the official opening was postponed. Drastic measures were mandatory. The fourth class was cancelled, and there was very serious discussion regarding the possible closure of the entire school.

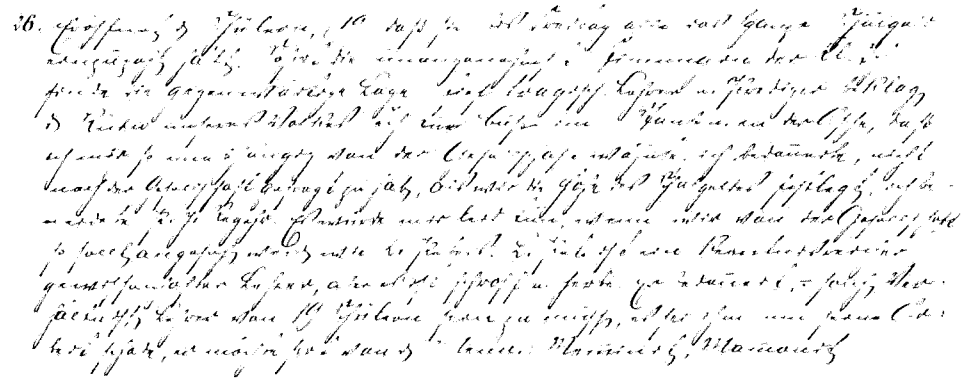
Late in September instruction began with only 19 students, and amidst much acrimony. Peters decided that the school could only operate if the students paid the entire tuition immediately. The dispute over the level and time of payment of the tuition fees was exacerbated by Peters' harsh and abrasive personality. A very unpleasant atmosphere prevailed. Peters was undoubtedly a competent and dedicated teacher, but he antagonized many in the community with his handling of the crisis. That unpleasantness also coloured relations among the teachers, and finally led to a sharp quarrel between Peters and Isaak P. Regehr when Peters verbally attacked his colleagues for coming into the teachers' room with mud on their shoes. Everyone in the school was very irritable, making a bad situation worse.[21]

The teachers learned a difficult lesson in 1922. Tuition fees were henceforth collected as parents could afford to pay them, and many parents were allowed to discharge the obligations by assisting in other ways. This helped to increase



Isaak I. Regehr (1892-1983) as a student of the fifth class at the Alexanderkrone Kommerzschule.

enrollment, which rose to 70 students the following year, but it also necessitated some very unconventional arrangements within the school. The fourth class was again offered, but it was not possible to pay a fourth teacher. The resulting arrangements were certainly cumbersome. For the first half of each week the third and fourth classes occupied the same room and were taught by the same teacher. During the second half of each week these two classes each had their own teacher, but the first and second classes were thrown together. In this way the three teachers taught four classes, but the overall atmosphere was very much



Isaak I. Regehr diary entry for 26 September 1922, marking one of the lowest points in the history of the Alexanderkrone school.
"Opened the school with 19 students who were told that they had to pay their entire tuition fees by next Friday. Immediately a most unpleasant atmosphere became evident. I find the entire situation very tragic. The teachers and preachers lament the attitudes of our people. I repent in sackcloth and ashes that we did not pay greater attention to the feelings of our people when we established the tuition fees. I envied P.J. Regehr [a colleague and cousin who was informed that his services as a teacher were no longer required due to the low enrollment]. I would be sorry if we should be regarded by society in the same way as teacher Peters. Peters is a competent and conscientious teacher, but he is too harsh and abrasive. He resents being a teacher of only 19 students under such circumstances. He resents the work he has to do. . . ."

more positive. One student later wrote that that year marked the high point of his life.[22]

During the winter of 1923-24 the school was desperately short of coal or wood for heating purposes. Gerhard Peters solved this problem in a very unique fashion. Students, reinforced by other singers from the villages of Kleefeld, Alexanderkrone and Lichtfelde, rehearsed the melodrama "Columbus." It was to be performed with piano accompaniment by Gerhard Peters who was an accomplished pianist. People were invited to the performance, but instead of buying tickets, which few could afford, the people were encouraged to bring an armful of wood to gain admittance. The response was overwhelming, and a second performance had to be scheduled to accommodate all the people. As a result, the school had sufficient wood for the whole winter.[23]

Even this happy resolution of a pressing problem had an unpleasant repercussion. Much of the wood thus gathered was wet or rotten, and only burned poorly and unevenly. It was the responsibility of a very poorly paid caretaker, who lived in dismal conditions in the basement of the school and had become a very active communist, to light the fire in the stove each morning. In setting the fire with wet or rotten wood, great care had to be taken. One morning Peters arrived at the school to find it cold, and went to stoke the sputtering fire which had been carefully set by the caretaker. Peters' efforts caused the fire to go out, greatly upsetting the caretaker who slapped Peters in the presence of some students. This indignity so angered Peters that he decided to file an official complaint with the local Soviet authorities.It was only with very great difficulty that Henry Kornelsen, a former student and in 1924 the person in charge of distributing the aid sent by North American Mennonites, was able to dissuade Peters from formally pressing charges against the communist caretaker.[24]

The choir, officially named the Haydn Choir, was nevertheless a great success. It continued in existence the next year, even though Gerhard Peters emigrated to Canada in 1924. The director of the choir in 1924-25 was Jacob I. Regehr. It rehearsed and then performed the "Spring" movement of Haydn's "The Seasons." The economic circumstances of the school had, however, improved sufficiently by that time that the proceeds from ticket sales for the performance were designated for the benefit of the Mennonite School for the Deaf and Dumb *(Taubstummenschule)* in Tiege.[25]

There were slight economic improvements after 1922, particularly after the announcement of the Soviet government's New Economic Policy (NEP). This led to the departure of Daniel Enns, who was offered a position at the Gnadenfeld Handelsschule where he was to introduce new agricultural training courses. That position, however, proved disappointing and Enns left for Canada in 1924.

Gerhard Peters also emigrated in 1924, but the financial situation at the school had been stabilized. In the 1924-25 school year the tuition was 10 *pud* (163.8 kg.) of wheat. The three teachers that year received 130 *pud* (2,129.4 kg.) of wheat and 43.40 rubles for their services. Some parents, however, paid the tuition fees for their children in commodities or services other than wheat. John Dick of Lichtfelde, for example, hauled several loads of coal in payment of the fees for his daughter Mary. Another father dug new latrines or toilets in lieu of

payment of tuition fees.[26]

In the early 1920s, political terror and economic disasters were uppermost in the minds of the people of Alexanderkrone, and of the teachers at their school. The new educational proposals and reforms formulated in Moscow and St. Petersburg were largely unknown and had little or no effect in Alexanderkrone before 1922. It was only after the proposed new curriculum, based on teaching by "complexes" rather than by subject matter, was officially approved that the Soviet authorities exerted greater pressure on the teachers at Alexanderkrone to conform to the new curriculum.

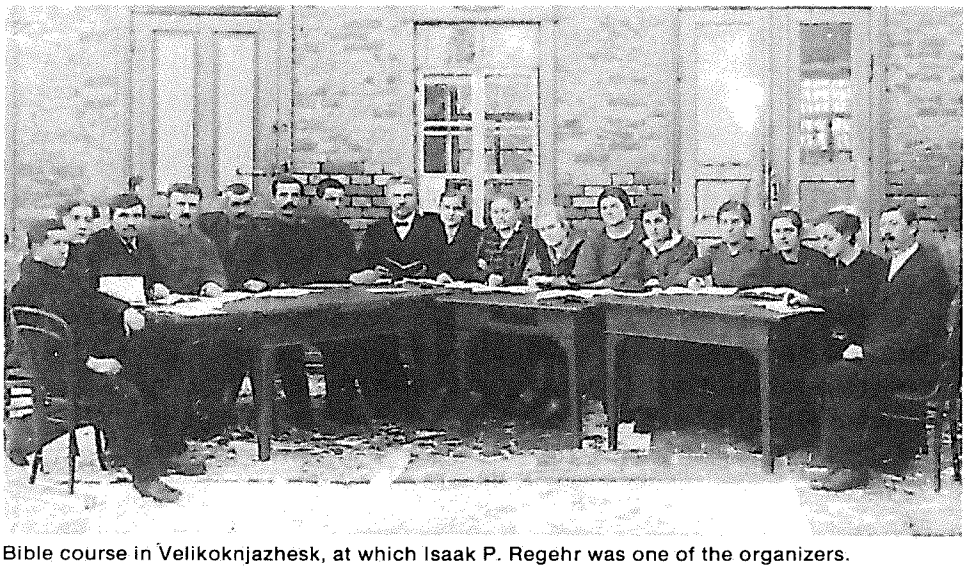
Several administrative and curriculum changes were made at Alexanderkrone with very little difficulty. The school was already co-educational, and the admission of more girls created no problems. Students of non-Mennonite background, and from non land-owning classes, had also been admitted before the revolution. The matter of official school uniforms had been effectively resolved by the economic crisis. There was such a widespread and desperate shortage of clothing of any kind in 1921 and 1922 that any formal dress code became ridiculous, and several former students still think economic rather than ideological considerations led to the abandonment of the school uniforms.[27]

The administrative and organizational arrangements whereby the school became a United Labour School *(Einheitliche Arbeitsschule)* were also made in 1922 without serious difficulties. Officially a seven-grade curriculum consistent with the curriculum of other Russian schools was adopted, but it was divided into two levels. The first four years were covered in the elementary village schools. The first class, sometimes officially listed as a preparatory class, of the former *Handelsschule* overlapped with the fourth class of the united or integrated elementary program. The second, third and fourth classes of the former *Handelsschule* became the fifth, sixth and seventh classes of the new integrated program. There were, however, no immediate or radical changes in the curriculum at the time when the school officially became an *Arbeitsschule,* and none of the teachers made any effort to combine or integrate productive physical labour with the specific material studied in the school. The students, of course, almost all came from a rural and agricultural background and were certainly familiar with productive physical labour, but it was not integrated into the official curriculum.

As a result, the change of name was not particularly difficult. The banning of all religious instruction in the schools, however, was a very much more serious matter. At first the teachers in the Alexanderkrone school simply ignored or slightly toned down the religious instruction. The demands of the government in this regard, however, became much more serious when, in 1923, Isaak P. Regehr was dismissed from his teaching position. Regehr himself adjusted rather easily to this turn of events. His first love and interest were preaching and Bible study, and after his dismissal he devoted himself entirely to that work. Specifically, he established what he called a travelling or itinerant Bible School. In a 1925 letter he reported that he had spent two days in each of Lichtfelde, Kleefeld, Alexanderkrone, Grossweide, Halbstadt, Rueckenau, Gnadenheim, Mariawohl, Landskrone and Gnadenfeld, and had engagements for further Bible studies in

Ministers' courses in the Molotschna in winter, 1925-26 with Isaak P. Regehr and H.J. Enns in charge.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives



Bible course in Velikoknjazhesk, at which Isaak P. Regehr was one of the organizers.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre

Lindenau, Tiege, Alexanderwohl, Neukirch and Rudnerweide. He reported that in each village the attendance at his Bible studies had been exceptionally good, with most meeting places filled to capacity. He also reported that there had been numerous conversions in the villages, but there is no reference to any conversions as a result of his Bible studies. There was great eagerness to hear and study the scriptures.[28]

The participants were asked to provide sufficient money or produce to help meet out-of-pocket costs and subsistence expenses for the teacher/preacher. That was certainly no way to become wealthy, but Isaak P. Regehr really did not need a large income at that time since the family was able to remain in the teacherage which they had occupied since 1906. This was possible because Isaak P. Regehr's oldest son, Isaak I. Regehr, continued to teach at the school, and the younger son, Jacob I. Regehr, was appointed after his father's dismissal.

The remaining teachers initially adopted a pragmatic attitude toward religious instruction in the school. They were content to leave such instruction to the churches and to itinerant Bible teachers, while eliminating all direct references to God and to religious matters in their instruction. The old Tsarist patriotic exercises, such as the singing of the national anthem, were replaced with prescribed new ones, including the singing of the *International* at offical programs and ceremonies.[29] Old school holidays also gave way to new ones, the most important of which was the celebration of Lenin's birthday on April 22.

The teachers were much less enthusiastic about the major curriculum changes prescribed by the authorities. Two important matters proved particularly troublesome. One had to do with the new methods they were expected to adopt; the other with content changes requiring them to become advocates of communism and atheism.

It is always hard to teach old teachers new methods. It was particularly hard to teach a rather rigid teacher like Gerhard Peters, who had eleven years of teaching experience, the mysteries and merits of the new method of teaching by complexes. Some Mennonite teachers adapted rather easily, a few even enthusiastically, to the new methods.[30] Gerhard Peters certainly did not, and his attitude affected the other teachers. As part of a personal campaign against the new methods, Peters composed and then circulated anonymously, a poem ridiculing the new methods. After his emigration to Canada he published the poem in at least three places.[31]

Die Komplexmethode

Komplexmethode soll uns führen!
Sie ist's, worin wir ganz verliebt.
Die Dummheit schnell zu liquidieren,
es keine andre Wege gibt.

Sie zeigt uns, wie aus einem Dinge
Erkenntnis strömet alsobald,

Sie schlägt um uns die Zauberringe
Mit ihrer Themen Allgewalt.

Will man, z.B., Rechnen lernen,
fang man getrost beim Ochsen an.
Vom Ochsen liegt die Zahl nicht ferne;
Zählt seine Bein', so ist's getan.

Wollt ihr nun auch noch gar addieren
der Ochse gibt euch Stoff genug:
Zwei Hörner und zwei Aug' sind viere,
hierin liegt sicher kein Betrug.

Vom Ochsen kann man abstrahlieren
jedwedes Wissen auf der Welt
Kann sprechen lernen, deklinieren,
ja, tun, was einem wohlgefällt.

Nicht nur Physik und Sternenkunde,
Chemie, Botanik, Zoologie
basieren auf dem Ochsengrunde,
nein, auch noch Reflexologie.

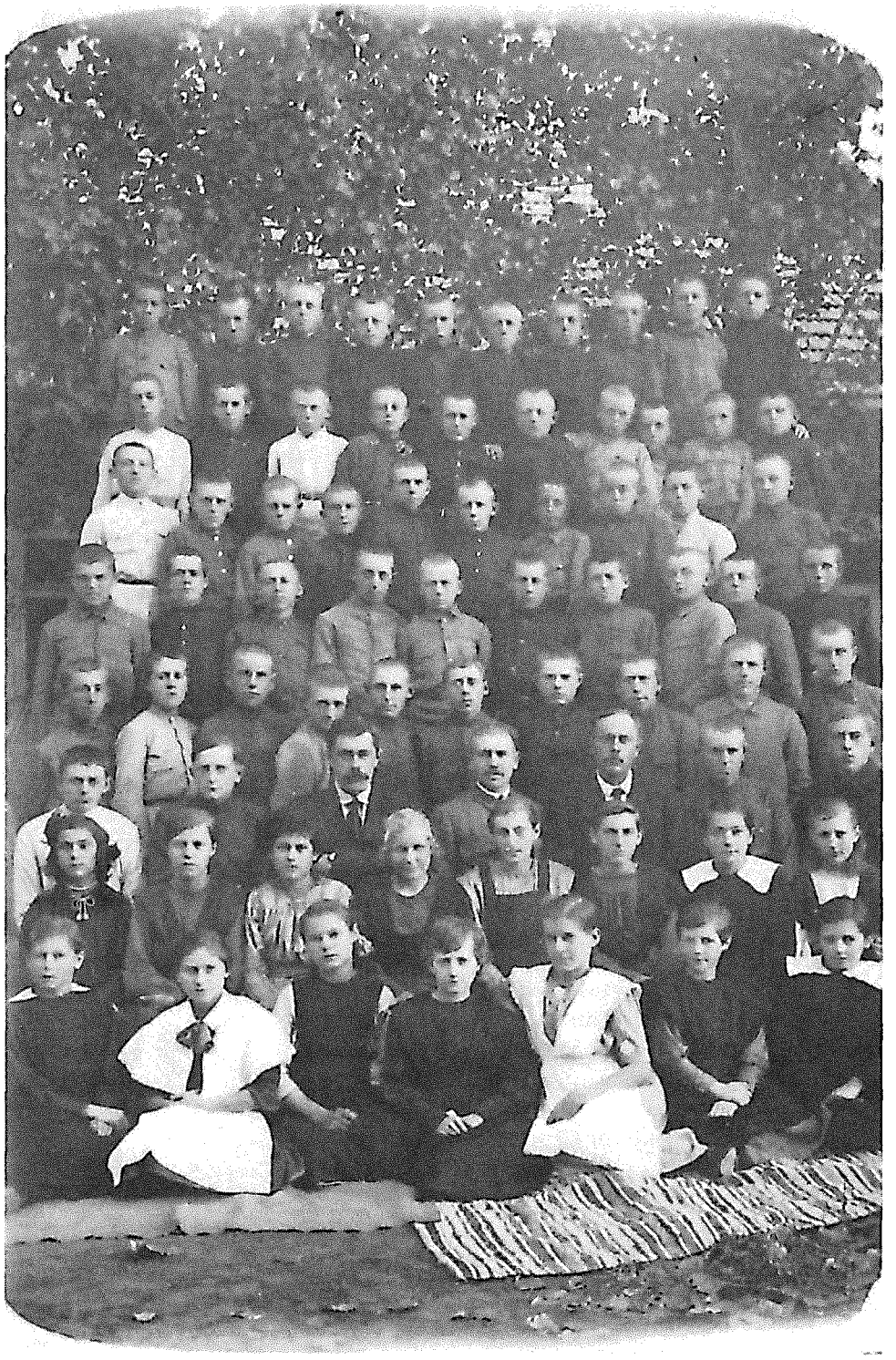
Es ist im großen Ochsenleibe
von einer Seele keine Spur.
Drum, was nun auch der Ochse treibe,
Reiz und Reflex ist alles nur.

Seht nur, wenn ihn, den Ochsen, Fliegen
umschwärmen, stechen, Schmerz verleihn;
der Reiz läßt keinen Ochsen liegen
vom Hirn zieht's in den Schwanz hinein.

Und dieser schlägt nach allen Seiten.
Dies nennt Reflex man, anders nie.
So lerne man vom Ochs beizeiten
die Psycho-Reflexologie.

Wollt ihr Geselligkeit studieren,
so schaut die Ochsen auf der Flur.
Man sieht bei diesen sanften Tieren
von Zank und Streit auch nicht die Spur.

Sie nie nach hohen Zielen streben.
Stumm wiederkauen sie ihr Kraut.
Sie haben ja ihr Ochsenleben
dem Ochsenhirten anvertraut.



Students and teachers of the Alexanderkrone Arbeitsschule, 1924.

Students and teachers of the Alexanderkrone Arbeitsschule, 1925.

Many teachers would probably have been much less hostile to the *Komplexmethode* if they had been given clear guidance and instructions and necessary supporting materials. None of that was provided. Instead, confusing and often seemingly contradictory instructions without necessary teaching aids, led to much grumbling and complaining.

This resistance to new teaching methods was greatly reinforced by religious concerns about the new curriculum. Peters, like most other teachers, was required to attend special retraining conferences. After attending one of these conferences he emphatically informed his brother that it had become absolutely clear to him that he could not meet the new demands, and that it was simply a matter of time before he would leave the school.[32] In another article a little later Peters explained exactly what so offended him. The teachers conference had dealt with two matters which he described as *Komplexmethode* and *Reflexologie*. He despised the first, but found the second even more offensive. It was based on the notion that human beings had no soul, and that all their actions and reactions were merely reflexes. The essential message seemed to be that people should do what comes naturally. It contradicted, in an absolutely fundamental way, Peters' own views of life and religion, and he was determined never to teach reflexology.[33]

This conference was a difficult experience for Peters, but there were many other, often much more useful local conferences where old and long-accepted practices remained. Teachers would give a model lesson, and this would then be reviewed and evaluated by the others present. Such conferences were greatly appreciated by the teachers, and the minutes of several which were held at Alexanderkrone reflect a far more optimistic mood than Peters' reactions to Soviet-sponsored teachers' conferences. These special teachers' conferences

Students and teachers of the Alexanderkrone Arbeitsschule, 1926.

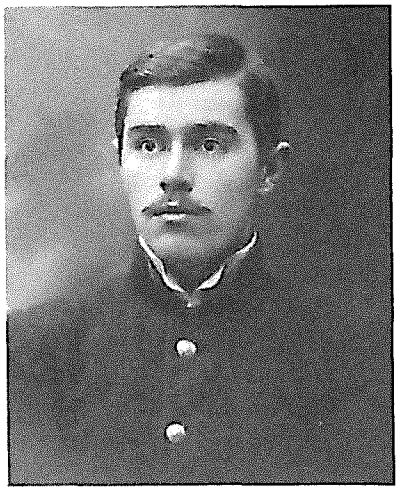
also demonstrated great professional concern amongst the teachers that they discharge their responsibilities in the most effective and professional ways possible. The demonstration classes were the regular school classes, the important difference being that a number of outside teachers were present and later gave the teacher a detailed critique of his performance. The organization of the material, the clarity of the presentation, the use of illustrative materials, the attitude and attentiveness of the students, and the relevance of questions asked and answered were all carefully evaluated and recorded in the minutes of these conferences. Judging from those minutes, the Alexanderkrone teachers earned entirely satisfactory reviews.[34]

In the mid-1920s many Russian Mennonite teachers were uncertain about the future directions of education in that country. Under the New Economic Policy (NEP) it seemed that a fairly sensible economic strategy would soon replace

Excerpt from the program for a literary evening held on 18 and 19 December 1924 at the Alexanderkrone Arbeitsschule.

much of the more impractical revolutionary rhetoric, and many saw evidence of similar trends in the educational field. Lenin and Krupskaya (his wife) were, after all, known to be fairly pragmatic in matters of education.

