

Preface

I am dedicating this book to my mother, Mildred McMinimy Jacobs. It was her love of Geography and History that inspired me to seek the knowledge of where my ancestors came from and how they lived. She encouraged my scholarly pursuit and helped me compile a great deal of information. It was her love for family that kept me close to all my relatives. I actually started putting our family history into words in January 1991, but I have been storing bits and pieces of information for most of my life.

My mother was so anxious to see the finished work, but the good Lord took her home before it was finished. She died on 10 April 1991. Her spirit will always live on in the family and has helped me compile what I have thus far. I can see the importance of talking to family members while they are still alive. I would like to encourage other family members to write their memories down to share with others who want to know their history.

I want to thank all the relatives who answered my letters with information on their families. Without their help I wouldn't be able to complete this work. Thanks also to the family members who worked on their histories before me. They made my work much easier.

Early Origins of the Jacobs

The early origins of my father's family are in Europe, in the Holy Roman Empire, which eventually became Germany. Since the early centuries of the Holy Roman Empire there was a variable unbroken chain of wars between rulers, nations and religious sects. These conditions eventually forced many to flee Europe for the promise of a better life elsewhere.

When the modern state-system began to appear in the fifteenth century there were two major factions: the Holy Roman Empire, under the leadership of the Habsburgs, and the French, under the Valois family. Between these powers lay a zone from which has evolved the modern nations of Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy.

Luther's revolt, 1517-1521 spread fast and far and Germany was absorbed in social and religious strife. Charles controlled the Imperial government in Germany and maintained hereditary rule of the Habsburg lands. The activities of Luther's princely German supporters seemed to form a threat to his hold over the German States. Since Charles was a staunch Roman Catholic, he decided to fight and had to fight for the rest of his reign.

The thirty Years War, 1618-1648, was fought largely in Germany. It began as a conflict between Catholics and Protestants, and ended as an almost political struggle to reduce the power of the Habsburgs. Germany suffered severely from the fighting effects of the Thirty Year War. Seldom in history has any land suffered what Germany endured. In some districts only half of the inhabitants remained. Cities and villages by the hundreds were virtually wiped out. People had nothing but starvation and depravation to look forward to.

On August 21, 1744, Peter III of Russia married Sophia Augusta Frederica of European decent. She was received into the Greek Orthodox Church and given the name of Catherine II. Peter III assumed the throne in Russia on December 25, 1761. His reign was of short duration as Catherine started a revolution on June 28, 1762, and had herself declared the ruler of Russia. Peter was strangled on July 8, 1762. Catherine became the most arresting personality since the death of Peter the Great.

Catherine had a truly twentieth century feeling for the importance of public relations, and cared deeply that the leading rulers of the west think well of her and the state of Russia under her rule. Hence, she maintained a voluminous correspondence with famous people all over the world. To Catherine II, who wanted to make her reign an outstanding one, Russia was like an open door to unlimited opportunities.

Catherine conceived the idea to populate her eastern frontier. This contained the Wolga region which had for centuries been the stronghold of nomadic tribes, thieves, speculators and fugitives. From the beginning of Russia the Steppes and the Wolga territory could hold no settlers. Thus, for hundreds of years the grass roots had been there, inviolate and undisturbed, twining themselves within the rich dark earth,

daring man to turn the soil. To attain this end she would have to obtain immigrants to develop the region. In this way, she also hoped that the settlers would serve as a wall to keep border ruffians out of her territory, thus eliminating the need for military forces.

Herself a German, the Empress preferred immigrants of German descent who by their neatness were to set an example for her careless slovenly Russian peasants. Above all, she wanted to improve the condition of the German peasants. Her compassion stemmed from the time when, as a little girl, she saw them in dire poverty on her travels in Germany. But to help the peasants was not easy, even for an Empress. As a woman, a foreigner, and usurper owing her throne to a conspiracy, she could not act openly. Depending as she did upon the good will of the nobility, she spent hours of arduous labor arriving at plans for a mass immigration. When Catherine II succeeded in drafting her famous Manifesto, she immediately flooded Europe with pamphlets containing her alluring promises. That eventually brought thousands of settlers to her Wolga region. On December 4, 1762 Catherine invited people of all nationalities, except Jews, to come to Russia.