When Gerhard Peters left Alexanderkrone in 1924 his colleague, Isaak I. Regehr, was firmly convinced that Peters was unduly pessimistic and made it very clear that he would stay, even if all the others decided to emigrate. His great appreciation for, and love of, Russian classical literature, liturgical music, and many other aspects of Russian culture, and his wartime experiences while



Jacob I. Regehr

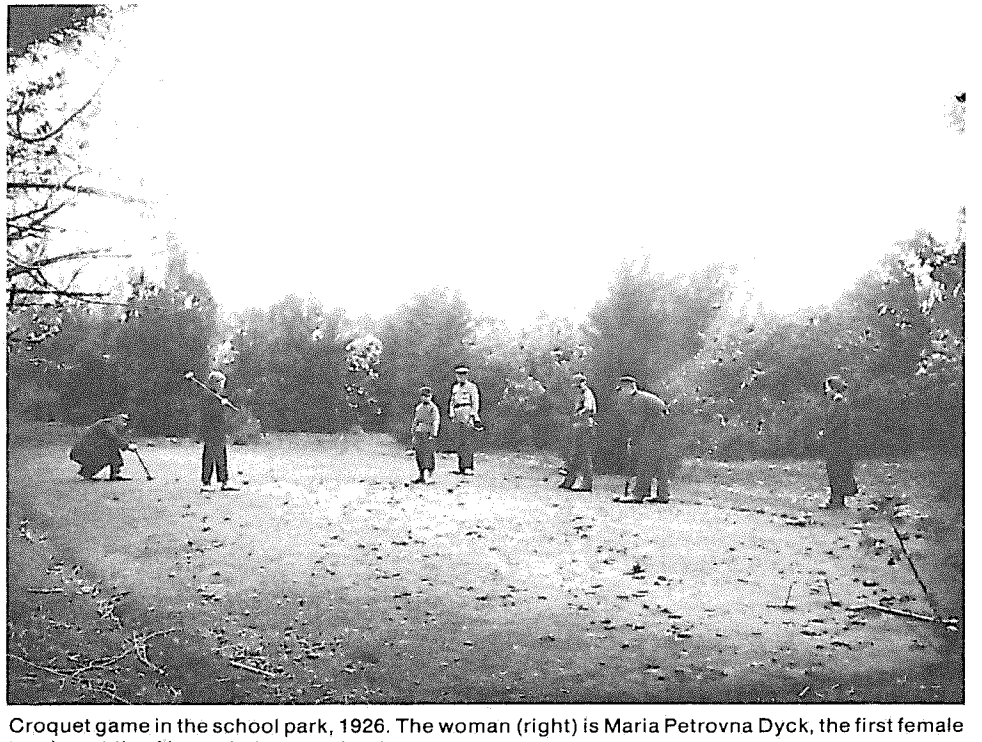
serving in the headquarters of the Russian Red Cross, had made Russia his emotional, cultural and intellectual fatherland. He was convinced that the excesses of the new government's reforms would soon be modified, quoting the old German proverb that a broth is never eaten as hot as it is cooked.

Jacob I. Regehr had more serious reservations about the new regime and began to make inquiries about emigration. An older married sister and her family did emigrate in 1925. A serious family problem, however, made emigration for the family of Isaak P. Regehr difficult if not impossible. Tina, an unmarried sister to Isaak and Jacob and also a teacher, had contracted tuberculosis. She would probably not be admitted by the Canadian authorities. Thus it happened that the older sister and her family left, and during the 1925-26 school year Jacob also emigrated, but the rest of the family decided to remain.

Three significant events in 1926 radically altered the situation. The first was that Isaak P. Regehr decided to apply for emigration, just in case things got worse rather than better. He did so on behalf of all family members still in Russia. The next step was to have everyone examined by a visiting Canadian doctor. Following that medical examination Isaak I. Regehr expressed disappointment when all family members, including Tina, were cleared for emigration. He noted in his diary that he was ashamed to be numbered among the emigrants and had no desire at all to leave.[35]

The second important event of 1926 was the compulsory attendance by Isaak I. Regehr at a two-week political and pedagogical orientation course in Ohrloff immediately after the end of the school term in the spring of 1926. This course radically altered his assessment of his future prospects in Russia. In a lengthy and agonized diary entry of 1 July 1926, he carefully reviewed what he considered to be the obligations of a teacher. His assessment differed somewhat from that of Gerhard Peters. He had been willing to avoid overt religious teaching, but was not willing to become an active propagandist of communism and atheism.[36] The Soviet authorities had, however, made it absolutely clear that he would only be allowed to continue as a teacher if, in fact, he actively supported their cause.

The Regehr residence, ca. 1926.



Croquet game in the school park, 1926. The woman (right) is Maria Petrovna Dyck, the first female teacher at the Alexanderkrone school.

Members of the Regehr family in front of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, ca. 1926.

Thereafter he became much more enthusiastic regarding emigration.

The third event of 1926 was the death of Tina Regehr. Although Tina had passed the Canadian medical examinations, family members knew that she was seriously ill, and that there were further medical examinations which she would probably not pass. That was certainly a serious impediment to all emigration plans, but it was entirely removed after Tina's death.

The final departure of the remaining members of the Regehr family was unexpectedly fast. Another teacher and family friend, J.J. Thiessen, was a leader for a group of emigrants. One family in this group was unable to go because of health problems, and Thiessen asked Isaak P. Regehr if they wanted to go in the place of this family.[37] The Regehr family and with it the last of the teachers with a long-term involvment in the Alexanderkrone school, left the village on 31 August 1926. With their departure an important period in the history of the Alexanderkrone school came to an end.

Chapter VII
In the Shadows of Stalinism, 1927-1937

The departure of the last of the former long-term teachers at the Alexanderkrone school ushered in a new and different era. The Soviet authorities had made it very clear that they would not permit the teaching of religion in their schools. But they had moved rather slowly in removing teachers of religion. In the case of the Alexanderkrone school, Isaak P. Regehr continued to teach at the school until early in 1923. His sons and their colleagues before 1926 had reluctantly accepted the fact that they could not teach or exert overt religious influence on their students. References to and pictures of the Tsar or biblical subjects were carefully torn out of the textbooks or otherwise obliterated. Religious instruction simply moved from the school to the church and home.

The Soviet authorities also made it very clear to the teachers that mere silence in religious matters was not satisfactory. Teachers were very explicitly told that they must become active and persuasive agents of communism and atheism. This the older teachers were not prepared to do and, as already indicated, all the long-term teachers at the Alexanderkrone school left the school and emigrated to Canada in the mid-1920s.

The emigration movement of the 1920s did not make matters any easier for the remaining teachers.[1] Approximately one-fifth of the Russian Mennonites emigrated, but it is generally accepted that a very much larger proportion of the preachers, teachers and community leaders left. As a result, those that remained faced a serious leadership problem at just the time when they were being subjected to renewed demands by the government. In the Molotschna settlement it was reported that at least 26 Mennonite teachers emigrated in the year 1925 alone, and many others left the profession to seek other work.[2]

At Alexanderkrone the departing teachers were initially replaced by other teachers of Mennonite background. Two Mennonite teachers who had joined the teaching staff in 1924 and 1925 remained at the school until 1931 and 1930 respectively. One was David P. Wiens, a native of Kleefeld and a graduate of Dorpat University who joined the staff and also served as the school's principal. He was a competent and highly respected teacher and was well aware of what would be required of him if he stayed. The second new teacher was Maria Petrovna Dick, the school's first female teacher.[3] They were joined in 1926 by Johann H. Unruh and Cornelius Lepp. These four teachers, however, no longer had any real choice — they had to promote and propagate communism, atheism and loyalty to the Soviet state.[4] According to one former Russian Mennonite teacher, they eventually had to believe what had seemed unbelievable. No duality, no resistance, and no qualified support was sufficient. Despite the fact that many regarded the new Soviet school as the antithesis of the former

Mennonite schools, they had to make their schools a cornerstone of Bolshevism and communism.[5]

The pace and even the means whereby these changes were effected varied considerably in the different Mennonite schools. At Alexanderkrone those teachers unwilling to conform to the new requirements emigrated, while in the Chortitza Zentralschule they were simply dismissed in the spring of 1927 in what one of those teachers sarcastically called "the great cleansing."[6]

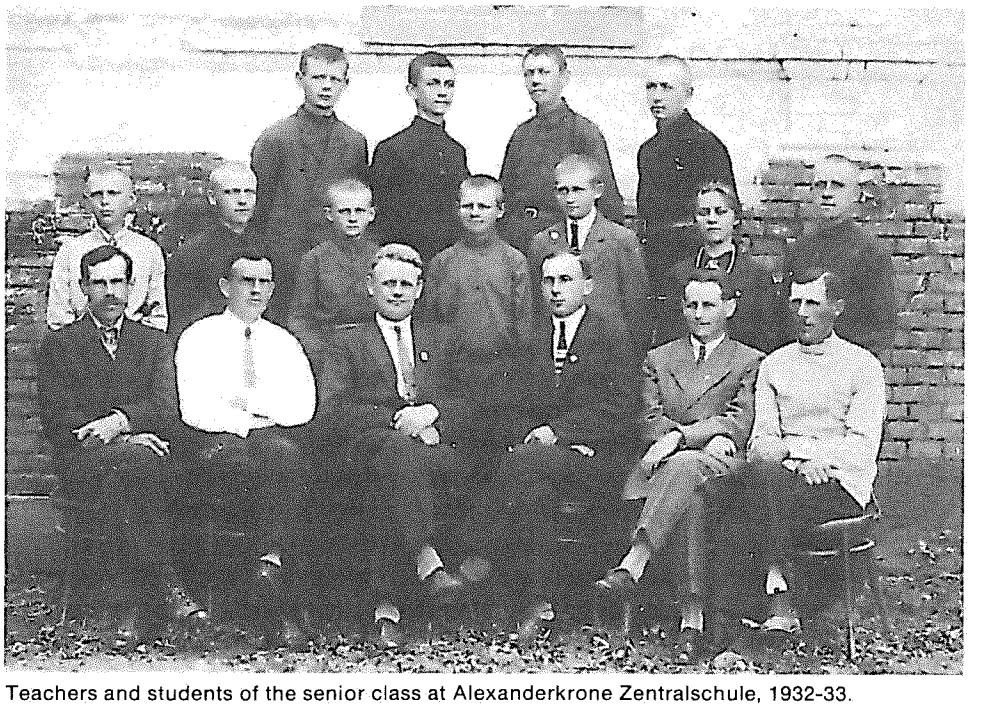
Four specific practices of the Soviet authorities were particularly effective in forcing the teachers to do the will of government authorities. There were, first of all, special retraining and reorientation conferences to which first the principals, and then all the teachers were "invited." At these conferences the new methods and objectives of the curriculum were carefully and forcefully explained. These conferences were usually held in a host school, or in some fairly attractive resort location. All expenses were covered by the government, and the principals and teachers were generally treated with dignity and respect, as serious deliberations and workshops were undertaken. The new demands of the government were also spelled out very clearly, as both Gerhard Peters and Isaak I. Regehr were dismayed to discover when they attended such orientation conferences in 1924 and 1926 respectively. At these conferences, moreover, teachers were carefully observed and any tacit or overt resistance to the new programs was noted. An older teacher from Chortitza, for example, complained:

> The *Komplexsystem!* No one knows what it is, but everyone is guided by it. . . . Nobody knows it, but lengthy reports are prepared and delivered.[7]

Not all Mennonite teachers in Russia took such a negative view of the new developments, but opposition was widespread. The Soviet authorities were well aware of this and, once firmly in control, became very skillful in increasing the pressure on the teachers.

An easy and natural second step after the retraining and reorientation classes and conferences was the requirement that all teachers write new qualifying examinations. Continued employment depended on success in these examinations. The examinations were an obvious device to screen out undesirable or uncooperative teachers. Personal agreement and compliance with the official objectives of the new curriculum, rather than scholarship or knowledge of their subject of instruction, were required to pass the examinations. One teacher who failed the examination complained that he was told time and time again by the examiners that they were not interested in the findings of scholars. They wanted to know what he thought and believed about God, about religion, and about political and economic conditions in Russia. It was, he said, a merciless pummeling of the soul ("ein schonungsloses Kneten auf der Seele").[8] In some cases not only individual teachers, but the entire staff from suspect schools, failed the examination. That happened to the teachers of the Ohrloff Zentralschule, and for a time it seemed that all instruction at that school would have to be suspended due to the lack of qualified, or, more accurately, requalified teachers.

The third very effective method whereby teachers could be forced to do the



Teachers and students of the senior class at Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, 1932-33.

bidding of the government was the establishment of communist organizations for children and young people.[9] It became the responsibility of each principal and each teacher to establish appropriate organizations in his or her school. These communist youth organizations, working in close cooperation with political teachers, assumed responsibility for many aspects of governance and discipline in the schools. They also became very dangerous watchdogs who could and did report teachers who did not advocate communism and atheism with sufficient vigour and conviction.[10] One writer concluded pessimistically that the real, and indeed the only, obligation of the teacher was to ensure that each and every one of his students left the school a committed communist and atheist. His employment, his freedom, his bodily welfare, even his life were at stake if any pupils left the school without strong commitment to the new ideology.[11] Another wrote that, just as the old Mennonite schools had been designed as a cornerstone for the preservation of Mennonitism, so the new schools became the cornerstone for Bolshevism and communism.[12]

The fourth, and probably the most effective device to force the sovietization of Mennonite schools and Mennonite teachers was the appointment of trusted party members to the staff of the school. Sometimes referred to as the *politruk,* a trusted communist teacher especially appointed for the purpose could observe and report on anything and everything that went on in the school. The early attempts by the Soviets to use trusted party members in this way was not particularly successful. At the pedagogical institute *(Pädtechnikum)* of the Chortitza Zentralschule, for example, a *politruk* was first appointed in 1920, but his overt and forceful methods antagonized most of the students and teachers. At

Heinrich Ivanovich Rempel

that time the *politruk* was more of a communistic and atheistic propagandist intent on converting at least a few students who would then form the local pioneer or *komsomol* group.[13]

This was too blatant, particularly since this particular *politruk* was regarded as pedagogically incompetent, and the Chortitza experiment was not repeated at Alexanderkrone. There no teacher was officially appointed as the *politruk* in the 1920s. In the 1930s, however, a more effective means of political surveillance was established.

Increasing professional and political pressure certainly made it very difficult for many teachers who were not strongly committed to the new regime to do and teach what they did not believe. What made it even worse was the fact that many of the parents still looked to respected Mennonite teachers, such as the highly moralistic Heinrich Ivanovich Rempel, teacher at the Alexanderkrone school in the 1930s, for the guidance and instruction of their children in the old way. Parental and Mennonite community expectations and their own very strong inclinations and beliefs pulled the Mennonite teachers in one direction, while official Soviet educational policy relentlessly forced them in the opposite direction.[14] Many teachers reportedly would have gladly given up their positions if any other means of employment had been available.

The changes in the schools did not all occur at once, but the pressure was relentless. It was, however, a sign of the times and a demonstration of the success of the sovietization process that, in 1929, any observance of the Christmas, Easter and Ascension Day celebrations was banned.[15] Even in the Mennonite schools the children had to go to school on Christmas Day, and many were questioned very closely whether their families had held any kind of private and secret Christmas celebrations at home. Particular efforts were made to root out the old practice of having children learn and recite Christian verses for parents and grandparents, and some parents had reason to regret the honest answers of their young children. The entire situation was fraught with very great personal anguish and much soul searching for teachers and students alike.

At much the same time two larger-than-life, floor-to-ceiling, portraits of Marx and Engels made their appearance in the school, one on each side of the spacious school foyer. Thus the last vestiges of overt resistance to Soviet demands were removed. The teachers did and taught as they were told. Resistance, at best, was futile and, at worst, dangerous professionally and physically.

Acquiescence was facilitated by the development and publication of the new curriculum which followed the new and approved methods and objectives. The necessary curriculum guides, textbooks and supportive materials for use in German schools became generally available and mandatory in 1929 after years of preparation.[16]

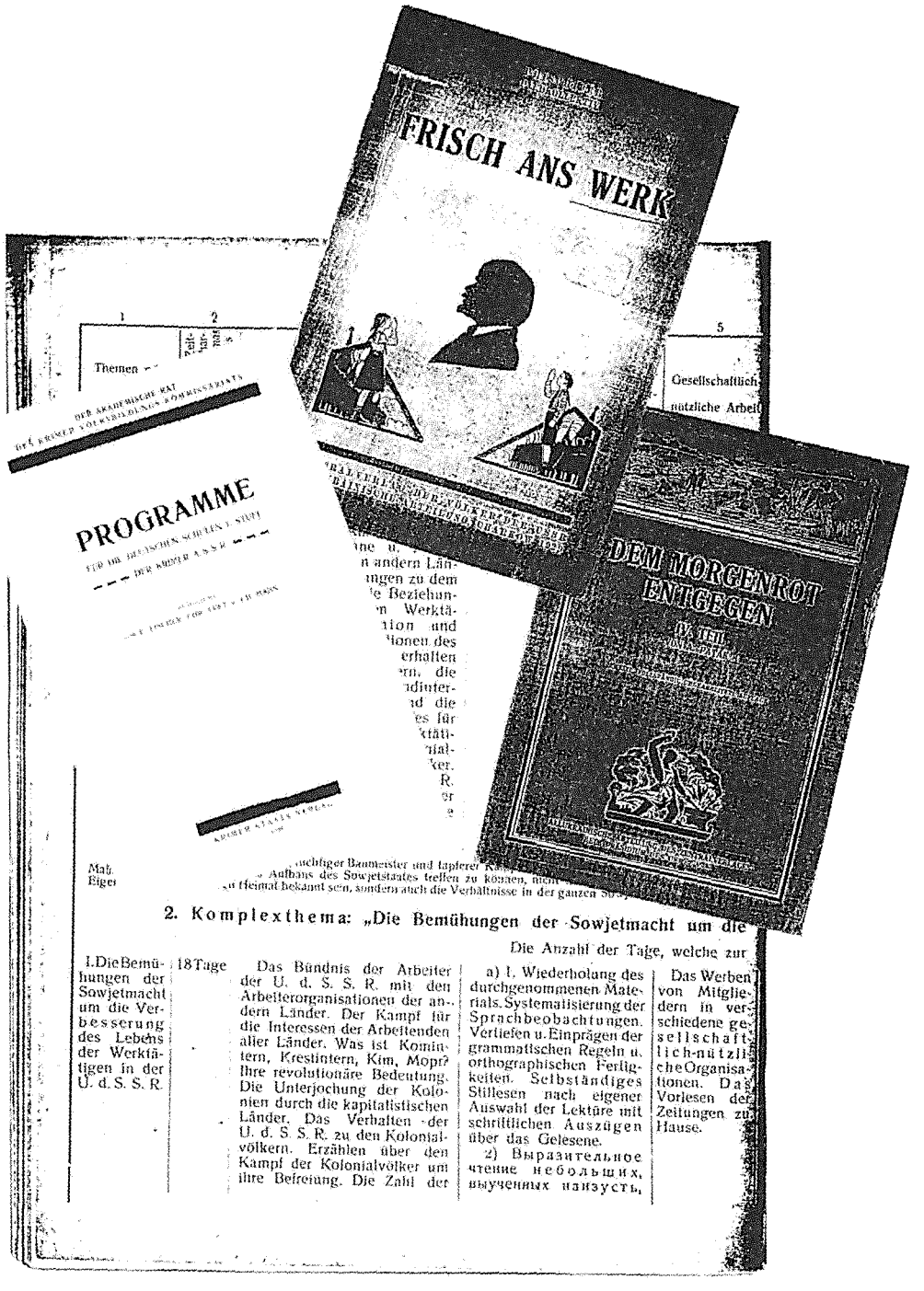
It was one of the strengths of the new curriculum that it permitted very considerable local adaptation and choice of specific subjects to be studied. The central themes were certainly given, but beyond that the program allowed sufficient choice so that teachers could avoid many of the things they found most offensive, provided they did so in a way which did not attract political attention. The availability of an approved curriculum also removed much of the uncertainty, and allowed the teachers to develop more consistent teaching patterns. The basic objectives of Soviet education were and remained well-defined, but after 1929 there were at least some fixed points of reference.

It is ironic, however, that the publication of the approved new curriculum for German schools utilizing the complex method coincided with fundamental shifts in the official educational philosophies of the Soviet government. Commissar Lunacharsky was replaced by A. S. Bubov as head of *Narkompros* in 1929 and new educational policies consistent with the new five-year plan announced in 1928 were introduced.[17]

The years after 1929 were not years of tranquility and progress, but teachers, students and parents in Alexanderkrone and in all the other German-speaking settlements of Ukraine soon had other more serious concerns than those pertaining to the educational system. Joseph Stalin had established himself as undisputed master of the Soviet Union, and soon made his presence and policies felt throughout the land.