Unfortunately, Catherine's invitation received no response. The Holy Roman Empire was, at the time, filled with chronic unrest, a war in progress, and most of the men were away in the army. Had the people been willing to respond to her invitation, they were obviously in no position to do so. Another reason for the failure of her manifesto was its lack of assurance that life under Catherine would be any more desirable than their present existence.

Meanwhile, the Seven Year War ended leaving a further legacy of grim depression of the spirit, and sense of futility. The land was impoverished and battle-torn. Farm acres lay waste, and dwellings were crumbled. A great economic crisis swept over Europe. Men, home from the war, found their families exhausted and haggard from hunger and disease. Soldiers walked about aimlessly seeking work. Beggars, clad in rags were scarcely less respectable than those of honest workmen. They all wandered around asking alms. Their ruler, Frederick the Great of Prussia, taxed his subjects unmercifully to rebuild his army. His ideal was to keep his subjects severely utilitarian by not teaching them beyond the rudiments of reading, writing and obedience. He drove his subjects like slaves. Hatred and discontent grew to unheard of proportions. They were ready to grasp at any chance to rise above their poverty and wretchedness, so Catherine's second try fell upon waiting and eager ears.

The Second Manifesto arrived July 22, 1763. It incorporated the following points:

1. All people of foreign countries were invited to come to Russia and to settle wherever they pleased. They were promised the right to pursue their old professions or occupations.

2. All the people were to have freedom of religion, the right

to build churches and schools, and to have priests and ministers who could direct and guide their spiritual and intellectual life.

3. All those without means would be furnished the necessary money to travel to a seaport of embarkation for Russia and would also receive money to defray all traveling expenses until they reached their destination in Russia.

4. After arrival in Russia, all who needed money for a livelihood and to establish their homes would be lent money, interest-free, by the government. This money was to be paid back within ten years in three installments.

5. All the people who settled on the Wolga River in groups of colonies were to be exempt from taxes for thirty years. Those who settled in St Petersburg, Lieflana, Moscow, or other large cities and who worked for corporations or merchants were to be exempt for five years. Those settling in smaller governmental or provincial cities were to have a ten years' exemption.

6. All the people who settled on the lower Wolga had the right to choose their own form of government, the sole requirement being that they submit to the prevailing form of civil law.

7. All those settlers with money were not to be taxed if they used the money to establish themselves or for their personal wants.

8. All the male immigrants were to be exempt from military or civil duty for as indefinite time. If, however, they desired to enlist in the Russian Army voluntarily, they would receive a bonus of thirty Rubles.

9. The government encouraged establishments of factories and industries which were to be tax and toll free for ten years. They had the right to sell their wares outside of Russia.

10. All of the immigrants who settled in Russia would be free to leave the country at any time, but they would have to pay a tax on all of their effects should they elect to leave

Copies of the manifesto were printed and disseminated throughout the Holy Roman Empire. The upsurge of spirits in the people was incredible. The promises were almost beyond belief. Exemption from military service, alone, would have been enough to persuade most of them to cast their lot with the Empress. The manifesto was read and discussed at meetings, by groups in the streets and by their families in the privacy of their homes. Thousands from all parts of the country prepared to leave. Among them were reflected all classes of society: nobility, artisans, craftsmen, officers and soldiers, doctors, students, as well as vagabonds and criminals. The latter found this an easy opportunity to escape officers of the law.

This exodus of Germans was a dramatic episode in European history. They sold what little property they had, paid their debts and tied their remaining belongings together to take along. With bundles on their backs, they set out on the hot weary trek to the sea. They trusted in themselves and put their lives in God's hands. What would come was the will of God. Eventually most of our ancestors settled near Katharenastadt and Saratow in the Volga Region on the Russian Steppes.

It was about 500 miles from Frankfort, Germany to Lubeck, on the Baltic Sea. When they got there, ships were supposed to be waiting to take them across the sea to Russia. It took most of the Germans about 60 days to make that trek because many were not fit for marching such a long distance and they were often refused a resting place in the villages through which they passed. When they got to Lubeck, there were no ships. Just wooden barracks that had been hastily put together by the Russians to house them for the winter. They were told that ice would be forming along the Russian rivers and thus they had to spend the winter in barracks. There were quarrels due to the cramped conditions, that winter, but there were also many friendships formed. Two hundred and fifty couples were married during that winter and also that many babies were born. Some lost their enthusiasm and were ready to turn back to their former homes. They found guards watching them day and night. Those attempting to escape were caught and returned.

When winter did set in many almost froze to death. Several became sick and died. Needless to say the immigrants fell prey to all kinds of tricksters who misinformed them and lied to them. There was plenty of time to relieve the gullible of their surplus goods and tools and their small hoard of money.

Finally in April 1766 the first group of people were allowed to sail for the Volga Region. As each person boarded the ship they received 16 schillings, about \$2.25, to be used for food on the trip. Food consisted of biscuits, pickled meat, bread, wine and brandy. The trip from Lubeck to Kromstadt, Russia normally took 11 days, but many of the ships were delayed up to six weeks because of strong winds.

They were told that Russia was a land of milk and honey, that the climate was mild, the soil fertile and productive. They were also told they would be given the right to choose the kind of work they were able to do best. The promises were fine bait, but they were greatly disappointed. There were many angry men when they discovered it was a farce. Now, no matter what their trade was, they wanted everybody to become farmers, even though they knew nothing about it. If they refused they would be whipped and sent off regardless. They were then given six pfennige (about four cents) per person daily for an allowance.

Upon their arrival a Kostroma, the immigrants were divided among the Russian people who shared their homes with them. To their surprise and disgust, they had to get used to a new custom, where the chickens, cows and sheep were brought into the house. The unfamiliar food and filth, the stench of the animals, along

with the strange language made this period a nightmare.

The much hoped for "Garden of Eden" turned out to be a heart breaking disappointment. There was nothing but the sky above and the bare earth below on which to tread, sleep and attempt to find shelter. The food, tools and seeds that Catherine promised, proved to be unsatisfactory, and tardy. The only shelters they would be able to manage were Russian style dugouts. It was simple to construct. A hole was dug out and the earth banked along its edges and the roof was made from branches laid close together and sealed with a layer of earth and clay. These dugouts were dark, inclined to be damp and accumulated odor due to the lack of ventilation in the confined space. But it had one good point, since it was two-thirds underground, it was well below the frost line. It was protected from the wind and could be kept warm with little fuel. As many as four families shared one dugout. Building shelters cost the settlers a crop that summer. Winter came early and was fierce and long. Sometimes they were confined to their holes for weeks at a time. Food allotted them was barely enough to keep them alive. Their meat ration included rats and mice.

With spring came new hope. It didn't even matter that the Volga flooded washing most of them out of their dugouts. Everyone thought they had seen the worst that Russia had to offer and they had survived. As soon as the ground dried, they began to plant crops. They were provided with seed wheat, rye and barley. Each family was given two broken-down horses, a handmade wooden plow, a sickle, hatchet, rake, wagon, a cow and a few much-needed food staples. The land proved to be rich and well adapted for wheat raising. The immigrants made a bold attempt at carving a living from the stubborn soil.

Late in the summer some repaired their dugouts, while others built houses above ground with mud bricks. That was the best they could manage for the second winter. During zero weather, animals were housed under the same roof, survival techniques they learned from their Russian neighbors.

In all, about 104 colonies, 45 on the mountain side and 59 on the valley side of the Volga were founded. Most of our ancestors who eventually settled in Ellis County, Kansas came from the Steppes or the valley side.