The character and objectives of Stalin's policies became clear very quickly, and wrought great hardship and tragedy. Complete collectivization of agriculture and the establishment of collective farms *(kolkhozes)* had always been an important part of communist ideology, but relatively little had been done to implement a comprehensive policy of collectivization before 1928. It was certainly true that the owners of large tracts of land, including many Mennonites, had been dispossessed of most of that land which had then become property of the *artel* formed by the landless local peasantry. True collectivization, however, proceeded only very slowly, and by mid-1928 less than two percent of rural peasant households in Ukraine belonged to *kolkhozes.* Those *kolkhozes* which had been established by that date, moreover, were "not really collective farms at all but merely associations for joint tillage, ploughing, harvesting and sharing the proceeds."[18]

Stalin and his officals were determined to change all this. They were willing to resort to extreme measures where necessary to implement complete collectivi-



Title pages and contents of several books which were used to teach the new curriculum at the Alexanderkrone school.

zation. The results were absolutely tragic and disastrous for the Mennonites and for most of the rural population in Ukraine and resulted in the deaths of an estimated 6,000,000 people.[19] Cruelty, ideological fanaticism, and administrative incompetence,[20] and perhaps even genocide, were the hallmarks of this tragic campaign to collectivize Ukrainian agriculture.[21]

Aggressive collectivization proceedings in Alexanderkrone began during the winter of 1930-31. The first step in the process was the systematic denunciation of the former owners of large or full farms *(Vollwirtschaften)* known as *kulaks.* They were members of the exploiting classes who had held poor workers under their fist. Persons denounced in this way were almost always expelled from their homes and communities. Most of the land formerly owned by these farmers had been taken earlier. Now the proletarians moved into their vacated homes and became the first collective farm members, while the denounced *kulaks* were either sent into exile or simply deprived of any means of livelihood and all rights of citizenship. Many were driven out onto the open steppes south of Alexanderkrone without money or building materials.[22] The official policy was to liquidate or destroy these people.

A year later, in 1931-32, the remaining former private farmers with smaller holdings *(Kleinwirte)* had their houses and property collectivized. It was, however, believed that these people might be retrained and thus become members of the new collective farms.

More or less coincident with the establishment of the *kolkhoz,* all the churches were ordered closed. The preachers and elders were arrested and exiled, as were any remaining members of the local intelligentsia. Many of the former churches were used as clubs or social centres for the local *komsomol,* but some also served as machinery sheds, and at least one was converted into a pig barn. The Alexanderkrone Mennonite Church, however, was converted into a school to accommodate the elementary grades, while several of the larger farmstead houses were converted into dormitories for students of the *Zentralschule.*

Despite the desperate and tragic consequences of rural collectivization and dekulakization, many of the students at the Alexanderkrone school harboured very mixed feelings about their school. One of those students described these attitudes thus:

> Our age group witnessed in childhood and youth such dramatic changes, the most horrendous conflicts and also the most remarkable changes in technology of human history, the development of human knowledge and other achievements, that almost fill our hearts with pride. If one could ever wipe away the terrible pain that the period of changeover inflicted upon our Mennonite people and just observe the happenings from far away, one could almost find it most interesting.[23]

Collectivization and desperate famine conditions throughout Ukraine in the early 1930s coincided at the Alexanderkrone school with major changes in the administrative and teaching staff of the school. No *politruk* had been officially

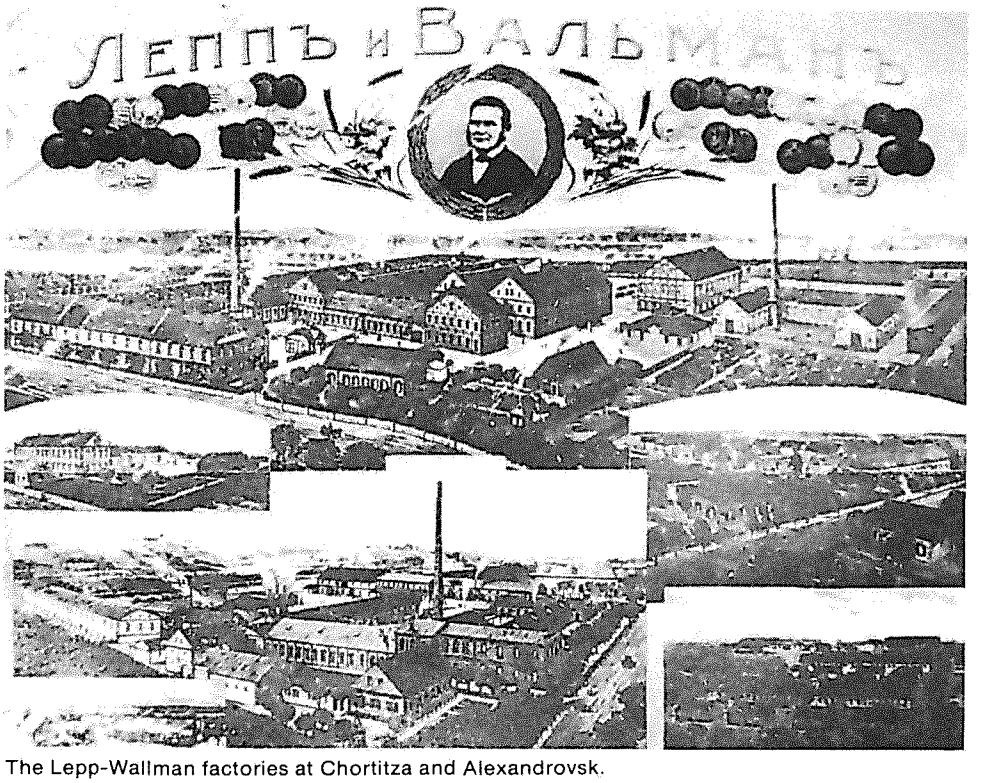
appointed in the 1920s, but several former students firmly believe that one teacher of Mennonite background served unofficially but very effectively in that capacity in the 1930s prior to a major reorganization of 1938. There is no official documentation to prove or disprove that suspicion, but after 1931 there were certainly teachers at the Alexanderkrone school, including some of Mennonite background, who were committed communists. In the political circumstances of the 1930s that often meant denunciations and rabid doctrinaire stances. Teachers who accepted all or some of the offical ideology could easily get caught up in the system, and it is a fact that denunciations of Mennonite *kulaks* and ministers often came from within the community. Cooperation with and even committed support of the system did not, however, ensure safety or security. Numerous teachers who served officially or unofficially as *politruks* were themselves later denounced and sent into exile.

The motives of teachers who served as official or unofficial *politruks* could vary greatly. Some were committed communists who did not know, or chose to ignore, the worst features of the system. Others sought professional advancement through cooperation, while still others probably acted out of fear or perhaps wanted to avenge some personal grievance. At Alexanderkrone, for example, several reassignments were due to personal and sexual irregularities and the resulting strife caused by the wives of some of the teachers.[24] Political and economic denunciations were, however, much more common, and much of the investigative work leading to or supporting such allegations at the Alexanderkrone school were internal.

In the 1930s at least twelve teachers fell victim to such political terror and were involuntarily reassigned or exiled. Only three of these, however, were arrested in the middle of the school term.[25] The others were replaced, reassigned, or they simply disappeared. Only later the students would hear that they had been exiled.

Each of these cases is a unique tragedy, but the fate of Ivan Ivanovich Dick is illustrative of the process. Dick had come to Alexanderkrone in the early 1930s, but was arrested in 1933 or 1934. He was imprisoned for several months, but reportedly defended himself well before the court which heard his case and was released, subject to the provision that he report regularly to the political authorities. That reporting procedure itself was fraught with terror. He had to go at night to the small bridge over Juschanlee Creek, and there meet a local police official, ever mindful of but never sure of what grave dangers might lurk in the dark or whether he would be allowed to return home. He was officially arrested a second time in 1935, but was again released by the court. While in prison he had, however, been treated so badly that he was, in many respects, a changed and broken man. He knew that Alexanderkrone had become too dangerous for him and went to Orenburg. There he was arrested a third time in 1938, and this time he was exiled to a northern labour or concentration camp. Unlike many others, his family received an official letter in 1939 informing them that their husband and father had been sent north. They never heard from him again.[26] This was by no means an isolated incident.

The political pressure at Alexanderkrone eventually became so great that a



The Lepp-Wallman factories at Chortitza and Alexandrovsk.

Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

number of students availed themselves of the opportunity, when it was offered, to renounce their parents. What this meant was that children need not suffer for the sins, failings, wealth, or political errors of their parents or other family members if they formally separated themselves from their family. The principal of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule at that time was Heinrich Wallman, whose family had been partners in the Wallmann and Lepp agricultural implement manufacturing company. Heinrich Wallman reportedly persuaded several Mennonite students to renounce parents who had either been prosperous farmers or preachers.[27] Even the willingness to give and act on such advice, however, did not save Heinrich Wallman himself from arrest, exile and death.

Students were also very strongly encouraged to be vigilant and to report any inappropriate behaviour. At a time when many were facing starvation, and all were in a state of fear and terror, a little bit of food or some recognition or preferment was often sufficient to persuade a student to turn on his or her peers. Many of those who yielded under those extreme pressures later suffered great spiritual anguish. The brutal and systematic destruction of an entire class of people and of a cherished way of life forced those who were desperately trying to survive into impossible situations.

Rural collectivization and the destruction of all those who might oppose his policies was, however, only a part of Joseph Stalin's grand design for his country. The other major component was a massive drive to modernize and industrialize

the Soviet economy. Stalin clearly recognized that the Soviet Union had powerful enemies, against whom a backward, rurally based agricultural economy could be no match. He was, therefore, determined to modernize and industrialize the Soviet economy. But to do this he needed appropriately trained and educated people. The Soviet educational system as it had evolved by 1929 was not producing enough competently educated specialists. The wild theories and extravagant claims of the superiority of Soviet educational methods had not produced the educated people needed to support rapid industrialization.

This led to a surprising and radical change in the educational policies and methods — a change that some Soviet and western historians have described as "the great retreat." Idealistic concepts of equality, and the insistence that the children of the oppressed classes must be given not only preference, but often control of the educational system, were not producing the administrators and professionals which Stalin needed to implement his economic policies. The knowledge of general concepts without adequate care for specific and detailed requirements, for example, simply did not produce reliable engineers whose bridges or hydro-plants would operate as required. And so the educational clock was, in effect, put back. Academic performance, brilliance and excellence, rather than development of the economic and social class or the political orthodoxy of the students, once again assumed greater importance. The old notion that all students and teachers must devote a very substantial portion of their time to manual labour was entirely abandoned. Industrialization required a new educated elite in the Soviet Union. Symptomatic of these changes was the change of name of the Alexanderkrone Arbeitsschule, which once again became a *Zentralschule.* This change of name came quite gradually, and there was apparently no official announcement of it. What is quite clear is that in 1929, when the official new curriculum materials in the German language were first published, the school was still an *Arbeitsschule,* but early in 1933, when collectivization and the formal establishment of the *kolkhoz* were completed, it was again a *Zentralschule.*

Accompanying the name change were numerous fundamental curriculum changes. Even Mennonite teachers hostile to the Soviet educational system readily admitted that the educational changes instituted after 1932 substantially raised academic standards in Soviet schools.[28]

There was, however, one important point on which the Stalinist schools did not return to the old system. Religion and religious instruction were not tolerated. Aggressive procommunist and antireligious biases remained. This continued to create serious personal conflict for many Mennonite parents and students. The parents certainly did not want their children to grow up in the atmosphere and lifestyle of the local *kolkhoz.* Traditionally and temperamentally they had a high regard for education, and saw education as the only way whereby the children could escape the dreary rural environment.

The great difficulty, particularly for many of the parents, was that advanced education inevitably meant that the student must turn his or her back, at least publicly, on the parental faith and religion. Most of the Mennonite parents, nevertheless, believed their children's futures would be better served if they attended school rather than if they turned to the life in the *kolkhoz.* The

irreconcilable claims of the parents and their homes, and those of the teachers and the school, nevertheless, created very great tension for many students.

The educational reforms of the 1930s in Russia also involved a considerable degree of school consolidation.The small one- or two-room elementary schools offered an inferior education. Only in larger consolidated schools was it possible to have a teacher for each grade level, and, if financial resources and government priorities permitted, to provide essential library, laboratory and gymnasium facilities.

Consolidation of the school systems had another important advantage. It removed many of the children living in more distant villages from their homes and from the influence of their parents at a much younger age. Several large houses, formerly residences of the more prosperous Alexanderkrone and Lichtfelde village farmers, were converted into dormitories for these children who could thus be subjected to a more systematic indoctrination of communist ideology.

Villages such as Alexanderkrone which already had an official seven-year school program had an obvious advantage over neighbouring villages which had only a one- or two-room elementary school. Consolidation therefore increased the educational importance of Alexanderkrone, and when new facilities were required, the local Soviet ordered that the Mennonite church in the village be renovated to become a school for the elementary grades. Similarly, the former teachers' residence in which the Regehr family had lived for 20 years was converted to classroom space in the mid-1930s.[29] Construction of a new cobblestone highway further increased the importance of Alexanderkrone as an educational centre.

The altered curriculum, the growth and expansion of the Alexanderkrone school, and its closer integration into the Soviet educational system were accompanied by numerous changes in the teaching staff. Long-term service and continuity had characterized the period before 1926, but after 1930 there were constant changes in the teaching staff, particularly after 1932. One student from a neighbouring village, who began studies at the Alexanderkrone school in the mid-1930s and who was asked about the names of the teachers, noted that she had had very many teachers, and then listed 21 but admitted that even that list was probably incomplete. David P. Wiens was one of those 21, but Maria Petrovna Dick was not. The list included at least nine Mennonite names, although few if any of these retained any direct links with Mennonitism. This former student also noted that many of the older teachers were replaced with younger and better qualified ones, and that in one year alone three new teachers with Institute training were hired.[30]

The attempt to improve the entire educational system in a very substantive way in the mid-thirties and thereafter was not only recognized, but very much appreciated by the remaining Mennonite teachers. One of these Russian Mennonite teachers, writing immediately after World War II, admitted that once the "insane" educational methods were abandoned, the Soviet schools rose to a very high academic level. It was this writer's opinion that the Soviet schools before the war were superior to Nazi or postwar German schools.[31]

Stalin's determination to improve dramatically the Soviet educational system also had another rather peculiar consequence for the Alexanderkrone school and for many other schools in southern Russia where the official language of instruction was German. The educational authorities found that there were not enough well-qualified German-speaking teachers to fill all the available vacancies. One writer stated that in 1935 there was a shortage of approximately 1,000 teachers in the intermediate schools in Ukraine, and that in one district alone 35 teachers were replaced in two months.[32]

In order to deal with this severe shortage of teachers the Ministry of Education expanded the facilities of the German *Paedtechnikums* or Institutes in Odessa, Chortitza and the Republic of the Volga Germans.[33] A few teachers were also recruited directly from Germany. Certainly some of the reassignments of teachers were made in an effort to improve the academic quality of instruction. Teachers reassigned for political reasons often ended up in exile, while those with only limited academic qualifications received other assignments.

One of the more important symbols of the new approach to education, industrialization and technological achievement was the large new hydro-electric dam and powerhouse which was built at the narrows of the Dnjepr River in the early 1930s. The same narrows which had been a favourite year-end excursion spot for the first students of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule because of their natural beauty, became an equally favoured excursion spot for a later generation of students at the school, who now marvelled at the accomplishments of modern education, science and technology.[34]

Stalin and his educational officials needed German-speaking teachers, but they were also very suspicious of Germany's political and military ambitions. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were, at best, erratic throughout the 1930s. Stalin certainly had grave misgivings about the ambitions of Germany, and particularly of Adolf Hitler and his Nazis after 1933. He also had good reason to doubt the loyalty of the numerous people of German background who were citizens of the Soviet Union. Many of the Germans living in Ukraine had warmly welcomed the German troops which occupied their territory after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. While most Soviet Germans did little that was clearly disloyal to the Soviet state, the loyalty of many was nonetheless suspect. Soviet Germans, like Ukrainian nationalists, it was believed, had to be watched very carefully, particularly when relations between Germany and the Soviet Union deteriorated markedly in 1934 and 1935.[35]

The deteriorating relations between Russia and Germany after 1935 led to a very controversial event in the history of the Alexanderkrone school. Two teachers, husband and wife, of German ancestry were arrested for espionage. Reliable documentation on this spy case is not available. The authorities, moreover, tried to deal with the matter quietly, without creating a major disturbance in the school. The recollections of former students are therefore incomplete.[36] The teachers in question, named Steinhauser, had allegedly prepared secret maps of the region and hidden them under a false bottom of a water kettle in order to smuggle them out of the country and presumably to Germany. The Steinhausers were arrested, tried, and never heard from again in Alexanderkrone.

The political terror and the suspicion of all things German in the 1930s did not only engulf *kulaks* and Ukrainian or German and Mennonite community leaders. It also reached, on at least one important occasion, into the ranks of the student body when four male students, named Heide, Sawatzky, Wiens and Dick, were arrested for speaking critically in the student residence about the Soviet government.[37] They were arrested and tried and apparently sent into exile, but the evidence regarding their fate is not conclusive.

As relations between Germany and the Soviet Union worsened in the later 1930s, Soviet concern about the Soviet Germans increased. At the same time Nazi officials were busily devising military and political plans which counted on substantial support and assistance from Volksdeutsche in the event of a German invasion of eastern Europe.[38] In the period immediately following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed on 23 August 1939, there were coordinated attempts between the two countries to exchange alien populations. Under that arrangement the Soviets would send Soviet Germans, mainly from the Baltic states, into Germany while Germany would move Slavic peoples from German-controlled territories on to the Soviet Union.[39]

Expulsion of Germans was not, however, the preferred solution of Stalin's government. Internal relocation of dubious elements of the population went on throughout the years of the Stalinist terror. But as early as 1934 the Soviet authorities began to prepare for a very much more extensive evacuation and relocation of all German-speaking peoples in the European portion of the Soviet Union. A massive and remarkably complete list of all Soviet Germans was secretly prepared. The person who devised the means whereby this list of more than one million Soviet Germans, including the Mennonites, could be made, later defected to the West. Her account of exactly how the Soviets obtained detailed information on all German Soviets was first made public in 1979 and portions of her account were republished in 1986. This detailed account stated:

> To sum up, I repeat: at the end of 1934 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had before it the most precise data on the numbers and occupations of all the Germans living in the USSR.
>
> All the secret service work and repressions carried out later were guided by the data we collected and arranged.[40]

The Stalinist pre-World War II period was curiously diverse, at least insofar as the Alexanderkrone school was concerned. There is little doubt that the Alexanderkrone school, once again named a *Zentralschule* and staffed largely by German-speaking teachers, achieved its greatest academic standing during the Stalinist era. The curriculum was radically altered to restore an emphasis on academic achievements. Discipline and moral standards in the school stood in very sharp contrast to the prevailing conditions in the *kolkhoz,* and students had an understandable pride in the impressive academic achievements. Children of former Mennonite farmers and landowners were culturally and academically in a very good position to take advantage of the educational opportunities, and often saw education as the only means to escape the dismal world of the rural

communes.

At the same time, however, the entire community was forcibly collectivized and dangerous religious and nationalistic aspirations were cruelly suppressed. Stalin's reforms would come to their full fruition in the three years which remained before the German *Wehrmacht* occupied the area. The school would attain remarkable academic heights, but it would also be entirely russified and then systematically destroyed in advance of major military changes in the region.

Chapter VIII
The Final Stage of Sovietization, 1938-1941

In 1938 the German schools in the Soviet Union underwent a very major change. German as the language of instruction was replaced by Russian. Henceforth the schools would not only be an instrument of communism and atheism, but also of Russian culture and nationalism, which was increasingly seen as extremely hostile to all things German, and particularly to Nazi Germany.

Russification placed many of the German-speaking Mennonite students in Alexanderkrone at a serious disadvantage. They did not know the Russian language well enough to continue their studies, and requests that those with an inadequate knowledge of Russian be allowed to repeat a grade were denied. As a result, many Mennonite students were forced back into the *kolkhoz*. The services of German-speaking teachers who had not mastered the Russian language, of course, also became superfluous. The changes in the official curriculum for the first seven years of instruction offered in the Alexanderkrone elementary and intermediate schools, aside from the language change, were relatively minor in 1938. Many of the teachers continued in their posts, although some new ones were also recruited.

There was, however, a very important change for the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule in 1938 when the program was expanded to the full ten-year program of a *Desjati-Letka*, or, in German, a *Volle Mittelschule*. This ten-year program was, and remains, comparable to the twelve-year elementary and secondary program in North America.[1] Only German and Ukrainian language and literature classes were taught in those languages after 1938.[2] A third administrative change involved the official appointment of the political leader, or *politruk*, as director of the school. The teacher who had performed these functions unofficially before 1938 was transferred to another school and later arrested and sent into exile, and a Russian named Pavel Mironovich Vassilenko was named to this position.He was a trained geographer, and at Alexanderkrone generally taught those subjects which are best described as civics or social studies classes, as distinct from classes based on specific disciplines such as geography, history, economics or political science. The political objective was to train the students to become good Soviet citizens and builders of socialism.