The German people gradually overcame most difficulties through their energy, industry and thrift, the national traits they possessed. For the first 10 years their crops were failures and to ward off starvation, they were forced to apply to the government for food. They also had to survive attacks from barbaric tribes of nomads who also lived on the steppes. When the Kirghiz would attack, they would murder and kidnap anyone they could find. The settlers had no defense against them except to hide. Four colonies were wiped out completely.

Families were small in the early years of the Russian settlement because so many children died from diseases like measles, whooping cough and diphtheria. Out of 11 or 12 children only 4 to 6 survived to maturity. Doctors were almost unheard of,

with only one or two trained doctors for populations of 10 to 15 thousand. A great deal of treating the sick was left to unlicensed men and women. Each village usually had a bone-setter and masseuse, a midwife and a healer.

By the middle of the ninth century, they enjoyed a measure of peace, prosperity and happiness, not dreamed of in their early years. If settlers had any money leftover, they put it in a pot and buried it for safekeeping.

Christians remained staunch in their religious beliefs despite hardships and scarcity of churches and religious services. Their faith, many times, was their only hope. The Roman Catholic church eventually sent the Capuchin, Franciscan and Dominican order priests to Russia. There were many Lutheran Ministers sent also. The Catholics and Lutherans helped each other. Priests baptized, preformed marriages and conducted funerals on the hillside, while Lutheran ministers reciprocated for the villages on the plain side. The Russian government contributed a large amount of money toward the establishment of the Catholic College at Saratow and bestowed a yearly endowment for the upkeep. Among the first priests educated there were Father Andreas Brungardt and his brother Michael Brungardt.

Only males were allowed to attend school. A girls education was complete after she learned to read her prayer book, which she usually accomplished in religious instructions. Periodically, the Russian government tried to install Russian teachers in the villages. As the colonists had the right of self-government they always managed to keep the Russian teachers out of their midst. Their school teachers had all studied the Russian language, but frequently were required to take examinations to prove that they were able to teach Russian. If they passed the tests the Crown left them alone, provided they promised to teach the pupils the language of the country. The hard-headed Germans were not about to have the school teacher instruct their children in the Russian language. Only a smattering of the Russian language was acquired by the pupils through the exciting tales of Russia which were told by the teacher again and again.

Kamenka Russia was founded in 1764 by Catholic immigrants from various parts of Germany. Immigration from Germany during these years came mostly from the towns of Hesse, Rhineland, Saxony, Wurthenberg, Bavaria, Westphalis, Hannover, Halstein, Alsace, and Lorraine. At the general Russian census of 1788, Kamenka had grown to 97 families in 24 years. It is not known when John Jacob Urban and his wife Anna Marie Reeb were born, but their oldest son Joseph was born in Kamenka on 18 March 1818. He died on 11 January 1881 at 63 years of age. He was the first pioneer to be buried in Pheifer, Kansas. A man sent by Catherine the Great to tour the Volga region in 1793 and 1794 reported the Kamenka is one of the most flourishing towns, possessing great wealth, among the Catholic colonies. It has excellent water wells, sunk through loam about 9 feet deep. Kamenka is located on the Ilawlja River, a tributary of the Don in the provence of Sartov on the Bergeite, or mountain side of the Volga River.

Wealth to the colonists in Russia in the years between 1800 and 1874 meant having enough to eat, a moderate home and courtyard, with good sheds and barns and orchards; a little extra money for emergencies and a few animals such as cows, horses and sheep. White painted frame and brick houses stood in straight rows along the streets. Each village had a church, usually built of brick, with steeples towering above. As time went on, however, their serene and peaceful life began to wane. Shortage of land became a major dissatisfaction. People had outgrown their primitive life. All land was crown-owned except village property. No one could obtain ownership of crown land, either through purchase or claim. The future of the coming generation was anything but promising. The favors Catherine the Great had granted the Germans, exemption from military service, and their superior air toward their Russian neighbors aroused much jealousy and resentment. Catherine was dead now and her Successor, Alexander II passed a military law on January 13, 1874 that all men between the ages of sixteen and forty, without exception would be drafted into the army. This ultimately expedited the emigration to America. The biggest concern of the religious Germans was that for six years of their service their young men would have no opportunity to practice their own religion. They were also not allowed to see their families or leave on furlough for the six years. After petitioning the Russian Government, the Germans were issued a reprieve from military service for the period of 10 years. During that time the Germans could leave Russia after giving 10% of their property to the Government for passports.