The political director of the school normally left all major academic matters to a colleague who functioned as the academic principal. In 1938 this position was assigned to Heinrich Ivanovich Rempel, an older, highly moralistic, but very skillful, competent and well-liked mathematics and science teacher.The official appointment of a political school director or principal of the school apparently did not significantly alter the general atmosphere of suspicion and anxiety in the school. However, by that time teachers of *kulak* background had been replaced

and weeded out or otherwise dealt with and reassignments were more likely to be made to improve the academic qualifications of the teaching staff.[3]

The expansion of the curriculum to a full ten-year program was accompanied by a more general consolidation of educational facilities in the region, and had close counterparts in many parts of the world. Larger central schools with better facilities and better qualified teachers were seen as an important way to counteract the serious deterioration in the quality of public education which had occurred in many parts of the industrialized world during the economically disastrous 1930s. In addition, school consolidations could serve important political objectives. Small and relatively isolated local schools were often preservers and protectors of a variety of local peculiarities and particularisms. The cause of assimilation, or at least full integration, of students into the mainstream of national thought and aspirations could be greatly accelerated if students from diverse backgrounds were brought together in larger consolidated institutions of learning. The earlier economic and political disasters of the 1930s had tended to make many people more malleable, and by 1938 the Soviet authorities decided that the time had come to recast the population of the Molotschna in a new and much more rigid Russian communist educational mould.

Consolidation, of course, entails the enlarging of some schools and the closing of others. The decision to expand the curriculum of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, set as that school was in the midst of a predominantly Mennonite population which had been beaten into a rather unwilling and sullen submission, might seem surprising. The school did, however, enjoy an excellent academic reputation and the main buildings used by the school were very well built. The former teachers' residence contained two grade 7 classes, while grades 8 through 10 were taught in the main school building. Two classes of grades 5 and 6 were taught in the former Alexanderkrone Mennonite Church.[4] The first four grades continued to be taught in the old village school.

The main motives of the authorities when making the 1938 changes were to russify the school, bring it more completely into the mainstream of Soviet life, and raise the academic standard of the curriculum to a level comparable with all Russian schools, as distinct from Ukrainian or minority language-group schools.

The construction of a wide new cobblestone highway placed the hitherto remote village of Alexanderkrone on a busy new thoroughfare and made it readily accessible to many non-Mennonite students from the nearby villages of Makovka, Annovka and Astrakhanka. This highway was, of course, built to meet economic, commercial and strategic purposes. It could, however, also serve as an instrument of assimilation. An entirely new mix of students would attend the expanded Alexanderkrone school after 1938. Many more non-Mennonite students gained access to the school, while the numbers of qualified Mennonite students was sharply reduced.[5] It must be noted, however, that assimilation had progressed to the point where, according to several former students, it no longer made any difference whether a teacher or a student was, or was not, of Mennonite background. To be a successful teacher or student at the Alexanderkrone school after 1938 one had to meet the academic requirements in combination with committed and active support of the ideals and purposes of Soviet

socialism.

The official curriculum of the entire Russian school system had, by this time, been carefully integrated so that instruction in any subjects would not contradict the basic values and lessons taught in others, most notably in the political subjects. It can accurately be described as holistic or integrated in both subject matter and teaching methods.[6] The subjects covered in years 5 through 7 were Russian grammar, literature and composition, Ukrainian grammar, literature and composition, German grammar, literature and composition, mathematics (algebra and geometry), anatomy, zoology, botany, geography, history, physics, chemistry, social studies, woodworking in the winter months, and gardening in the beautiful school park with its flowering bushes and flowerbeds in the springtime. In the upper years the subjects were Russian grammar, literature and composition, Ukrainian grammar, literature and composition, German grammar, literature and composition, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, drafting, astronomy, physics, chemistry, history, and military studies (theory, tactics and target practice).[7]

The school year was divided into quarters, with students being required to write examinations at the end of each quarter. Academic requirements were very stringent, and within the school an aggressively competitive attitude was fostered. Individual and class averages were calculated at the end of each quarter, with various honours and rewards going to the individual or the class with the highest average, and to the class with the greatest improvement over the previous quarter. There was great pressure for students to do well, or to withdraw from the school lest their poor performance adversely affect class averages. It was in many ways a peculiar system. Since entire class averages, as well as individual student averages, were calculated, the basic principles of socialism were safeguarded while at the same time the benefits of very vigorous competition were also very much part of the system.

In order to further promote and encourage solidarity within individual school classes or grades, each class elected a class leader or president who presided over meetings at which a surprising variety of topics could be discussed and appropriate decisions made. A very important objective, however, was to encourage each member of the group to do the best he or she could, thus contributing to an improved class average. In addition, each class had its own news reporter who had responsibility for the various pieces of news that found their way onto a specially designated newswall *(Wandzeitung)* which was an important part of the school. In many ways each classroom was expected to function as an autonomous responsible group or miniature soviet (council).[8] This curious mix of cooperation and competition apparently worked very well in the school system, in part because so many of the students saw education as the only means by which they could escape the unsatisfactory, and often desperate economic, social, cultural and political situation in which they found themselves.

The same kind of group competition was also fostered on the collective farms. To achieve higher production the *selsoviet* (village council) arranged competitions to see which collective farm could realize the highest quota deliveries for the state, but the system never worked as well on the communal farms as it did in

the school.[9] In fact, students of Mennonite background, raised on a Protestant work ethic, found very much in the new Soviet educational system to their liking. Many contrasted it sharply with the very different conditions prevailing in the *kolkhoz*. The school in virtually all its official and unofficial activities did, however, seek to influence the students in a way which contradicted the fundamental religious principles and ideals of the parents.

The school program and activities were vigorous and rather spartan. Instruction took place Monday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m to 3:00 p.m. Each day began with 15 minutes of active physical exercise or sports activities. If the weather was suitable these exercises, for students in grades 5 and 6 took place in the yard beside the former Alexanderkrone church, and for the students in grades 7 through 10 in the yard in front of the main school building. During inclement weather the exercises were moved indoors into the large student assembly halls in the two main buildings. The sports activities included simple physical exercises as well as races, long and broad jump competitions, the throwing of the discus, gymnastics, a variety of competitive sports, particularly for students in the senior grades, and other appropriate exercises. Sports, particularly competitive sports, were very important in the school.

After 15 minutes of physical warm-up exercises for the start of the day, the students gathered in the two assembly halls for appropriate opening exercises. The form, though certainly not the content, of these exercises had a great deal in common with the morning devotions of the earlier days. The teachers were assigned to read short selections from the writings of Marx, Lenin or Stalin, and give news briefs of a local and political nature on a rotational basis. Then the students were dismissed for classes which were normally 40 minutes in length, with 10-minute breaks between classes, and a 20-minute break at noon. The marking system was still the old 5 point or grade system which had been in effect in the school from its earliest days.[10]

The school day did not normally end for the students at 3:00 p.m., although formal instruction ended at that time. Numerous student circles or societies provided further opportunity for education in a more socialized setting. Literature, photography, music, singing, drama, various sports, political and social circles were established, with each student being allowed to join up to three of these. All the societies, including the official communist youth organizations, issued various badges, ribbons and other decorations for members who achieved some level of distinction, in much the same way as boys' and girls' organizations around the world did. It is, in fact, remarkable to note the striking similarity in educational forms between systems which allegedly espoused radically different goals and objectives. At Alexanderkrone after 1938, the clearly enunciated and rigorously pursued goals and objectives were to train competent and useful citizens of the Soviet social, economic and political system. The curriculum, in its broadest and most inclusive form, was carefully designed to meet these objectives.[11]

Living conditions for students in the school's dormitories were very spartan. The large houses on two former village farmsteads, very close to the school and directly across the street from each other, were converted to serve as dormito-

ries. One of these was for the boys, the other for the girls. There were up to 12 students in each room, with triple-level bunk beds lining the walls.[12] These dormitories had no cafeteria and only extremely limited food services. Students were given a small daily supper ration, consisting of 50 grams of *brinza,* a sheep's-milk cheese made by the nearby Bulgarian collective of the village of Annovka, and five small potatoes. All other food had to be provided by the students, each having his or her own special storage locker. It had to be eaten in the basement of the main school building at regularly scheduled times.

The widespread poverty and starvation of the time meant that many of the students were often very inadequately fed, or at best had a very monotonous and unbalanced diet. The earnings system on the collective farm did not provide for children who went to school. Where there were grown-up able-bodied people in the family food could be received, but where there were many children and only one able-bodied worker food was very scarce. The children of party officials or others in privileged positions in the *kolkhoz* naturally enjoyed a richer fare — a matter well calculated to increase compliance and cooperation with the authorities.

There were no longer any formal tuition fees at the school, but some fees had to be paid for accommodation by those students staying in the dormitory. School attendance could, nevertheless, be a serious financial hardship for students and their families. A student had to provide all or, in the case of dormitory students, most of his or her own food and was not in a position to earn work credits in the *kolkhoz* while attending school. Families with small children or elderly or incapacitated members often found it impossible to let their children go to school, despite Soviet mandatory school attendance legislation. Many, considering what was taught in the school, might not have regretted that, had it not been for the fact that the children were then subjected to influences in the *kolkhoz* which seemed even worse.

Relations between the school and the village *kolkhoz* were rather close. Teachers and students could be requested to help with the work on the *kolkhoz* on an emergency basis, but it was not a common practice to close the schools in order to facilitate the work on the collective farm. One student, however, remembers that her class twice had to help harvest cotton on experimental cotton fields. According to the *kolkhoz* agronomist, the cotton had to be picked at the time when the caps broke open in order to get quality cotton. In the late 1930s cotton was planted at Alexanderkrone on an experimental basis, apparently meeting with very considerable success.[13]

The *kolkhoz* was village-based, while the *Zentralschule,* as distinct from village schools, served a much broader constituency. As a result, students might find themselves called upon to serve not only in their own village *kolkhoz,* but also in other villages. School and educational officials certainly professed that physical labour was ennobling, and that some exposure to it was a valuable part of any proper education. Both the political and the academic leading teachers of the school were, however, very strongly committed to academic excellence and sought to minimize the disruptions. During the summer months, on days off from school, or at other times when school was not in session, students were

naturally expected to help augment their families' income or work credits.

Discipline in the school, perhaps befitting of the state which glorified manual labour, almost always consisted of such labour. Students committing offences less serious than those requiring expulsion from the school were required to do various menial tasks, such as several hours of hoeing in the garden, digging, or cleaning up the school yard and buildings.

One student also reported a different type of offence and punishment. Her family had, in flagrant defiance of Soviet standards of behaviour, secretly set up and decorated a tree at Christmas time, and the children had learned and recited religious verses on the 25th.[14] When questioned about this one of the children admitted the offence. The punishment in that case was a directive that the offending students be placed incommunicado for a two-week period. No other student was allowed to speak to these offenders, on pain of suffering a similar punishment. That particular form of punishment, however, proved ineffective, and before the two-week period was over, transgressors outnumbered those still at liberty to speak to one another, and the matter had to be abandoned.

In the Alexanderkrone school there was also a great deal of positive reinforcement of desirable behaviour. Sometimes even a morsel of extra food seemed a very important reward. Special favours in class, a special class excursion or outdoor nature study, or a trip for deserving students to a nearby market were commonplace. A major seven- to ten-day excursion at the end of the school year by students in the graduating class to notable historic, natural or technological sites remained a very important part of school life at Alexanderkrone until the school was closed.

The Soviet school at Alexanderkrone after 1938 was certainly not the kind of school Jacob Esau and David Dick had dedicated to the glory of God in 1906. Instead of a plantation in the Kingdom of God it had become an institution dedicated to building communism. The goals and objectives of the Mennonite school and of the Soviet school seemed diametrically opposed to one another. And yet the Soviet school after 1938 still had a good deal in common with the Mennonite school of 1906. Both were officially committed to the elevation and development of human abilities, particularly intellectual abilities. Both demanded a strong commitment on the part of students and teachers. Both were intent on building what supporters believed would be a better society, and both approached their task with a very strong sense of purpose or mission.

The fundamental and underlying assumptions and aspirations had been changed in a radical way. Yet the methods and procedures, and, indeed, even some of the objectives, when stripped of their religious or political rhetoric, seemed remarkably similar. None of this, however, can obscure the simple fact that in its last years the Alexanderkrone school, still popularly referred to as "the Mennonite *Zentralschule*" was truly a Soviet school.

Chapter IX
Dispersion and Destruction

The Alexanderkrone Zentralschule graduation exercises of 22 June 1941, mark the official end of the school's history. On that day 17 students who had survived the rigours of the Russian ten-year educational process assembled on the stage in the main school building to receive their coveted certificates. These graduation exercises were in one way very special, since they marked the graduation of the first, and, as it turned out, also the last class, which had completed the ten-year program begun in 1938 at the school.

Graduations are, of course, a time both to look back and to look forward. The recent experiences of these 17 students had certainly not been easy, but the graduation was a happy occasion as students and their teachers and parents together hoped and looked forward to a happier, more secure and more prosperous future. One of the graduates was particularly pleased that her father, after the long years of hardship, tragedy, and two years of imprisonment, was once again willing to put on his best Sunday suit in order to attend her graduation.[1]

The graduating students and their parents, and perhaps even the teachers, were not aware that on the previous day German panzer divisions had crossed the Russian frontier, and that Russia and Germany were officially at war. Most of the people in Alexanderkrone did not learn of the outbreak of war until a few days later, when they heard it through broadcasts over the local radio station at Waldheim.[2]

When the news of Germany's aggression was made public, it was followed immediately in Alexanderkrone and adjoining villages with a series of evacuations of men. All the German and Mennonite colonists were regarded with very considerable suspicion by their communist rulers who had certainly not forgotten the friendly reception German troops had received in German and Mennonite settlements when they had occupied much of Ukraine after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918. The alleged espionage of the Steinhausers had further increased local suspicions, and those suspicions were not entirely misplaced. Ukrainian, German and Mennonite farmers had little reason to hold their communist government in high regard. Most were not likely to engage in overt acts of disloyalty or sabotage, but many later willingly collaborated with the German occupying forces. The Soviet government, moreover, had provided itself with the necessary information and lists so that it could move quickly against those of German background.[3]

The vigour with which various local soviets acted varied considerably. The first step almost everywhere was to call a mass meeting at which everyone was briefed and encouraged to fight the enemy and help the motherland. This was

The 1941 graduating class with teacher Heinrich Ivanovich Rempel.

The last graduating class of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, 1941.

followed immediately by a series of measures designed to minimize any potential collaboration between German-speaking villagers and the advancing forces of the *Wehrmacht.* Within a week of the outbreak of war most of the able-bodied men in southern Molotschna villages between the ages of 18 and 60, and any others whose loyalty was thought to be somewhat questionable, were told to get ready for an immediate evacuation. The men were divided into two age groups. The first group comprised men between 45 and 60 years of age while the second group included those betweeen 18 and 45. Persons of Mennonite or German background who had formerly been prosperous landowners, were,of course, regarded with particular suspicion, and any who had somehow escaped earlier arrests were now detained.

The first group of mobilized men from the southern Molotschna villages — those between the ages of 45 and 60 — had to leave immediately and were initially kept near Makovka in a cattle enclosure surrounded by a barbed wire fence.Molotschna Mennonite wives and children were still able to visit the encampment and give their husbands or fathers whatever clothing and food they had been able to find before the men were placed on trains and sent away. The above-mentioned student who had just graduated from the Alexanderkrone school was appalled to see the elderly Heinrich Rempel, her former teacher and the school's academic principal, and the elderly physician, Dr. Bittner from Alexanderkrone, lying together in this barbed wire enclosure, trying to rest their heads on a stone which was cushioned only by a flimsy jacket. The weather was decidedly cool, threatening rain, and there seemed no protection from the elements for these men, or for this student's father who was also among the detainees.[4]

The number of men arrested in this first wartime sweep varied a great deal from village to village, and in some areas many of the men were later able to escape and return home.[5] Apparently the attitudes and zealousness of the local soviets were of very great importance in determining the number of men deported. Certainly the population losses in the different villages varied considerably. One account, for example, says "Already in the first week a few were deported."[6] Other accounts give much greater prominence to the June deportations than to the mass evacuations and relocations of German people in September. Most, and perhaps all of the men evacuated in June, were destined for various labour battalions and work camps in Siberian or eastern and Asiatic Russia. Their fate, in most cases, was very similar to that of the thousands who were arrested and disappeared throughout the Stalinist terror of the 1930s. Exact numbers of Alexanderkrone men sent into exile during the first week of June are not known.

The deportations in June were soon followed in July by a more general mobilization. Widespread and general mobilization of all able-bodied men for military service was both natural and inevitable, and in July of 1941 a large number of men, including many who were members of the communist party or were trusted workers in various industries or in the *kolkhoz,* were mobilized for military service. Many, including at least two other teachers of the Alexanderkrone school, were conscripted for service in the Red Army or for auxiliary

military service. In this mobilization Mennonite or German identity was not necessarily a major consideration. Able-bodied and at least partly-trained men were needed for urgent wartime services.

These were normal precautionary and conscriptive measures taken by a nation under attack. The specific methods used, particularly in the evacuations during the last week in June, were often harsh and cruel, but they were consistent both with past Soviet practice and with measures taken in other invaded countries.[7] Much more drastic and catastrophic measures would follow in September of 1941.

A series of disastrous military defeats forced the Red Army into a hasty eastward retreat and led to the German occupation of vast eastern territories, including the lands of the former Mennonite colonies in Ukraine. In order to understand the events of September 1941 it is necessary to outline briefly the military developments of the first three months of the Russian-German conflict.

Hitler's eastern military campaign, code-named "Barbarossa," went very badly for the Red Army in 1941.[8] German tactics called for lightning advances by selected panzer units of the *Wehrmacht* which were designed to split and isolate various Russian defensive units. Thus, the Russian front was penetrated and cut up in more than half a dozen places in the first days of battle. The crack German panzer units drove deep into enemy territory and then sought to encircle and trap huge concentrations of enemy defenders.

The number of Red Army prisoners taken in these early encirclements was phenomenal and became cause for great panic on the Russian side. Those Red Army units which were able to escape fled eastward, destroying such installations, livestock and crops as they could in order that these not fall into the hands of the rapidly advancing Germans.[9]

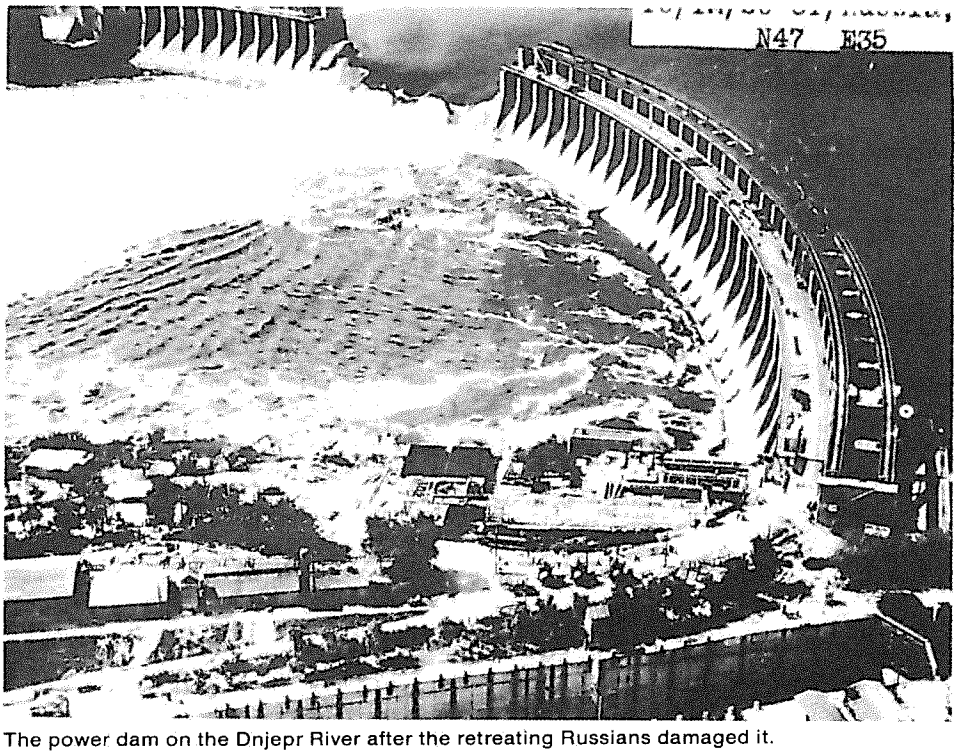
German military successes in June and July of 1941 naturally created much unrest in all the territory which was in the path of the German advance. In these areas harvesting operations were begun immediately after the outbreak of war in order to salvage what could be harvested before the area fell to the Germans. All the people able to do so were also ordered out to dig strategic defensive fortifications. There was nothing particularly sophisticated about these earthen defensive works. A network of World War I-style trenches was dug to guard strategic river crossings, including the banks of the Molotschna River, particularly at Halbstadt and Ohrloff. Most of the former students of the Alexanderkrone school, both male and female, were sent to the northern shores of the Sea of Azov to dig wide anti-tank ditches. In war, as in peace, individual quotas were established which required each person to dig one metre of the ditch, which was to be seven metres wide at the top and three metres wide at the bottom. The anti-tank ditches were sloped on the side from which the German tanks were expected to attack, while the other side of the ditch created a perpendicular wall. The objective was very simple, though utterly ineffective. The hope was that the German tanks would drive into these ditches but then be incapable of driving up the perpendicular wall. Soldiers and civilians standing at the top of the cut might then throw grenades and bombs, or shoot at the tanks below. The scheme might have worked if someone had been able to persuade the German tank drivers to

drive into, rather than around, the traps prepared with so much hard labour!

Throughout the summer of 1941 the German military juggernaut rolled eastward in a series of sweeping encircling movements. The Dnjepr River formed the boundary of these sweeping encirclements in late August, and on August 25 the Third Panzer Group reached the Dnjepr, quickly capturing the strategic city of Dnepropetrovsk.[10] The west bank of the river was secured, escape routes blocked off, and then control and pacification of the surrounding regions could proceed. This meant that the settlements on the west bank of the river, including the entire Crimean peninsula and the large Mennonite settlement of Chortitza, fell into German hands much earlier than did the settlements east of the Dnjepr, including the Molotschna settlement.

The huge hydro-electric dam and generating works on the Dnjepr River which provided power for much of the industry in the surrounding region. The dam had so often been praised in published works and to touring groups of school children as one of the great engineering masterpieces of the proletarian revolution. The retreating Russian forces partially blew up the great power dam only hours before the German forces could gain effective control of the city. All other important industrial sites which might prove of use to the Germans were also systematically dismantled or destroyed by the retreating Russians.

The Soviet government responded to these desperate developments with desperate countermeasures, two of which were of particular importance to the



The power dam on the Dnjepr River after the retreating Russians damaged it.

Photo courtesy of Mennonite Life

people of Alexanderkrone. The first of these was to dismantle and relocate all vital war industries in European Russia, eastward, preferably beyond the Caspian Sea or the Ural Mountains. The scope and magnitude of this vast industrial relocation program of 1941 has been described thus by one historian:

> This fantastic migration of industries and men to the east was not completed without considerable difficulties; there were gigantic bottlenecks at certain major railway junctions such as Cheliabinsk, and the evacuees suffered some terrible hardships on the way to the Urals, Siberia and Kazakhstan in the late autumn and at the height of winter.
>
> Altogether, between July and November 1941 no fewer than 1,523 industrial enterprises, including 1,360 large war plants had been moved to the east — 226 to the Volga area, 667 to the Urals, 244 to Western Siberia, 78 to Eastern Siberia, 308 to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. The "evacuation cargoes" amounted to a total of one and a half million railway wagon-loads.
>
> This transplantation of industry to the East at the height of the German invasion in 1941 is, of course, an altogether unique achievement. But it would, at the same time be naive to assume that everything of any industrial importance was either evacuated in time, or destroyed on the strength of Stalin's "scorched-earth" instructions after July 3.[11]

This massive industrial relocation required enormous resources of labour, as did the subsequent operation of the relocated eastern and northern industries. Where essential natural resources were lost in the west, new mines, transportation facilities, and processing plants had to be built in more secure areas. At the same time the Soviet military forces faced a very serious manpower shortage, following the loss of millions who fell or were taken prisoner on the battlefront. There was, however, a way to deal with the eastern manpower problems. Russia had within her borders an estimated 1.1 million citizens of German ancestry. The loyalty of many of these people to the Soviet regime was doubtful. If they were left in areas likely to be captured by the Germans, these people might give aid and comfort to the enemy. It was therefore decided that all persons of German ancestry be forcibly evacuated from their homes and moved eastward to serve the new and relocated industrial or resource-based undertakings in the East. In this particular development the Soviet Germans generally, and the Mennonites of Alexanderkrone in particular, became pawns in a very much larger military chess game over which they had absolutely no control.

On 28 August 1941 the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet issued a general military decree entitled "On the Resettlement of Germans Living in the Volga Region," which stated in part:

> According to information received by military organizations, there are thousands upon thousands of spies and saboteurs among the Volga Germans. They are prepared to set off explosions in this area at a signal from Germany. Not a single German in the Volga region has informed Soviet authorities of the presence of these numerous spies

> and saboteurs. Therefore, the German population of the Volga region is hiding the presence of enemies of the Soviet state. In order to avert undesirable eventualities and avoid unnecessary bloodshed, all Soviet Germans were forcibly exiled to Siberia and central Asia.[12]

This policy affected the Mennonites of the Molotschna colony in the same way that the Germans of the Volga district were affected. The intention was clear. Up to 1.1 million people were to be driven from their homes and put to work under very tight security in the new and relocated Russian industries. It was later estimated that approximately 650,000 Soviet Germans were in fact forcibly relocated.[13]

In Alexanderkrone and the other southern Molotschna villages the policy of relocating all Soviet Germans was implemented very quickly after the order was issued by the Soviet Praesidium. The first to be evacuated were all the remaining men between the ages of 16 and 60. Numerous accounts survive of the circumstances of that evacuation of the men and boys of the region. Two must suffice here:

> On 4 September all of our men from 16-60, the weak and strong, the sick and the well, were ordered away. I can still see how the men walked down the street accompanied by their wives, their mothers, and their families. That is how they left house and home. They were driven away like a flock of sheep. Some accompanied their loved ones for a stretch. And then came the farewell and separation and a final *Lebt wohl.* With weeping eyes and bleeding hearts many remained by the road, helpless witnesses of the human tragedy. The tears that flowed, only he can understand who has experienced them himself.[14]

> Early in September, as we were digging near Mariupol, word was received that all men between the ages of 16 and 60 were to return home and report to the district office. The others were to continue their work. The mood was very depressing on that day, and not a great deal of work was done despite the exertions of the supervisors. When we were denied permission to go home in the evening, we began to walk home. Along the way we met groups of men going to Tschernigovka. The younger ones were marching under guard, but a few of the older and weaker ones were allowed to ride on waggons, which also carried small packages and baggage. Many tears were cried in those days, since virtually every family was affected. Many women, whose husbands had already been sent into exile, now also had to part with sons, fathers or brothers.[15]

The particular tragedy of these evacuations was the fact that they ruthlessly broke up and separated families. The men were generally evacuated first and sent to work in the labour battalions, leaving the women, children and old people to deal with the ongoing responsibilities of the settlement. But even for the women, children and the old and the sick an order for evacuation came almost immediately.

As already indicated, German troops reached the Dnjepr River on 25 August. The partial destruction of the power dam by the retreating Russians[16] allowed much of the accumulated water to run off, and actually expedited some of the German crossings of the river upstream. As was their strategy, the panzer units and other key German units quickly secured the strategic points, began their encircling movements, while leaving it up to a second wave, often comprising military units from allied countries, to complete the occupation, round up the prisoners, and take possession of any remaining supplies and resources. The Molotschna villages were not strategic from the German point of view, and their conquest and occupation were only accomplished early in October when the striking panzer forces were already far to the east.

The time between the decisive battle for the region in late August, and the conquest and occupation of the Mennonite villages in the Molotschna, provided an opportunity for the retreating Soviets to evacuate many of the women and children who had remained in the villages early in September after the men were removed. At the time the Molotschna area was already hard-pressed by military units from the north and northwest, but an official order was given that all the remaining Germans and Mennonites were to prepare for evacuation to Kazakhstan, where new mines and a number of the relocated war industries were to be built. The people were urged to slaughter their animals and prepare meat as well as other food which they were to take with them. In addition, they were urged to take saws, axes, spades, hoes and other implements which they would need to build huts and other essential structures in their new homes.

All remaining Germans and Mennonites of the Molotschna region were ordered on 1 October to report to one of five railway stations, the five being Halbstadt, Stulnevo, Tokmak, Lichtenau and Feodorovka. The people from the southern tier of villages all reported to Lichtenau, Stulnevo or Feodorovka. Those at Lichtenau and Feodorovka were the first to be loaded with whatever supplies they had brought into the railway freight cars.

Approximately 25 of the 58 villages of the Molotschna were thus emptied of virtually their entire German-speaking population. They were taken east by train to the shores of the Caspian Sea. There they were loaded onto rather unstable and bulky barges, to be towed across the Caspian Sea. These barges were not really seaworthy. Several capsized or were swamped, with considerable loss of life, and the loss of most of the food and supplies. The people who survived the crossing were placed in returning empty coal train cars. They were dumped along the road on inhospitable land in Kazakhstan and urged to make whatever preparations they could for the rapidly approaching winter season. In due course, as industrial evacuation materials arrived at the site, they were called to build the new factories or dig new mines. Women and children, who were unable to work, were left on the barren steppes to fend for themselves as best they could. Hunger, cold and disease reaped an abundant harvest during that dreadful winter in northern Kazakhstan.

That was the fate of the people from the southern villages of the Molotschna settlement. Those from the other villages found that there was a serious shortage of railway rolling stock and they were ordered to wait but to be prepared to load

at any time. One participant at the Stulnevo station offers the following description of the ensuing events:

> On October 1 vehicles came from the Russian villages to take us to the Stulnevo railway station. We were given accommodation in an empty granary, but ordered to be prepared to load at any time. More and more people arrived. The next morning there was a large mass of people, probably between 6 and 7 thousand. Most had to sleep under the open sky. Eventually some trains were assembled, but party officials eager to escape before the Germans overran the place, requisitioned the trains, while we were left behind.
>
> On the fifth day we had to leave the granary and move onto the field. Then the station was blown up, and the granary burned to the ground. All the guards had disappeared.[17]

These women and children then made their way back to the villages as best they could, to await the arrival of the enemy forces. In some villages large numbers returned; in others, including Alexanderkrone and the neighbouring villages, very few. On the basis of the documentation prepared by the German Ministerium für die Ostbesetzten Gebiete, by the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, and by the Deutsches Auslandsinstitut, a general outline of the state of affairs in the villages at the time when the Germans arrived is possible. These documents show that the population of Alexanderkrone after the evacuation was 167, only 17 of which were "German." These sources also report that 15 Alexanderkrone men had been taken before the outbreak of war, and 321 men, women and children were evacuated after June of 1941.[18] The situation was similar in other southern villages. One historian provides the following assessment:

> When the German armies reached Kleefeld, for example, only twelve men, eight women, and five children remained. At least 556 people had been shipped eastward. Though Kleefeld represented an extreme case, other villages were not far behind. Altenau lost 420, its 1942 population consisting of twelve adults and eight children. Not a single intact family remained. Rosenort's population stood at 35, with three families still intact; 434 people had left. Lichtenau and Tiege made the best showing: 257 out of about 330 and 484 out of 677 were deported; 15 and 11 families respectively, remained intact. Of all the southern villages, only Tiege still had a population over 100; 22 men, 55 women and 59 children. By comparison the more centrally located Landskrone (population under 500) lost only 64 people, while Tiegenhagen (population over 500) in the northwest lost 51.[19]

One person who had been ordered to drive tractors from the machine station at Makovka near Steinfeld to Mariupol returned just in time to witness the German occupation of Neukirch and Alexanderkrone. The southern villages had already been evacuated. Many of the cows were in agony, not having been milked for days, and generally cattle roamed as freely as they pleased. Everything had simply been abandoned by the evacuees, just before the Soviet army

retreated eastward to Tschernigovka.

The attacking forces subjected the deserted villages to heavy artillery bombardment before moving in. This was certainly not the main line of the eastward advancing front. Instead the occupation of the Molotschna was part of the general securing of the area. The first forces moving into the former Mennonite villages were German-allied Roumanians. Alexanderkrone was bombarded and then attacked with flamethrowers, behind which the Roumanians advanced. Any remaining Russian soldiers and those suspected of being soldiers in civilian clothing were taken prisoner and herded down the main street of Lichtfelde eastward through Alexanderkrone. Just before retreating, the Russians had placed small land mines at various strategic points, including several beside the narrow bridge over the Juschanlee which linked Alexanderkrone and Lichtfelde. Congestion at the bridge, prodding and even some gunfire from the rear forced several of the prisoners off the path. At least two prisoners were killed by exploding mines at the bridge near the grounds of the former Alexanderkrone Zentralschule.[20]

The three-day occupation by Roumanian troops was accompanied with considerable violence. Numerous instances of plundering and rape were reported, but once the area was properly secured, the few remaining people of the Molotschna villages near the Juschanlee River gained their first glimpse of German officers. Riding on motorcycles and smartly attired, they quickly established a small command station and ensured that any remaining German or Mennonite people were properly protected. Since these people knew both the German and the Russian languages they were eagerly sought as translators and, in a more general way, as informants.

The Germans occupied the Molotschna district for almost two years. They never got far enough east to facilitate the return of those who had been evacuated to Kazakhstan or Siberia. Consequently the history of Mennonites in Alexanderkrone really ends in 1941.

Conclusion

The people who survived the forced evacuation from Alexanderkrone and the other Molotschna Mennonite villages in 1941 were not permitted to return to live there after the war. Furthermore, the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule never reopened its doors to teachers and students. However, the village, some of the school buildings, and a number of the people did survive.

It was my privilege to visit the villages of Lichtfelde and Alexanderkrone in August of 1988. Approaching Alexanderkrone from Lichtfelde, the view is obscured by the grade leading to the little bridge over Jushanlee Creek. But at the top of that little bridge the former Alexanderkrone school comes fully, and still very impressively, into view. The architects obviously had a good eye for the co-ordination of the building on that particular site. The impressive gate posts at what was once the entrance to the school yard further enhance the visual impact. It is obvious that, in its prime, the school was architecturally very impressive.

Both the old school building and the teacherage on the school grounds still exist, but they are in a state of disrepair. The facade and wide stairway leading up to the front door of the former school building are gone, and the front door is no longer in use. The building now serves, at least temporarily, as a dormitory and canteen for migratory collective farm construction workers. Special construction projects, particularly large mechanized dairy, chicken and hog barns, on the Kirov collective farm of which Alexanderkrone is now a part, and on other nearby collective farms, require the services of skilled construction workers, who are provided with room and board in the old school buildings. The building appears to be structurally sound, and some repair work and renovations in the interior were in progress at the time of our visit. It was not possible to view the inside of the building because some of the workers who had worked the night shift were asleep in the building at the time.

The former teacherage has very recently undergone a change of ownership. A young family sought and obtained permission to purchase the house from the collective farm. Initially the administrators set a price of 1,000 rubles, but closer inspection of the building revealed that it was still structurally very sound, and the price was increased to 2,500 rubles, which this young family paid. The husband and father of two children is a machine driver on the collective farm where he earns approximately 200 rubles per month, but more than twice that amount during the busy spring and harvest seasons. The wife and mother is a bookkeeper on the collective farm. When we visited there the family was very busily and enthusiastically renovating and repairing the old building, and urged us to return in two years' time to see the building restored. Only the residential portion of the building remains. The attached barn either collapsed or was demolished long ago.

The former Alexanderkrone Zentralschule (front view) photographed in August, 1988.

The former Alexanderkrone Zentralschule (back view) in August, 1988.

The former teacherage of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule pictured with its new owners, their two children and a niece, photographed in August, 1988.

Our tour guide told us that private ownership of rural houses had been possible for some time, but more people were now availing themselves of that option. The apparent reason is that individual collective farms can retain, and distribute amongst their members, profits earned in their farming operations, making it possible for the workers of well-run and profitable collective farms to earn substantially more than their compatriots on less efficient collective farms. The family which has just purchased the teacherage is a beneficiary of these new policies.

The little park adjacent to the school building is still attractive, but substantially altered. The trees, planted shortly after the school was founded, have grown to the point where they now form a small and very pleasant forest. The former carefully maintained paths and flowerbeds are all gone, and the centre of the grove is so shady that very few flowers could survive there. We were, however, assured that the nightingales still sang in those trees, no doubt as melodiously as ever.

The villages of Lichtfelde and Alexanderkrone seem relatively well maintained. Many (perhaps up to one-third) of the former Mennonite houses have survived, but their appearance is significantly altered because the barns, sheds and other outbuildings were systematically torn down and the wood used to build new central buildings during the period of collectivization.

Gerhard Lohrenz, after his first post-war visit to the southern Molotschna villages in 1971, lamented that the former beauty of the Mennonite villages was gone and that "nothing is reminiscent of the past."[1] He particularly noted and was obviously not impressed with a waterpipe which ran the length of the village. There was a faucet in front of each house to provide the people with the

water they needed. Even the streets seemed to Dr. Lohrenz to be dustier and houses smaller and much more dilapidated than in the past. And indeed, when viewed by contemporary North American tourists, the old villages and buildings often appear squalid and depressing. But, for me at least, a great deal was reminiscent of the past. No doubt some improvements, including more modern water and plumbing arrangements, have been made since 1971.

Thanks to our tour guide we were able to meet several of the older women in the villages, one of them a person who had married a Ukrainian but whose maiden family name was certainly "Mennonite." These dear old women seemed to be the same kind of people as our own grandmothers or great-grandmothers. They knew only a little of the history of the villages, but seemed to possess those endearing human qualities which are often associated with traditional rural village life. These people, some of whom had moved into the former Mennonite homes after the forced evacuations of 1941, still bore many of the scars and marks of wartime tragedies and disasters, and spoke with emotion about sons or husbands lost in the war.

The villages and many of the buildings, though severely damaged, have survived the ravages of collectivization, political terror and warfare. So too, have many of the former students of the school who were forcibly evacuated northward or eastward during the war. The men were generally sent into northern Siberian labour camps, while the women and children evacuated late in 1941 were dumped on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea in Kazakhstan and then taken by coal train eastward. There many of them still live. In a few cases it was possible for the men, when they were released from the labour camps after the death of Stalin, to join their families. Sizeable Mennonite churches have recently been established in the area, attracting a number of former Alexanderkrone students. Several of these have also been able to emigrate to the West much more recently as *Umsiedler.* A former student of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, when it was already completely Soviet-oriented, is now the religious leader of a Russian Mennonite Brethren Church in northern Kazakhstan.

In the preparation of this manuscript many former students were interviewed. Some of them attended the school when it was still a Mennonite school, others during the period of transition, and still others after it had been completely sovietized. Despite all these differences there was a remarkable similarity and kinship amongst these former students. It could certainly be argued that, for at least some students attending the school in its last years, this kinship merely demonstrates the triumph of the influence of home and family over the influence of the school. It is also true that those who became fully integrated into Soviet society did not respond to requests for information. None of this, however, detracts from the very affectionate way in which virtually all the students who did respond speak of the school, and the strong continuity that is evident in those memories and responses.

With the exception of Jacob I. Regehr, no other former teachers of the school who are still alive could be identified or contacted. A number of former teachers have, however, left written memoirs, recollections and impressions. In almost all of these, regardless of the time when they were written, there seems to be a

sharper tone of anxiety, insecurity and sometimes inadequacy than in the student recollections. Shortly after leaving the school Gerhard Peters wrote:

> For me the question sometimes arises whether our work there [in Alexanderkrone] was really of use to anyone. I am becoming more and more convinced that every person, without exception, has a purpose and an obligation, which is that we must serve our fellow human beings as best we can with those gifts given to us. We teachers must, above all, combat spiritual darkness with all our available strength. . . . And I must confess that I have not devoted myself adequately to this task, and I have not served as I should have. When I realize this I naturally ask whether the time spent in Alexanderkrone was not, through my own fault, largely lost time.[2]

Peters was not unique in expressing these sentiments. It is perhaps unfortunate that he and most of the other teachers are no longer able to read and appreciate the strongly affirmative comments and letters by former students. The Mennonite teachers, however, were a buffer between the Mennonite community and an often hostile outside world. They could not change or enlighten the world as they would have liked to, and they could not really protect their students. Those students who provided information for this study, however, strongly endorsed and appreciated the efforts their teachers made. One who attended in the last years of the school's existence wrote:

> I never thanked my teachers and have wished more than once to do so. . . . Your research and compiling your work (at least in our minds and hearts) will help us to say our much too late "Thank you!" At the same time it should set a monument to all the teachers — from start to end — that tried to teach us available knowledge.[3]

Another former student wrote that "the former students still living in the Soviet Union regard their school years as the best in their lives."[4] A third, whose parents emigrated in the 1920s wrote:

> The Lord in his providential care and grace also gave me a very big gift — the possibility of attending this school. My thankfulness to God is already being expressed, and will become perfect in eternity.[5]

The old Alexanderkrone Zentralschule is gone, as are its supporters, teachers, and most of its former students. The 35 years of its existence were never easy. Perhaps, if the founders in 1906 could have foreseen the future, they would not have built the school, and they might have spoken much less confidently of the will and power of God to sustain what they firmly believed was God's work.

The Alexanderkrone Zentralschule was a place of learning. Its founders and early teachers hoped to make the school a place where Mennonite adolescents would learn facts and skills which would enable them to make substantial contributions to the economic, cultural and spiritual welfare of their communities. After the revolution and civil war the authorities made the school into a place where students would learn to become builders of Soviet socialism. But in the desperate conditions of the early 1930s and in the final dispersal and

destruction of the school the people of Alexanderkrone had to try to learn and understand some of their history's most difficult and enigmatic lessons.

Each reader of this book is left to contemplate what are the real lessons to be learned from the troubled history of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule. They are not easily discerned. Nor are there simple answers to the many questions raised in this study. Perhaps, each student of the school, and each reader of this book, will learn truths, and apply what has been learned, in unique and personal ways.