The United States government had given the Kansas Pacific Railroad Co alternate sections of land(640 acres) in a twenty mile strip on each side of the right-of-way as an inducement for building the railroad through Kansas. The Railroad Company was anxious to have the area settled and developed. As a promotional scheme the Railroad Co. distributed pamphlets extolling the beauty and fertility of the plains. The pamphlets reached all parts of the world, even into the interior of Russia. Three thousand of the colonists gathered at the urging of Balthasar Brungardt and the leaflets were thoroughly read and explained. The majority of those present decided to send five delegates to America to investigate the land. On their return to Russia they brought a pound of soil, some prairie grass, paper money, and all kinds of descriptive literature.

After the first young men in the draft were inducted into the army November 24, 1874 plans for the exodus were made in earnest. The settlers took wagons about 40 miles to Kosakenstadt, boarded boats on the Volga and in a nights journey arrived in Saratow. There they boarded the train to take them to Bremen, Germany where they would sail for America. Each person was only allowed 100lbs of belongings or they had to pay extra. Dark clothes were worn by all men, women and children which solved the problem of changing, washing and carrying too many clothes. Since there were no rest rooms or running water in the

coaches, each family carried a chamber pot, a tin basin and a can of water. The water can was filled at the stations and the chamber pots were emptied out the train windows. At Koslow they changed trains. The train took them through Grjasi where it turned northwesterly toward the city of Orel. They passed through Smolensk and the Polish city of Wetebsk. As they passed through Germany they found hills rivers and beautiful landmarks. great towers, cathedrals and museums which was a never ending source of admiration. After a three day stay in Bremen they boarded one of the North-German-Lloyd ships for their journey. The fare was 150 Rubles for an adult ticket, 75 Rubles for half ticket, and 38 Rubles for a quarter ticket. Some people with more money had to lend those with less some money to afford the crossing. From Bremerhafen the ship sailed toward the English Channel and then out to sea. Most of the mothers and children stayed in steerage while the men and young people spent much time on deck, dancing, playing cards, basking in the sun and walking around the crowded decks. Most ships took fourteen days or longer for the voyage depending on the weather. The days seemed endless on the ship when the weather was stormy. It took all of those who were up and well to take care of the sick. The impure air and stench down in steerage was almost unbearable.

When land was first spotted in the New York harbor, there was an almost uncontrollable excitement among the crowds. Doctors came aboard the ship to immunize the emigrants. They had to stay aboard ship one more night and debark in the morning. They all gazed in admiration at the buildings and dazzling lights more beautiful than the stars in heaven. Spirits ran high among the emigrants. Some were almost beside themselves with joy. The next morning they were taken across in small boats to the nearest railroad station where a long train stood on the track waiting to take the emigrants across country to Kansas. They were fascinated by the country side as the train slipped by villages of wood houses and white churches with tall steeples. Thickets of trees starting to turn red and yellow, factories, farmlands, bridges, and hills.

Farther west the country was more flat and more deserted looking. Towns were few and far between. The emigrants felt very strange by the time they got to St. Louis. Most had never seen Negroes before, and there they seemed think as flies. They met a land agent at Kansas City who came to aid them if necessary. When they got to their final destination, they knelt and prayed "Praise the Lord".

Little did the new settlers know that their new home would match ounce for ounce and pound for pound the hardships and grief their forbearers had endured to conquer the wild winds of the Russian Steppes.