The history of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule provides evidence of the wisdom and timelessness of the words of the preacher of the Old Testament who wrote that "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Notes

Introduction

1. A full farm normally had 65 *desjatins* of land. One *desjatin* is approximately 2.7 acres or 1.0925 hectares.

2. The Mennonite *Zentralschulen* served the needs of students who had completed the five- or six- (sometimes seven-) year curriculum of an elementary village school, and their graduates could continue to a *Kommerzschule* (commercial or trade high school), a *Realschule* (high school specializing in the sciences), or a *Gymnasium* (high school specializing in the arts and humanities) where they would obtain the equivalent of a North American high school education. The main difference between a Mennonite *Kommerzschule* and a *Gymnasium* was that the former was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade *(Handelsministerium)* while the latter was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Public Education *(Ministerium der Volksaufklärung)*. Throughout this manuscript the terms *Zentralschule, Handelsschule,* and *Arbeitsschule* will describe a school which offered instruction at a level equivalent to a North American junior high school level. Such schools will also be described as Mennonite intermediate schools. It was only after 1938 that the school in Alexanderkrone offered instruction at both the junior and senior high school levels.

For a comparison of the Russian and North American schools see H. Goerz, "Unsere Schulen in Canada und Russland: Ein Vergleich," *Mennonitische Welt,* 5, No. 10 (Oktober 1952): 4-6.

3. Details of the official groundbreaking ceremony are provided in an official report published in *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 39 (30 September 1906): 432, and Katharina Janzen, "Aus der Schreibtischschublade meiner Mutter," *Der Bote,* 12 October 1971, p. 11; 19 October 1971, p. 11; 26 October 1971, p. 11; 2 November 1971, p. 11; 9 November 1971, p. 11; and 16 November 1971, p. 11. This series of six articles comprises the detailed and colourful recollections of Jacob Esau of Lichtfelde, and will, hereafter, be referred to as *Esau Recollections.*

4. The German translation of this Psalm is much stronger than the English in its confident expression of faith: "Keiner wird zu Schanden, welcher Gottes harrt."

5. The official announcement and detailed explanations of the reasons for change from a *Zentralschule* to a *Handelsschule* are given in "Die Alexanderkroner Handelsschule," *Die Friedensstimme,* IX, No. 43 (1 Juni 1913): 9-10. Similar announcements also appeared in *Der Botschafter,* Berdjansk, and *Die Odessaer Zeitung,* Odessa.

Chapter I
Educational Needs and Opportunities in 1906

1. By far the best and most detailed account of the origin and early history of the Alexanderkrone intermediate school is to be found in the *Esau Recollections.*

2. Interview with Isaac Boldt, Saskatoon, by T.D. Regehr, 6 April 1986, hereafter referred to as *Boldt Interview.*

3. Only the villages of Alexanderkrone, Lichtfelde and Kleefeld became members of the *Alexanderkroner Schulverein* and levied annual assessments for the support of the school. "Zur Zentralschulfrage," *Volksfreund,* 15 März 1918, p. 3. *Volksfreund* was a Russian Mennonite periodical that, briefly, replaced *Die Friedensstimme.* By contrast, the Ohrloff Zentralschule obtained support from the villages of Ohrloff, Tiege, Blumenort, Rosenort, Lichtenau, Blumstein, Muensterberg, and Altenau. *Volksfreund,* 6 April 1918.

4. The specific organizational structure of the various Russian Mennonite *Zentralschulen* is given in Leonard Froese, "Das pädagogische Kultursystem der mennonitischen Siedlungsgruppe in Russland," (Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophischen Fakultät der Georg-August-Universität zu Goettingen, 1949), 97-98, hereafter referred to as Froese, *Pädagogisches Kultursystem.*

5. *Esau Recollections.*

6. A.A. Toews, *Mennonitische Märtyrer der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1949), 369-377.

7. There is extensive secondary literature on the Russian educational system. The main sources for this discussion are Oskar Anweiler, *Geschichte der Schule und Pädagogik in Rußland vom Ende des Zarenreiches bis zum Beginn der Stalin-Ära* (Berlin: Quelle und Meyer, Heidelberg, 1964); W.H.E. Johnson, *Russia's Educational Heritage* (Pittsburg: Carnegie Press, 1950); N. Hans, *The Russian Tradition in Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

8. The extensive literature on Russian Mennonite education is given in the bibliography. I have relied extensively on the numerous articles written in the Mennonite press of that time, particularly in *Die Friedensstimme.* The most important secondary sources on which the following section is based are H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung: Entstehung, Entwicklung und Untergang* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Echo Verlag, 1951). Peter M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Brüderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte* (Halbstadt: Raduga Verlag, 1911); Leonard Froese, "Das pädagogische Kultursystem der mennonitischen Siedlungsgruppe in Russland" (Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der Philosophischen Fakultät der Georg-August-Universität zu Goettingen, 1949).

9. The full set of 87 rules and regulations is published in D.H. Epp, *Johann Cornies: Züge aus seinem Leben und Wirken* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Echo Verlag, 1946), 56-68.

10. "Bericht über die Konferenz in Simferopol zur Ausarbeitung eines Statuts für die Zentralschulen und die pädagogischen Kurse, vom 5-8 Juni 1907," *Die Friedensstimme,* V, No. 24 (16 Juni 1907): 303; "Protokoll der Beratung welche am 8 Dezember 1907 in der Neuhalbstaedter Kirche in Schulsachen der mennonitischen Bevölkerung Rußlands stattfand," *Die Friedensstimme,* V, No. 50 (15 Dezember 1907): 669-670. This matter was the subject of ongoing and intense discussion and debate for several years in the Russian Mennonite press.

11. "Versammlung in Schoenwiese zur Ausarbeitung eines einheitlichen Statuts für die deutschen Zentralschulen des Odessaer Lehrbezirks," *Die Friedensstimme,* VI, No. 27 (5 Juli 1908): 426-427. For a complete list of all the *Zentralschulen* in the various German colonies in southern Russia and a discussion of their historical evolution see J. Stach, "Die Zentralschulen in den deutschen Kolonien Südrußlands mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Krim," *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten,* 9, No. 11 (November 1937): 6.

12. "Zum Projekt der mennonitischen Mittelschule," *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 18 (6 Mai 1906): 183-184, and No. 19 (13 Mai 1906): 192-194. This article elicited several

spirited responses, leading to a vigorous debate about the need for and purposes of Mennonite education.

13. More detailed information on Eduard Wüst is available in Jakob Prinz, *Die Kolonien der Brüdergemeinde: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien in Südrußland* (Moskau, 1898); V.G. Doerksen, "Kirchliche Verwüstung? Eduard Hugo Wüst in Wuerttemberg 1844/5," paper presented to the Symposium on Russian Mennonite History, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1977.

14. The most detailed and comprehensive treatment of the religious ferment is provided in Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, California: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978). A more recent and very well informed interpretation is provided in John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1981).

15. Harry Loewen, "Echoes of Drumbeats: The Movement of Exuberance Among the Mennonite Brethren," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 3 (1985): 118-127. See also J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno, California: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975): 66-68, and A.H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde, 1860-1954* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1955).

16. An account of the founding of the Molotschna Teachers' Federation is given in *Die Friedensstimme*, V, No. 31 (5 August 1906). See also *Die Friedensstimme*, V, No. 29 (22 July 1906): 311-312.

17. "Zum Projekt der mennonitischen Mittelschule," *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 19 (13 Mai 1906): 192-94, and "Ein Aufruf zunächst an die Kirchen- und Bezirksgemeinden des Halbstaedter und Gnadenfelder Gebiets," *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 46 (18 November 1906): 511-12, and "Zum Referat des Lehrers P. H." *Die Friedensstimme*, V, No. 47 (24 November 1907): 620-21.

18. "Zur mennonitischen Mittelschule," *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 22 (3 Juni 1906): 229-30.

19. *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 28 (15 Juli 1906): 299-300.

20. Peter Braun, "The Educational System of the Mennonite Colonies in South Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, III (July 1929): 168-182.

21. In *Die Friedensstimme*, these two schools are variously referred to as *Gemeindeschulen* or as schools supported by the *Volost*. For more information on these schools see *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 1956 ed., s.v. "Education among the Mennonites in Russia," and Froese, *Pädagogisches Kultursystem*.

22. The six new *Zentralschulen* were located in New York, Nikolaipol, Alexanderkrone, Karassan, Spat and Orenburg.

23. "Zur mennonitischen Mittelschule," *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 23 (10 Juni 1906): 240-42.

24. "Zur mennonitischen Mittelschule," *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 22 (3 Juni 1906): 229-30.

25. A. Neufeld, "Realschule in Berdjansk," *Die Friedensstimme*, IV, No. 23 (10 Juni 1906): 242.

26. Several of the members of the Alexanderkrone School Society, notably estate owners David Dick, Jacob Sudermann and Nikolai Schmidt, were also very active in the Halbstadt School Society. David Dick was for a time chairman of both the Alexanderkrone and Halbstadt school societies.

The Halbstadt school was the subject of numerous lengthy articles and much discussion in the pages of *Die Friedensstimme* from 1906 through 1908. Much of the discussion focussed on the course of studies to be taught in the new school. Some urged that it be a

four-year teacher training school. Others demanded theological training as a "preacher school." There were those who wanted more training in the sciences or in the humanities. Some wanted the school to accommodate its program to that of the Russian school system. Others urged that German models be followed. There were also difficulties regarding student and teacher qualifications, particularly since the Molotschna *Zentralschulen* followed a three-year program while those in Chortitza had a four-year curriculum which more closely resembled the Russian school system.

27. *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 27 (8 Juli 1906): 291.

28. "Ein Mennonitenabend in Petersburg," *Die Friedensstimme,* XII, No. 18 (1 März 1914): 9. This article reported on a special meeting of Mennonite students in St. Petersburg, held in the "Wien" restaurant on Gogol street, to which 70 Mennonite students had been invited and 55 came. One of those present claimed that the number of Mennonite students studying in St. Petersburg had increased over a period of seven years from seven to over seventy students.

29. "Schulgründungen," *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 18 (6 Mai 1906): 187.

Chapter II
A Difficult Beginning, 1906-1907

1. *Esau Recollections.*

2. *Boldt Interview.*

3. *Esau Recollections.*

4. *Esau Recollections.* See also T.D. Regehr, "Isaak P. Regehr: A Biographical Sketch." Unpublished manuscript in possession of the author.

5. *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 22 (3 Juni 1906): 234.

6. A detailed outline of the "Lehrplan der Zentralschulen" at the beginning of the twentieth century is given in J. J. Hildebrand, "Education Among the Mennonites in Russia," unpublished manuscript available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Froese, *Pädagogisches Kultursystem,* 130 gives a slightly different curriculum.

7. The information pertaining to the early conflicts with officials of the Ministry of Education is drawn from the *Esau Recollections,* and from several lengthy and detailed reports published in *Die Friedensstimme.*

8. T.D. Regehr, "Isaak P. Regehr: A Biographical Sketch." Unpublished manuscript in the author's possession.

9. "Kurze Mitteilungen über die Reise der Kommission in Schulangelegenheiten nach Petersburg," *Die Friedensstimme,* V, No. 20 (19 May 1907): 250-52.

10. The normal practice in Mennonite *Zentralschulen* was to hire one more teacher than there were classrooms. It was also a generally accepted policy that an additional teacher would be hired if enrollment in any class exceeded 50 students.

11. Jacob Esau's recollections name several persons in the educational hierarchy. It is not entirely clear that he really understood the chain of command or responsibility, and on occasion it seems that he used the term inspector, director or curator inappropriately. Adding further to the confusion is the fact that the *Molotschnaer Mennonitische Schulrat* had its own bureaucrats which carried the same titles but very little of the authority enjoyed by officials of the Ministry of Education.

12. A detailed calculation of the salaries and expenses of village school teachers in the

Molotschna is given in "Ein Christ an der Molotschna," *Die Friedensstimme,* V, No. 33 (18 August 1907): 422. A similar detailed account of the salaries of intermediate and secondary teachers is given in "Was Nun?" *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 29 (22 July 1906): 311.

13. These figures are taken from a table prepared by Isaak P. Regehr for the years 1906-07 to 1925-26.

14. Uncompleted memoirs of Isaak I. Regehr. Isaak I. Regehr could remember helping his father with some of the harvesting work in Kleefeld, but Jacob I. Regehr born five years later and growing up in Alexanderkrone could not recall that his father ever engaged in farming operations.

15. J. Esau, "Bis hierher hat uns der Herr geholfen," *Die Friedensstimme,* VI, No. 21 (24 Mai, 1908): 328. See also *Esau Recollections.*

16. Uncompleted memoirs of Isaak I. Regehr, in the possession of T.D. Regehr.

17. Isaak P. Regehr "Aufzeichnungen, Namen der Schüler, Ortsname, Geburtsjahr, u.s.w.," hereafter referred to as *Isaak P. Regehr Aufzeichnungen,* frequently refers to the first year or grade of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule, as "Vorbereitungsklasse."

18. *Esau Recollections.* The statistics provided in other sources vary slightly from those given by Esau. See, for example, *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 39 (30 September 1906): 432. The coming and going of individual students who might, or might not, be counted at any particular time, is outlined in J. Esau, "Bis hierher hat uns der Herr geholfen," *Die Friedensstimme,* VI, No. 21 (24 May 1908): 328-29.

19. *Boldt Interview.*

20. See for example the large advertisement Braun placed in *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 31 (5 August 1906): 344, just before the beginning of the 1906-07 school term.

21. The official school dress code is described in an official announcement "Die Alexanderkroner Handelsschule," *Die Friedensstimme,* IX, No. 43 (1 Juni 1913).

22. In those days Russian Mennonite boys in their early teens still had their heads shaved bare. A smart cap therefore magically transformed many a mere boy into an impressive young man. The caps and uniforms created an esprit de corps, and provided a new and honoured identity which was greatly cherished by the students and teachers alike. It carried with it many of the connotations which a smart military uniform has long enjoyed. Several accounts indicate that, even in the dark days of the Makhno terror, it was still considered a particular insult if some of the marauding bandits wore the cherished school cap. There were, however, some conservative Mennonites who saw the new styled caps, with their visor and proud emblem emblazoned on the elevated front, as a clear sign of arrogance, pride and sin which contrasted sharply with the older, more appropriate tams or berets worn by Mennonite men. The rather tough and conservative grandmother of teacher Isaak P. Regehr, for example, made short work of the first modern cap which wandered into her domestic world. With a sharp slap the offending cap was sent flying into the far corner of the room, and the offending wearer sharply reprimanded.

After the 1917 Revolution the Soviet authorities did away with all school caps and uniforms. They were denounced as symbols of class and privilege, and therefore banned.

23. As reported in *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 39 (30 September 1906): 432.

24. The bureaucratic organization of the Ministry of Education at that time was very hierarchical. Immediately below the Ministry officials in the capital were 12 curators. Reporting to the curators were more numerous school directors, who in turn supervised or were responsible for the activities of the local school inspectors. The administrative hierarchy of the educational system is described in Anweiler, *Geschichte.*

25. These events are described in *Die Friedensstimme,* IV, No. 42 (21 October 1906): 467; "Mennoniten, rettet eure Lehrerbildungsanstalt," *Die Friedensstimme,* V, No. 15 (14 April 1907): 184; "Etwas wider den Artikel: Mennoniten, rettet eure Lehrerbildungsanstalt," *Die Friedensstimme,* V, No. 19 (12 May 1907): 235; "Kurze Mitteilungen über die Reise der Kommission in Schulangelegenheiten nach Petersburg," *Die Friedensstimme,* V, No. 20 (19 May 1907): 250-252.

26. Translated from the *Esau Recollections,* which include a complete year-end report for the 1906-07 school year.

Chapter III
The Long Struggle for Accreditation, 1908-1913

1. The information pertaining to the first years of the struggle for accreditation is drawn from the *Esau Recollections,* and from Jacob Esau's offical and lengthy reports published in *Die Friedensstimme.*

2. *Esau Recollections.* The exact words, in German were: "Dazu kam noch eine uns tief darniederbeugende, höchst unangenehme, schmutzige Geschichte aus dem Schülerkreis hinzu. Zwei Schüler...haben schmutzige, unkeusche Liebschaften im Quartier getrieben. Nur den dringenden Bitten der Väter dieser Söhne zufolge wurden sie nicht ausgeschlossen, sondern erhielten Verzeihung, mußten aber Quartier verlegen. Einige Wochen nachher ist jedoch N. freiwilling angeblich seiner kranken Nerven wegen, ausgetreten und nach Hause gefahren."

3. It is interesting that Jacob Esau mentioned the emotional pain he had suffered at the death of his sons, comparing that with his feelings when he was deprived of the chairmanship of the Alexanderkrone School Society. He did not refer to the death of his first wife, who died in childbirth several years after their marriage. Some of the details about the death of Esau's first wife and daughter are given by Katherine Janzen, "Aus der Schreibtischschublade meiner Mutter," *Der Bote,* 12 Oktober 1941, p. 11.

4. There is some inconsistency regarding the number of students in the various classes. Jacob Esau, in his official report, claimed that at the end of the school year there were 16, of whom 15 passed the examinations. The *Isaak P. Regehr Aufzeichnungen* list 17, of whom 16 were successful. It seems clear that 18 students began the year in the third class. One apparently withdrew or left the school, while another completed the year at Alexanderkrone but actually took his examinations elsewhere. Similar minor discrepancies also apply to the statistics given for the first and second grade. The detailed statistics given here are those reported by Jacob Esau in "Bis hierher hat der Herr geholfen," *Die Friedensstimme,* VI, No. 21 (24 Mai 1908): 328-29.

5. *Esau Recollections.*

6. *Isaak P. Regehr Aufzeichnungen,* p. 83, and a complete list of all the teachers, school tuition fees, and teachers' salaries in Isaak P. Regehr's handwriting.

7. "Über Handels-Hochschule," *Die Friedensstimme,* XI, No. 29 (10 April 1913): 8; "Unsere mennonitische Mittelschule," *Die Friedensstimme,* XI, No. 34 (1 Mai 1913): 6 and "Protokoll der außerordentlichen Generalversammlung des Mennonitischen Schulvereins am 6 Mai 1913," *Die Friedensstimme,* XI, No. 40 (22 Mai 1913): 1.

8. "Es geht bergab," *Die Friedensstimme,* XVI (7 September 1918): 3. It is significant that the Molotschna Colony was divided into two administrative districts — Halbstadt

and Gnadenfeld. The Gnadenfeld and Alexanderkrone Zentralschulen, both in the Gnadenfeld district, encountered much more serious difficulty than did those in the Halbstadt district.

9. "Die Alexanderkroner Handelsschule," *Die Friedensstimme*, IX, No. 43 (1 Juni 1913): 9. This lengthy official announcement regarding the changed curriculum at Alexanderkrone also appeared in several of the other German language papers of southern Russia.

Chapter IV
Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, 1908-1917

1. Written recollections of Tina Janzen, Abram Reimer and Isaak I. Regehr, and *Isaak Boldt Interview.*

2. The longest and most detailed surviving anecdotal account of Bykov is given in Gerhard Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed: The Personal Story of a Canadian Mennonite from Russia* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1976): 80-82, hereafter referred to as Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed.* That account is somewhat marred by Lohrenz' overblown ego, but is otherwise consistent with other surviving accounts. See particularly comments by Tina Janzen, Abram Reimer, and J.I. Regehr, as collected by J.I. Regehr and made available to T.D. Regehr. Other information is drawn from letters by G.A. Konrad and Tina Janzen to T.D. Regehr, both written in 1986, and from discussions with Isaak I. Regehr before his death.

3. One correspondent states that Bykov joined the teaching staff in 1913 when the school became a *Handelsschule.* That, however, is contradicted by Jacob I. Regehr who was a student at the school from 1909 to 1912 and had Bykov as a teacher.

4. Isaak P. Regehr's activities in all these areas is discussed in Isaac I. Regehr's uncompleted memoirs. The land transactions involved the acquisition of a farm lot in one of the newly established villages of the Terek settlement, and a townlot in Neuhalbstadt.

5. The official tuition fees were 50 rubles per year from the beginning, and were still at that level in 1913 when the school became a *Handelsschule.* Later, during the difficult post-war period, the school had to resort to payment in agricultural produce. This also meant that the teachers in the 1920s were paid partly in cash and partly in agricultural produce.

6. The School Society became a *Fürsorgekomitee.* "Die Alexanderkrone Handelsschule," *Die Friedensstimme* XI, No. 43 (1 Juni 1913): 9-10.

7. The only critical published or unpublished comments regarding Isaak P. Regehr which seem to survive are those made by Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed,* 79-80. The teacher given the pseudonym Heinrich Allert by Lohrenz is in fact Isaak P. Regehr. Lohrenz elaborated considerably on those comments in a letter to T.D. Regehr, 16 December 1976. See also M. Hamm, Winnipeg, "Ihr noch Lebenden der Alexanderkrone Zentralschule," *Der Bote,* 11 Januar 1972, p. 11.

8. *Boldt Interview.*

9. Gerhard Lohrenz to T.D. Regehr, 16 December 1976.

10. Years later Isaak P. Regehr taught Bible School in Herbert, Saskatchewan. A diary he kept during the last year of his life makes repeated references to his disagreements with the local Mennonite Brethren church leaders and their evangelistic methods which

Regehr regarded as shallow and unethical. The diary is in the possession of T.D. Regehr.

11. Sixty years after his graduation from the Alexanderkroner Handelsschule Martin Hamm still expressed remorse about some of his antics when a member of the school choir. M. Hamm, Winnipeg, "Ihr noch Lebenden der Alexanderkroner Handelsschule," *Der Bote,* 11 January 1972, p. 11. Hamm describes his experiences in greater detail in his autobiography, *Aus der alten in die neue Heimat* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1971).

12. The three main Mennonite factions or denominations in those three villages were the so-called *Kirchliche* (Church) Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren, and the *Allianz Gemeinde.*

13. Anna Baerg, a member of the Concordia Choir wrote a fairly detailed diary which recorded not only the activities, but also conveys much of the spirit and atmosphere of the times. *Diary of Anna Baerg, 1916-1924,* edited and translated by Gerald Peters (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1985).

14. Gerhard Lohrenz to T.D. Regehr, 16 December 1976.

15. *Boldt Interview.*

16. Interview with Abram H. Reimer by J.I. Regehr in 1986.

17. *Mennonite Encyclopedia,* 1956 ed., s.v. "Enns, Daniel Peter," pp. 224-225.

18. Abram H. Reimer interview with J.I. Regehr, 1986, and G. A. Konrad interview with J.I. Regehr, 1986. Isaak Boldt described Enns as "schrecklich streng."

19. *Mennonite Encyclopedia,* 1956 ed., s.v. "Enns, Daniel Peter," pp. 224-225, indicates that Enns held the following official positions: chairman, Mennonite Teachers' District Conference, Schoenau, Taurida, 1896-1907; chairman, Mennonite Teachers' Conference, Davlekanovo, Ufa, 1909-1911; chairman, Electoral District, Alexanderkrone, 1917-1919; member, Molotschna Board of Education, 1917-1919; member, Central Bureau, All Russian Mennonite Organization, 1919; chairman, Sanitation District Committee, Seven Villages, 1922; chairman, Ontario Mennonite Immigrant Committee, 1924; member, Central Mennonite Immigrant Committee of Canada, 1925-1934, and secretary, 1925-1927; secretary, Board of Directors, German-English Academy at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, 1931-1936; and chairman, German Cultural Society, Rosthern, 1933-1936.

20. G.H. Peters, *Blumen am Wegrand* (Winnipeg: Regehr Printers, n.d.).

21. Isaak Boldt's exact words were, "Er hatte einen schweren Charakter." *Boldt Interview.*

22. Gerhard Lohrenz, "Lehrer Gerhard Peters (1889-1972)", *Der Bote,* 23 Mai 1972, p. 4.

23. G. H. Peters, *Charakterbildung: Beiträge zur Stärkung und Veredlung des Charakters, dem Hochschulkursus einer Mennonitischen Lehranstalt angepaßt, in 20 abgeschlossenen Lektionen* (Winnipeg, 1955), 1. This was the second edition of the work. The first edition consisted of 18 lectures.

24. From autobiographical notes by Gerhard Peters, made available by his daughter, Helga Wiebe, and from the incomplete memoirs of Isaak I. Regehr.

25. The policy of the Alexanderkrone School Society in 1913 was to open a second parallel first-year class if at least 20 to 25 students registered for that second section. See official announcement to this effect in *Die Friedensstimme,* XI, No. 63 (14 August 1913): 10.

26. *Maria Huebert Interview.* Gerhard Peters says in his memoirs that Heinrich Reimer taught again after the war, but his name does not appear on the list of teachers as prepared by Isaak P. Regehr.

27. Many of the assignments written by Isaak I. Regehr while he was a student at Alexanderkrone and then at the *Kommerzschule* in Halbstadt have survived, and are in the possession of T.D. Regehr.

Chapter V
The School and the Larger Mennonite Community, 1908-1917

1. The most persuasive attempts to define this cultural and religious ethos of the Russian Mennonite commonwealth are James Urry, "The Closed and the Open: Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1889)," (Ph. D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1978), and David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47 (October 1973): 259-308 and 48 (January 1974): 5-54.

2. Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed*, 72. It is interesting to note that Lohrenz describes one of the two allegedly "born-again" boys as being basically dishonest. That presumably left only one truly "born-again" student in the entire *Zentralschule*.

3. *Isaak P. Regehr Aufzeichnungen* list at least two Russian students who were admitted the first year. Several non-Mennonite German students, a few Jewish students, and a number of Russian students attended in the ensuing years.

4. The same attitude toward religious instruction as described here also prevailed at the Halbstadt Kommerzschule. Even the traumatic suicide of a student at that school, which had an enormous impact on teachers and students alike, did not lead to any evangelistic campaigns in the school. Students who made religious commitments as a result of that tragedy did so in their own homes or in their own churches. This event is described in both the diary and in the incomplete autobiography of Isaak I. Regehr.

5. Tina Regehr's name does not appear in the *Isaak P. Regehr Aufzeichnungen* which list all the students admitted to the school, together with their home village. Tina did, however, attend classes, and appears on the 1909-10 class picture.

6. *Isaak P. Regehr Aufzeichnungen*, 30 and 32.

7. *Boldt Interview.*

8. Mary Dick, who later married Isaak I. Regehr, and her sister Tina (Janzen) both recall that their father, who was more widely read and open-minded than many of the other farmers and whose oldest son had married Isaak P. Regehr's daughter, Liese, still thought it a waste of time and money to send the girls to school in Alexanderkrone. But three of his four daughters very much wanted to go, and he eventually agreed.

9. Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed*, 82. It is not at all clear whether there were formal rules enforcing this sort of behaviour, or whether this was simply adolescent student behaviour. Certainly Jacob I. Regehr says there were no formal rules of this kind at the time when he was a teacher at the school in the 1920s, but some of the girls who attended in the 1920s remember behaviour very similar to that described by Lohrenz.

10. Examples of this kind of silliness was a fad that some of the girls carefully washed their hands with soap if, inadvertently, they had touched a boy. Even a brother and sister walking to school together could become the object of ridicule, and certainly sharing a common lunch box was not acceptable for some.

11. Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 29 September 1987.

12. Virtually parallel accounts of such incidents were given by Isaak Boldt who was a student from 1912 to 1916, and by Maria Huebert who was a student at the same school 25 years later. In that respect neither war, revolution, starvation, collectivization and political terror had produced any change.

13. Gerhard Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed*, estimates that the population of Alexanderkrone during the war years was approximately 600 people. Other former residents regard this as a rather high estimate of the village population, unless the student population of the

school is included.

14. It is indicative of the personalities and circumstances of the early years of the school that one student's very vivid recollection relates to the time when he and some of his friends were caught outside after the official curfew by Jacob Esau. Jacob H. Reimer, "Erinnerungen an Lehrer und Prediger Jacob Esau," *Der Bote*, 14 December 1971, p. 4.

15. G. Lohrenz to T.D. Regehr, 16 December 1976.

16. Copies of approximately 30 essays and term papers written by Isaak I. Regehr at several educational institutions in Russia and Canada are in the possession of T.D. Regehr.

17. Isaak I. Regehr diary for the years 1919 and 1920, marked Rueckenau and Alexanderkrone.

18. "Bücherverzeichnis des Emigranten I. Regehr, Alexanderkrone, August 1926," in the possession of T.D. Regehr.

19. Martin Hamm, *Aus der alten in die neue Heimat* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1971), and Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed*. Both Hamm and Lohrenz were part of this large and rather unusual contingent of Sagradovka students.

20. Gerhard Peters states explicitly in his autobiographical notes that Viatcheslav Bykov's brother taught for a short time at the Alexanderkrone school, but his name does not appear on the comprehensive list of teachers for the period from 1906 until 1926 which was prepared by Isaak P. Regehr.

21. For a succinct statement of the vast landholdings of German-speaking peoples in Russia, and of the government policy of confiscation of these lands, see Ingeborg Fleischhauer and Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans Past and Present* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1986), Introduction and Chapter 1.

Chapter VI
Soviet Continuity and Reforms, 1917-1926

1. J.G. Rempel, "D.P. Enns," in *Der Bote*, 27 September 1950, p. 5. For Enns' views and recollections of the Russian Mennonite educational system see D. P. Enns, "Education in Russia," *Mennonite Life*, (July 1951): 28-32.

2. Despite his reputation as a very strict and authoritarian teacher, Enns strongly supported the organization of a student society which, at least technically, had the power to recommend the hiring and firing of teachers. Governing student societies were, in fact, quite popular in the Alexanderkrone school in the early years after the revolution, although parental and community pressures prevented serious or radical excesses. The only issue which became the subject of real contention and dispute was the matter of corporal punishment, and on that matter the students clearly had official government policy and the principal of the Alexanderkrone school on their side.

3. Aron A. Toews, ed., *Mennonitische Märtyrer. Band 2, Der große Leidensweg* (North Clearbrook: Selbstverlag, 1954): 245.

4. A detailed report on the support given the Mennonite schools by local villages at that time is given in "Zur Zentralschulfrage," *Volksfreund* (15 March 1918): 3. Tuition fees throughout most of the war stood at 50 rubles per student, but rose rapidly during the period of inflation following the October revolution.

5. This claim is made by Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettle-*

ment of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution (Altona, Man.: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962): 37.

6. His last words, in German, were "Nur nicht zuletzt noch irre werden." A detailed account of the life, death and funderal of David and Katharina Dick is given in Aron A. Toews, ed., *Mennonitische Märtyrer der jüngsten Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (N.p.: Selbstverlag, 1949): 369-377.

7. For an account of local Mennonite reactions to these murders see Peters, *Diary of Anna Baerg,* 48-50.

8. *Ibid.,* p. 58-60.

9. *G.H. Peters Reminiscences,* p. 10.

10. A fascinating family account of Paul Ignatiev's career, including his miraculous escape from Red Guard executioners because one of those Guards recognized him as the minister under whose authority the technical school attended by this Guard had been reformed, is provided in Michael Ignatiev, *The Family Album* (New York: Viking, 1987).

11. Anweiler, *Geschichte,* is particularly helpful in showing this continuity. Anweiler shows the very important role that Paul Ignatiev's attempted reforms had in shaping future educational thinking.

12. The only major deficiency graduates of the Halbstadt Kommerzschule had when seeking admission to a university program was instruction in Latin, which was not offered in the Mennonite schools.

13. A new educational periodical entitled *Zur Neuen Schule* promoted and explained the new Soviet educational system to German-speaking teachers.

14. For a Mennonite perspective on this issue see H. Rempel, "Die Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion," *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten,* 9, No. 6 (Juni 1937). A good general summary of Lenin's educational ideas regarding national minorities is provided in Anweiler, *Geschichte.*

15. The switch to German instruction created very considerable difficulties since no appropriate readers and teaching materials in the German language were available. For a discussion of these problems and their solution see "Die Aufarbeitung und Organisation des neuen Lehrbuches," *Zur Neuen Schule,* Heft 4 (11) (April 1926): 14-15; "Eine Begründung der Programme für die Sowjetschule," *Ibid.,* Heft 6/7 (November/Dezember, 1925): 21-23; A. Patak, "Allukrainische Beratung der deutschen Kulturarbeiter," *Ibid.,* 6-9.

16. Some of the most extreme antireligious attitudes and sentiments found expression in the new periodical entitled *Neuland: Antireligiöse Zweiwochenschrift der Sowjetdeutschen,* published by the Allukrainischer Zentralrat der Kämpfenden Gottlosen.

17. Daniel Dorotich, "History in the Soviet School, 1917-1937, Changing Policy and Practice," (Ph. D. dissertation, McGill University, 1964): 24-26.

18. *Programme für die Deutschen Schulen I. Stufe der Krimmer A.S.S.R.,* redigiert von E. Fischer, Chr. Luft u. Ch. Hahn (Simferopol: Krimmer Staats-Verlag, 1929); *Unsere Muttersprache: Lehrbuch für den Deutschunterricht zum Gebrauch in der Arbeitsschule* (Moskau: Zentral Völkerverlag, 1927); *Frisch ans Werk. Erstes Lesebuch zum Gebrauch in deutschen Kinderanstaltungen für soziale Erziehung in der Ukraina* (Prischiber Pädkollektiv, Charkow: Zentralverlag der Völker der USSR, Allukrainische Abteilung, 1929); and A. Patak, *Dem Morgenrot entgegen* (Charkow: Allukrainische Abteilung des Zentralverlages beim Präsidium des Ukr. Z.V.K., n.d.). All these very rare books are available in the Ost-Europa Sammlung of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich.

19. List of teachers, tuition fees and salaries, in Isaak P. Regehr's handwriting. This list only shows Isaak I. Regehr beginning as a teacher in 1921, but the diaries of Isaak I.

Regehr clearly indicate that he began to teach at Alexanderkrone in 1920, and that Bykov was also a teacher there in 1920-21. The Isaak P. Regehr list is unclear and misleading in its entries for 1920-21.

20. *G.H. Peters Reminiscences.*

21. *Isaak I. Regehr Dairy,* No. 10, 26 September and 4 October 1922.

22. Peter Harder, "Es war einmal . . . " *Der Bote,* 30 November 1971, p. 3.

23. *G.H. Peters Reminisences.*

24. *Boldt Interview.*

25. Jacob I. Regehr kept a detailed record of the activities of the Haydn Choir. This record provides a detailed explanation of its origin and activities, as well as a complete list of all choir members, the times and number of rehearsals, and copies of the official invitations to the performance.

26. *I.I. Regehr Diaries* and *J.I. Regehr Notes.*

27. See for example "Die Alexanderkroner Zentral- und Handelsschule in Südrußland in der Molotschna," written by Tina Janzen in March of 1986.

28. "Aus der alten Heimat: Auszug aus einem Privatbrief von Pred. Is. R. Alex-kr. Mol." *Der Bote,* 8 April 1925, p. 6.

29. Preserved school programs indicate that on a number of occasions the first verse of the *International* was sung in German, the other verses in Russian.

30. This is demonstrated by several enthusiastic articles by Mennonite authors in the periodical *Zur Neuen Schule.* Of particular interest is Franz Froese, "Konditionismus und Komplexsystem," *Zur Neuen Schule,* Heft 2 (9) (Februar 1926): 13-15, and "Das Komplexsystem im Dienste der Arbeitsidee," *Zur Neuen Schule,* Heft 6/7 (Dezember 1925): 23-25.

31. G.H. Peters, *Blumen am Wegrand* (Gretna, Manitoba: Regehr Printers, n. d.), 34-35; *Der Bote,* 2 Dezember 1925, p. 6. The poem also appeared in *Mennonitische Welt.*

32. Gerhard Peters to his brother, Jacob, 17 August 1923, as quoted in a letter from Gerhard Peters' daughter, Helga Wiebe, to T. D. Regehr, 11 June 1987.

33. *Der Bote,* 2 December 1925, p. 6.

34. *J.I. Regehr Notes.*

35. *Isaak I. Regehr Diaries,* 27 May 1926.

36. *I.I. Regehr Diaries,* 1 and 9 July 1926.

37. This account was told to T.D. Regehr by Rev. J.J. Thiessen, then a Mennonite minister in Saskatoon, during a visit in 1970.

Chapter VII
In the Shadows of Stalinism, 1927-1937

1. A lengthy letter by a teacher who remained, illustrates this sentiment very well. "Chortitza, den 9 April 1925," *Der Bote,* 8 Juli 1925, p. 6.

2. "Aus der alten Heimat: Von den Schulen an der Molotschna," *Der Bote,* 10 February 1926.

3. *I.P. Regehr Aufzeichnungen* list a Maria Petr. Dueck of Neukirch as a student who entered the preparatory class of the Alexanderkrone Handelsschule in 1917. Her year of birth is given as 1904. It should be noted that I.P. Regehr listed the names of many students as Dueck, even though other sources refer to them as Dick or Dyck. I have not

been able to find conclusive proof that this former student was indeed the teacher appointed eight years later.

4. "Was der deutsche Lehrer in Sowjetrußland muß," *Der Bote,* 26 February 1930, p. 4; and "Gottlosen-Propaganda in deutschen Schulen der Sowjet-Ukraine," *Der Bote,* 18 März 1931, p. 1.

5. D. Paetkau, "Mennoniten und Sowjetschule," *Der Bote,* 4 and 11 Mai 1927, p. 1.

6. "Streiflichter," *Der Bote,* 22 November 1928, p. 3.

7. "Chortitza," *Der Bote,* 8 Juli 1925, p.6.

8. W. Sudermann to B.B. Janz, 20 August 1923, published in John B. Toews, ed., *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975): 391-392.

9. Children from nursery school through grade 2 were organized as Children of the October Revolution. Those in grades 3 through 6 were called Pioneers; those in grades 7 through 10 were Young *Komsomol;* and those over 16 years of age could become members of the *Komsomol.*

10. "Aus der alten Heimat: Etwas von der 'neuen Schule' in der alten Heimat," *Der Bote,* 28 October 1925, p. 5.

11. "Die rußlanddeutsche Schule an der Molotschnaja unter dem Bolschewismus, von einem ihrer einstigen Lehrer, mitgeteilt von Heinrich Toews," *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten,* 11, No. 2/3 (Februar/März, 1939): 9-10.

12. David Paetkau, "Mennoniten und Sowjetschule," *Der Bote,* 11 Mai 1927, p. 1.

13. Anna Sudermann, later the academic principal of the Chortitza Zentralschule, "Chortitza Lehrerseminar (Pädtechnikum) von 1920-1929," *Der Bote,* 5 Januar 1971, pp. 5-6; 12 Januar 1971, pp. 2-3; and 19 Januar 1971, p.5; and "Revolution, Kommunismus und Christentum," Der Bote, 13 April 1971, pp. 5-6; and 20 April 1971, pp. 3-4.

14. "Aus der alten Heimat: Von den Schulen an der Molotschna," *Der Bote,* 10 Februar 1926, p. 6.

15. "Die Weihnachts- und Osterfeiertage werden in den Schulen abgeschafft," *Der Bote,* 25 September 1929, p. 4.

16. *Programme für die Deutschen Schulen I. Stufe der Krimer A.S.S.R.,* redigiert von E. Fischer, Chr. Luft u. Ch. Hahn (Simferopol: Krimer Staats-Verlag, 1929). Supporting readings included K. Fischer, *Unsere Muttersprache: Lehrbuch für den Deutsch-Unterricht zum Gebrauch in der Arbeitsschule* (Moskau: Zentral Völkerverlag, 1927); *Frisch ans Werk: Erstes Lesebuch zum Gebrauch in deutschen Kinderanstalten für soziale Erziehung in der Ukraina* (Prischiber Pädkollektiv, Charkow: Zentralverlag der Völker der USSR, Allukrainische Abteilung, 1929); A. Patak, *Dem Morgenrot entgegen* (Charkow: Allukrainische Abteilung des Zentralverlags beim Präsidium des Ukr. Z.V.K., n.d.).

17. John Dunstan, *Paths to Excellence and the Soviet School* (Oxford: NFER Publishing Company, 1978): 20.

18. Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986): 107-111.

19. The most recent comprehensive work on the collectivization of Ukrainian agriculture is Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow.*

20. For detailed accounts of incompetent administration of the collective farms see Walter Kuhn "Kommunal- und Kollektivwirtschaft," *Mennonitische Lehrerzeitung,* Erster Jahrgang, Viertes Heft (März 1949): 19, and various "Dorfberichte" prepared for the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, whose records are at the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz.

21. It is beyond the scope of this history of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule to provide a detailed account of the organization and operations of the Alexanderkrone collective. I am, however, greatly indebted to Maria Huebert, Leamington, who worked

in the controller's office of the collective farm, for a detailed and comprehensive account of its operations in the late 1930s.

22. Helmut T. Huebert, *Hierschau: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers): 1986, p. 305.

23. Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 29 September 1987.

24. The specific details of these irregularities, which happened after 1938, have been made known to the author, but are withheld at the request of those who provided the information.

25. The three were a husband and wife teaching couple named Steinhauser, and Heinrich Wallman. This information was provided in a letter from Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 29 September 1987. A more detailed discussion of the arrest of these three teachers follows later in this chapter.

26. As told to T.D. Regehr by Helen Dick, daughter of Ivan Ivanovich Dick, now living in the Vancouver area.

27. As told to T.D. Regehr by Maria Baerg-Wiebe, Leamington, 24 August 1987.

28. "Brief eines früheren Kollegen an den Schriftleiter des Boten," *Der Bote*, 28 Februar 1946, p. 4.

29. These local changes were described in *Huebert Interview.* Many of the details were confirmed by Gerhard Dyck in a visit with J.I. Regehr, and reported in a letter from J.I. Regehr to T.D. Regehr, 17 July 1986.

30. *Huebert Interview.*

31. "Brief eines früheren Kollegen an den Schriftleiter des Boten," *Der Bote*, 28 Februar 1946, p. 4.

32. "Die Zustände in den Sowjetschulen," *Der Bote,* 25 Dezember 1935, p. 5

33. The *Zentralschule* in Halbstadt was apparently not offering teacher training in the 1930s. Teachers from the other teacher training institutes rarely had command of Low German and were, for that reason, referred to as *Deutschländer.* Most were in fact Soviet citizens.

34. It is particularly interesting that both the first class of the Alexanderkrone school in 1906-07, and the last class of 1940-41 made a special year-end excursion to the narrows of the Dnjepr. In both cases the excursion was made in traditional Mennonite *Leiterwagen* which had served well in 1907 and were still functional in 1941.

35. A. Bohmann, *Menschen und Grenzen: Struktur der deutschen Bevölkerung im sowjetischen Staats- und Verwaltungsbereich,* 3 Bände. (Koeln, 1970). Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

36. Former students have not been able to provide me with the exact date, and some did not know the exact nature of the charges. Most knew that the two *Reichsdeutsche* teachers suddenly disappeared, and later heard they had been charged with espionage and exiled. The brief account given here is pieced together from the recollections of several students, and the wife of one of the other teachers of that time.

37. This information is given in a letter from Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 9 May 1986. It was the same teacher who provided the evidence against the Steinhausers who also closely interrogated many of the students about anything these four students might have said. That teacher was regarded as the unofficial *politruk* in the school at that time.

38. The term *Volksdeutsche* was used to describe those who were cultural, national or ethnic Germans but living outside the boundaries of the Third Reich. There were thus two kinds of Germans: *Reichsdeutsche* and *Volksdeutsche.* Both were Germans, but the former were citizens of the Third Reich while the latter were citizens of other nations.

39. A copy of this agreement to exchange populations is in the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz,

file R59/249, pp. 1-9.

40. As quoted in Ingeborg Fleischhauer and Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans Past and Present* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1986): 91.

Chapter VIII
The Final Stage of Sovietization, 1938-1941

1. There were some significant differences between the school system in Ukraine, and those in Russia proper. A detailed description of the German *Zentralschulen* in Ukraine just prior to the outbreak of World War II is given in "Die rußlanddeutsche Schule an der Molotschna unter dem Bolschewismus von einem ihrer einstigen Lehrer," *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten,* 11, No. 1 (Januar 1939): 12-14; Lohrenz Reichert, "Unsere Zentralschulen in Süd-Rußland," *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten,* 10, No. 2 (Februar 1938): 12-13; and Ludwig Schmalz, "Die Schule der deutschen Siedler in der Sowjetunion," *Deutsche Post aus dem Osten,* 10, No. 6/7 (Juni/Juli 1938): 11-13.

2. A detailed outline of the curriculum at the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule after 1937 has been provided by Maria Huebert, Leamington, Ontario, and is in the possession of the author. Comparable information about the Chortitza Zentralschule is available in Anna Sudermann, *Die Chortitzaer Zentralschule von 1920 bis 1943;* typed manuscript available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg, Vol. 1085, Folder 8.

3. *Huebert Interview.*

4. There were two classes or sections for grades 5 through 7. After grade 7 more than half of the students signed up for *technikums* or trade schools. Only those who prepared for entrance into Institutes and Universities remained to complete Grade 10. There were only single classes or sections for grades 8 through 10. If student enrollment in one of the senior grades fell below 15 that class could be cancelled and the remaining students encouraged to go to Gnadenfeld.

5. In the 1941 graduating class, for example, fewer than half of the 17 graduating students had "Mennonite" names.

6. Urie Bronfenbrenner, "Education Theory and Research in Soviet Character Education," in Alex Simirenko, ed., *Social Thought in the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969): 269-299.

7. Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 15 March 1986, provides a detailed outline of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule curriculum.

8. A concise and succinct statement of the group dynamics which were to be developed in the Soviet educational system is provided in the Bronfenbrenner article referred to above. A more elaborate and complex discussion is available in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-34* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

9. Walter Kuhn, "Kommunal- und Kollektiv-wirtschaft," *Mennonitische Lehrerzeitung,* 1, No. 4 (March 1949): 19-20.

10. Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 9 May 1986.

11. Anweiler, *Geschichte.*

12. *Huebert Interview.*

13. Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 29 September 1987.

14. *Huebert Interview.*

Chapter IX
Dispersion and Destruction

1. *Huebert Interview.*

2. The situation was apparently different in some of the other Mennonite settlements, where news of the outbreak of war became known almost immediately after the invasion. See for example the autobiographical account by Anna Goerz, in the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg, Vol. 1081, Folder 6.

3. Fleischhauer and Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans,* Chapter 2 explains how the lists of all Germans in the Soviet Union were prepared, while Chapter 3 shows how they were used.

4. *Huebert Interview.*

5. Bundesarchiv, R6/616 to R6/628. A surprising number of men from other German colonies who were also evacuated in June of 1941 were able to escape and return home. Many of the younger men, evacuated in September of the same year, were able to return home when the area was occupied by the Germans.

6. *Goerz Recollections.*

7. The plight of enemy aliens in wartime has always been harsh and unpleasant. Even in cases where there was no evidence of disloyalty, and where there was no immediate or direct military threat, enemy aliens often faced very harsh treatment. The experience of the Japanese in Canada, where the threat was far less obvious or direct than in Russia, provides a useful counterpoint to those who have been particularly critical of Soviet wartime actions against their enemy aliens.

8. There is an enormous body of literature on this subject. Some of the better books dealing with the Russian-German conflict from 1941 to 1945 include: Alan Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict,* 1941-1945 (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1965); Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War: Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (London and New York: Penguin, 1972); Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1964); Gerald Reitlinger, *The House Built on Sand: The Conflicts of German Policy in Russia, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960).

9. Calvocoressi & Guy Wint, *Total War: Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (London and New York: Penguin, 1962): 171.

10. For a detailed discussion of the Ukrainian campaign see Alan Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-45* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1965), Chapter 7, entitled "Slaughter in the Ukraine."

11. Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1964): 216.

12. As quoted in Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1985): 168.

13. These estimates are given by Fleischhauer and Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans,* 87.

14. As quoted in Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonities since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, Manitoba: D.W. Friesen & Sons, 1962): 353.

15. *Anna Goerz Reminiscences,* Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Vol. 1081, Folder 6.

16. Bundesarchiv, R6/567. "Energiewirtschaft" gives details of the damage done to the dam, and its reconstruction by the Germans. See also R6/305. "Lagebericht in Dnjepropetrowsk."

17. *Anna Goerz Reminiscences.*

18. A tabulation of population figures in all the Molotschna villages before and after the evacuations is given in Helmut T. Huebert, *Hierschau: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1986): 318-319.

19. John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (North Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982): 174-5.

20. *Huebert Interview.*

Conclusion

1. Gerhard Lohrenz, "Dörfer der Molotschna," *Der Bote,* 28 November 1971, p. 2.

2. Gerhard Peters to Jacob Peters, 25 January 1925. A copy of this letter was made available by Mrs. Helga Wiebe.

3. Maria Huebert to T.D. Regehr, 27 August 1987.

4. Anna Ratzlaff, "Erinnerungen aus der Schulzeit in der Alexanderkroner Zentralschule in den Jahren 1923-1927."

5. Tina Janzen, "Die Alexanderkrone Zentral- und Handelsschule in Südrußland in der Molotschna."

Chronology
of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule
(Dates before 1918 are according to the Julian Calendar)

19 November 1905	Preliminary organizational meeting
8 December 1905	Organization of Alexanderkrone Mennonite School Society
25 April 1906	Groundbreaking ceremony
15 September 1906	First entrance examinations
17 September 1906	Official dedication and opening of the school
18 September 1906	Instruction begins
12 December 1912	Official approval to become a Handelsschule
February 1917	First Provisional Government established
26 October 1917	Bolsheviks seizure of power, followed by the abolition of Mennonite local government
March 1918	Signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk
April 1918	German troops occupy Ukraine
July 1918	Nestor Makhno returns to Ukraine after his release from prison
November 1918	German troops withdraw
November 1918 - March 1918	White Army occupation, terrorist raids by *Makhnovtsi* and organization of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz*
March 1919 -July 1919	The Makhno terror, following the defeat of General Deniken
July 1919 - December 1919	White Army under General Deniken regains partial control of the Molotschna area
30 October 1919	Murder of Mr. and Mrs. David Dick, chairman of the Alexanderkrone School Society
10 November 1919	The Blumenort massacre
December 1919 - June 1920	Red Army in control of the Molotschna area
20 June 1920	Critical battle and bombardment of Alexanderkrone
2 November 1920	Red Army decisively defeats Whites
1921 and 1922	Period of typhus epidemic and starvation
1922	New curriculum officially approved in Moscow and the school becomes a Unified Labour School *(Einheitliche Arbeitsschule)*
31 August 1926	Last of long-time pre-revolutionary teachers leave
1929	German curriculum materials for use in Unified Labour Schools is approved
1931-1933	Collectivization and dekulakization

1932	Abandonment of the "new" curriculum, and reversion to Central School *(Zentralschule)* status
1934	Preparation of the official lists of all German colonists in the USSR
September 1938	Russification of the entire curriculum; Alexanderkrone school becomes a *Desjeti-Letka*
21 June 1941	Outbreak of war between Germany and the USSR
22 June 1941	Last graduation ceremonies of the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule
late June 1941	First conscription and evacuation of able-bodied males into labour camps and battalions
July 1941	General mobilization and defensive preparations
25 August 1941	German troops cross the Dnjepr
28 August 1941	Official proclamation ordering relocation of all Germans in RSFSR and Ukraine
28 August 1941	All remaining men between the ages of 16 and 60 forcibly removed from the village
5 September 1941	All remaining German or Mennonite women, children and old people forcibly removed from the village
9 September 1941	Roumanian troops occupy Alexanderkrone
12 September 1941	German officers arrive and establish command posts

Table I
Teachers at the Alexanderkrone Zentralschule

The information in this table is drawn from a comprehensive list of teachers from 1906 to 1926 which was prepared and preserved by Isaak P. Regehr. In some respects this list differs from information contained in personal recollections of other teachers. The information about the teachers who taught at the school after 1926 is drawn from published reports and from the recollections of former students of the school.

*Denotes principal of the school

1906-07
*Franz Thiessen
Isaak P. Regehr
Herman Rempel

1907-08
*Alexander Friesen
Isaak P. Regehr
Franz Thiessen

1908-09
*Alexander Friesen
Isaak P. Regehr
Franz Thiessen ½
Ludwig Festa ½

1909-10
*P. Friesen
Isaak P. Regehr
H.D. Neufeld
H.P. Neufeld

1910-11
*P. Friesen
Isaak P. Regehr
H.P. Neufeld

1911-12
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
P. Dirks

1912-13
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
P. Dirks

1913-14
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
H.P. Neufeld
Daniel Enns
Heinrich Reimer

1914-15
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
H.P. Neufeld
Daniel Enns.

1915-16
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
H.P. Neufeld
Daniel Enns

1916-17
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
H.P. Neufeld
Daniel Enns

1917-18
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
H.P. Neufeld
Daniel Enns

1918-19
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
Peter Regehr
Daniel Enns

1919-20
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
Daniel Enns

1920-21
*V.I. Bykov
Isaak P. Regehr
Gerhard Peters
Daniel Enns

1921-22
*Gerhard Peters
Isaak P. Regehr
Isaak I. Regehr
Daniel Enns

1922-23
*Gerhard Peters
Isaak P. Regehr
Isaak I. Regehr

1923-24
*Gerhard Peters
Isaak I. Regehr
Jakob I. Regehr

1924-25
*David Wiens
Isaak I. Regehr
Jakob I. Regehr

1925-26
*David Wiens
Isaak I. Regehr
Jakob I. Regehr
Maria P. Dick

1926-27
*David P. Wiens
Maria P. Dick
Johann H. Unruh
Cornelius Lepp

1927-28
*David P. Wiens
Maria P. Dick
Johann H. Unruh
Cornelius Lepp

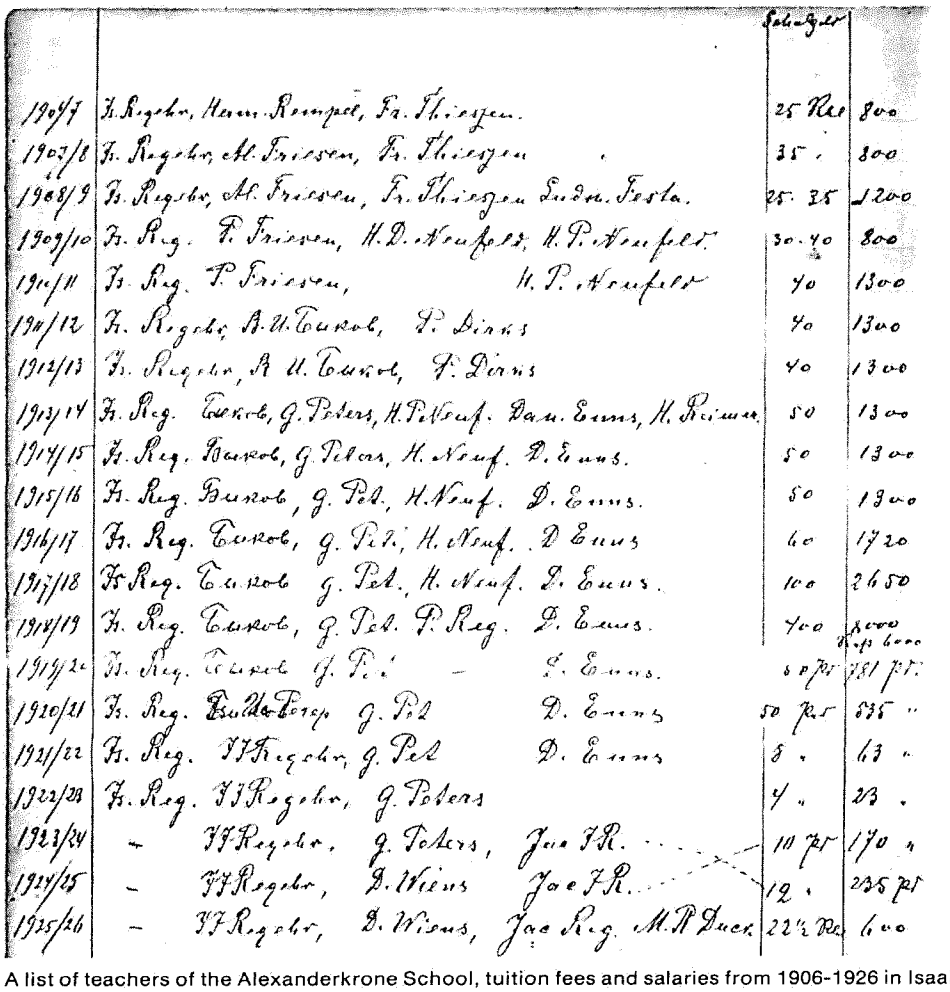
1928-29
*David P. Wiens
Maria P. Dick
Johann H. Unruh
Cornelius Lepp

1929-30
*David P. Wiens
Maria P. Dick
Johann H. Unruh
Cornelius Lepp

Teachers in the 1930s:

Ivan K. Adam	Ivan D. Moos
? ? Bergmann*	Sergie A. Nasarenko
Ivan Ivanovich Dick*	Emil F. Pfeffer
? ? Dudka	Heinrich Reimer
? ? Falkenstein*	Heinrich Ivanovich Rempel
? ? Fuchs*	? ? Seifert*
Nikolai Jakovich Harder*	? ? Steinhauser*
Ivan Ivanovich Harder*	? ? Steinhauser*
David Jacob Hildebrand	Abram Thiessen*
Vera E. Kravtschenko	Heinrich Wallman*
? ? Mainzer*	? ? Wasser*
Emil W. Meier	Pavil Mironovich Vassilenko

*Denotes teachers who are known to have been evacuated, involuntarily reassigend, or simply disappeared in the dark of night.



A list of teachers of the Alexanderkrone School, tuition fees and salaries from 1906-1926 in Isaak P. Regehr's handwriting.

Table II
Student Statistics

Year	I	II	III	IV	T	Cert.
1906-07	53	16			69	
1907-08	38	42	17		97	16
1908-09	32	29	20		81	18
1909-10	35	25	23		83	16
1910-11	40	37	24		101	18
1911-12	41	27	22		90	21
1912-13	39	33	18		90	—
1913-14	66	37	29	17	149	11
1914-15	31	40	23	14	108	12
1915-16	29	20	24	8	81	8
1916-17	68	33	28	19	148	18
1917-18	53	52	32	19	156	19
1918-19	28	37	23	18	116	12
1919-20	17	30	15	12	74	12
1920-21	18	11	18	6	53	6
1921-22	29	19	8	16	72	?
1922-23	7	6	5		18	—
1923-24	31	18	14	7	70	?
1924-25	35	18	7		60	—
1925-26	36	28	16	4	84	?

Sources: Isaak P. Regehr *Aufzeichnungen,* and detailed notes by Jacob I. Regehr.

Note: From 1906-07 until 1920-21, 586 boys and 59 girls were admitted to the school. 181 boys and 6 girls received their graduating certificates. Even in 1925-26 the number of boys greatly exceeded the number of girls, the numbers that year being 73 and 17 respectively.

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1. Interviews:

Boldt, Isaak, Saskatoon, a former student, interviewed by T.D. Regehr on 6 April 1986.

Dyck, Gerhard, Winnipeg, a former student, interviewed in Clearbrook by J.I. Regehr.

Huebert, Maria, Leamington, a former student, interviewed by T.D. Regehr in May of 1986, and again on 23 August 1987.

Konrad, Gerhard A., Clearbrook, a former student, interviewed by J.I. Regehr in March of 1987.

Thiessen, Hildegard, wife of former Alexanderkrone teacher Abram Thiessen, and her daughter Hedi Unger, Surrey, interviewed by T.D. Regehr on 10 August 1987.

Voth, Henry, Clearbrook, a former student, interviewed by J.I. Regehr on 9 July 1987.

Wiebe, Maria (nee Baerg), Leamington, a former student, interviewed with Maria Huebert by T.D. Regehr on 23 August 1987.

2. Written Recollections:

Dick, David, former student and a son of David and Katharine Dick, Apanlee, now living in Winnipeg, wrote a letter and sent pictures to T.D. Regehr, 10 May 1986.

Epp, Rueben, Dawson Creek, sent pictures of the Alexanderkrone windmill, together with a detailed technical description.

Esau, Jacob, Chairman and Secretary-Treasurer of the Alexanderkrone Mennonite School Society whose detailed recollections are published in Katharina Janzen, "Aus der Schreibtischschublade meiner Mutter," *Der Bote,* 12 October 1971, p. 11; 19 October 1971, p. 11; 26 October 1971, p. 11; 2 November 1971, p. 11; 9 November 1971, p. 11; 16 November 1971, p. 11.

Huebert, Maria, Leamington, a former student, also prepared extensive notes and wrote numerous letters in which she provided much very valuable information about the last years of the school's existence. In addition, she provided a number of letters written by her mother during the most difficult period of the 1932-33 famine. Maria, and five of her six brothers and sisters, attended the Alexanderkrone school in the 1930s.

Janzen, Tina, Clearbrook, a former student, wrote two short sketches, the first entitled "Die Alexanderkroner Zentral- und Handelsschule in Südrußland in der Molotschna," and the second, "History of the Alexanderkroner Zentralschule."

Klein, Anna, Clearbrook, a former student, wrote "Es war einmal . . . ," dated 21 April 1986.

Konrad, Gerhard, Clearbrook, a former student, provided short notes, a letter dated 15 March 1986, and pictures of the Alexanderkrone school building in the 1970s.

Lohrenz, Gerhard, a former student, wrote very extensively about many different aspects of Mennonite life in Russia. Relevant to this history are several articles in *Der Bote,* his book *Storm Tossed,* as described in greater detail below, and several detailed letters written to T.D. Regehr.

Peters, Gerhard, a former teacher, and his wife both wrote unpublished and uncompleted memoirs. These were supplemented by a letter from their daughter, Mrs.

Helga Wiebe, 11 June 1987, and a copy of a letter written by Gerhard Peters to his brother Jacob Peters, 25 January 1925.

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Ratzlaff, Anna, Clearbrook, a former student, wrote "Erinnerungen aus der Schulzeit in der Alexanderkroner Zentralschule in den Jahren 1923-1927." She also made available a letter she had received from Lenchen Unger, a former classmate, who still lives in the Soviet Union and visited Alexanderkrone in 1976.

Sudermann, Anna, Winnipeg, a former teacher and principal of the Chortitza Zentralschule, wrote "Die Chortitza Zentralschule im Zeitraum von 1842-1942," for the Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete. Later, after coming to Canada, she wrote "Die Chortitzaer Zentralschule von 1920 bis 1943," which is available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.

3. Sources in the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, West Germany.

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Bergen, Anna, "Die Flucht," Vol. 1081, Folder 6.

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Hildebrand, J.J., "Education Among the Mennonites in Russia," Unpublished manuscript.

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Sudermann, Anna, "Die Chortitzaer Zentralschule von 1920 bis 1943," Vol. 1085, Folder 8.

6. Regehr family archives collected by and in the possession of T.D. Regehr, which include: *Aufzeichnungen,* a diary and some correspondence by Isaak P. Regehr; diaries, correspondence, student essays, report cards, the uncompleted memoirs and various other personal papers kept by Isaak I. Regehr; the recollections of Mary (Mrs. Isaac I.) Regehr; various school papers and personal notes and recollections by Jacob I. Regehr; and unpublished biographies, with relevant notes, of Peter P.

Regehr, of his son Isaak Peter Regehr, and of his grandson Isaak I. Regehr, together with relevant research notes, all compiled by T.D. Regehr.

7. **Periodicals and Journals.** Unless otherwise noted all these periodicals and journals are available in original form or on microfilm at the three major Canadian Mennonite archives: the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg; the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg; and Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo.

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Heimatbuch der Deutschen aus Rußland

Mennonitische Lehrerzeitung

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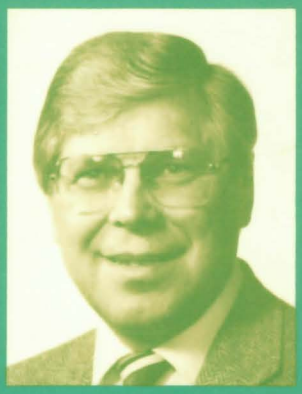

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