

# Recollections and Reflections

## Schönbrunn 1885-1920

Homestead of grandfather Kornelius H. Enns  
(b. 8/28/1853)

and

home of our family  
1903-10 and 1916-20.

by Mary Kornelsen

Written in the German language in May 1990

*Translated by John Enns*

My earliest recollections begin in 1909 when peace and harmony were the order of the day. In 1910, father sold his share of grandfather's estate to uncle Heron Enns and entered into a partnership with a friend, J. Neufeld, buying a general store in a northern city Doglekanovo which was near Ufa, a city on the "transiberian" railroad where a group of Mennonites had settled. This business was prosperous until the 1914 war broke out and because too much was sold on credit they had to declare bankruptcy in 1915 when father was due to be drafted into military service.

Since mother, with 7 children, did not want to stay in the far north, the family moved back to Schönfeld near Schönbrunn. Father was permitted to take a position as an "estate" manager for a Mr. P. Heidebrecht instead of military service because the harvest was to be brought in. The family had left all belongings in storage in the north and because of the war, nothing could be shipped south. Father had leased his country estate to his farm manager, Mr. Nachtigal. So, penniless and destitute, it was nice to find a house for his family in Schönfeld and the house that he was able to move into was well equipped with the essential furnishings and utensils. Also a good household staff: two maids, a woman to cook for the farm help, and a farm foreman. These estates had a total of about 30 workers. The owner, Mr Heidebrecht, had four sons. All had been drafted into the army. Father was busy keeping machinery in working order during this harvest time and was treated by his boss as his own son. At Christmas our whole family was asked to his house and we all received gifts. On Christmas Eve we received word that our farm foreman had been killed in battle (he had been drafted after the harvest was in) and father received his call for military duty. It was a troubled period. Father was able to come home on leave periodically in 1916 and 1917 for the harvest.

The war ended in mid 1917 and the revolutionary upheaval took hold. A new chapter in our lives began. Father took one more trip north to check on his belongings but all his farm and furnishings in storage had been confiscated. We were among the first to be disenfranchised at that time. Father still wanted to move back up north but his relatives and friends discouraged him. He had brought a few belongings back from the north that friends had been able to save for him. Among these were 2 dolls (mine and Margaret's). The summer of 1917 while father was in the army we spent with grandparents "Janzen" not far from Schönfeld.

I must return to 1916. father was on leave and called on the widow of our farm foreman to tell her he would help as much as he could to find her work because Mr. Heidebrecht had lost both his estates and had fled to stay with relatives. Uncle John P. Dick lived nearby in Schönbrunn and was in need of a cook for the workers. His foreman was a bachelor so the widow with 3 children moved in and within a year they married. When Mennonites were forbidden to hire cheap Russian labourers they had to let the couple go. The following year this law was changed but the whole district of Schönbrunn, Schönfeld, and surrounding estates was disrupted. Late in 1917 we moved back to our homestead in Schönbrunn. With gifts of furniture and 2 cows from relatives and friends, a new start was made. But not for long.

The revolution had opened all prison gates. Gangs of bandits came into their own. Pilfering, raping, and killing were almost daily events. Many of our people were murdered. Others fled to the "mother colony" Molotchna during this upheaval. Since we thought ourselves to be of the poorest, we didn't feel our little hamlet Schönbrunn would be attacked. But we were wrong.

Shortly after our neighbour Uncle John Dick's mother passed away in 1919, he married. He and his wife left Schönbrunn for the Molotchna as others had before. With the loss of home and with only what could be loaded on a couple of wagons, they were penniless too. We were all in the same boat.

In 1919 we had a father and daughter (Russian) as helpers: a very nice pair. Cousins of our mother, a Dyck family with four sons, came to us during one night. They had fled from their estate. The next evening a couple of armed bandits stormed into our house. When they saw all the men they just walked through the house to our neighbours the Dicks. There they took the team and wagon belonging to another gang of robbers who were in Dicks' house and left. Thinking we would be blamed for this Mother woke us to tell us they were going to Dicks' house to tell the robbers that their team had been stolen by another gang. A little while later I heard two gunshots. I jumped out of bed thinking that our parents had been shot. as I was on my knees praying for God's help, Uncle John Dyck came in and told me our parents had just walked by. They had been forced to ready a team and wagon for the bandits who had then ordered father to take them to the next village.



Mother insisted that the bandits promise her that father would be permitted to return unharmed. After repeated threats to shoot him, he reminded them "you promised my wife I would return unharmed." The bandits eventually found their own team and wagon and father returned. It was with thankful hearts that all present felt a miracle had happened that night. The bandits planned to drive all owners from their homes and the events proved this to be so. The next day the Dicks left and also the Mathieses, our neighbours on the other side. The empty houses in Schönbrunn were being used temporarily by people of the area who had fled their estates. A few days later I saw mother saying goodbye to our maid who had always called her Mom. "God be with you, will we ever see you again?" were her parting words. That winter when army manouvres were a daily event, my brother Abe (16 years old) was drafted to drive a wagon full of infantry men toward a front. Some were ill and couldn't walk. The wagon and Abe returned 14 days later. He had contracted typhoid fever and although he had been wearing a heavy overcoat, the illness and the exposure to such bad weather in an open wagon caused him to lose consciousness. The horses had found their way home. "it is a miracle that he is alive," said the Russian doctor who visited him twice that winter. Mother and Katie both came down with the same illness. I was spared.

Father was entrusted with records and moneys from people who had fled their estates and this seemed to be the reason for the raids by the bandits. Every estate owner had left a watchman to look after the animals etc. All thought they would return in the spring. The last brutal raid by bandits took place in May of 1920 on a full moonlit night.

Father had been warned by a neighbour's hired man that we should all leave within three days. Thus the men all kept watch armed with clubs. they heard shots. Mr. Beidinger living in Dicks' house next door had been wounded. He ran into the woods. The bandits realized they had hit the wrong man. They were looking for father. They came at once to our house. Mother wouldn't open the door and they left but returned shortly with Mrs. Beidinger. They broke a window and Mrs. Beidinger called "Please open up—they have killed my man and will kill me too if you don't open." So mother opened the door. She was immediately pulled down the steps and clubbed with a revolver on the head and face. They dragged her into the yard and I thought "they have killed her" for she



made no sound. Abe saw this and grabbed an axe to go to her aid but Neil grabbed him saying if you go they will kill us all. But with that the bandits were in the house cursing and swearing and ransacking the house. They asked me to get a lamp. I tried to light it but was shaking with fright. One of them grabbed the matches and I ran to help mother, who was near collapse, and brought her into the kitchen. She told me quietly to take all the clothes in the laundry basket and hide them in the stable. Abe and Neil had to get a team and wagon ready and bring it to the front. The bandits were still threatening mother asking "Where is your man?" She said, "You have shot him." They loaded Neil up with clothes and told him to take them to the wagon. I was loaded up with clothes too but I managed to throw them behind the door. Finally, with nothing more to take, they were about to leave but insisted on taking Abe along as hostage and driver. Father had been hiding in the woods. When he came back we all prayed that Abe would return. We helped Mrs. Beidinger look for her husband. He had died from the gunshot wound and we helped to bury him the next day. That night we felt the power of prayer but I didn't believe we would see Abe again. The following day was hectic. Father helped to bury Mr. Beidinger and we received another warning to leave. We had two horses left and an old farm wagon. A makeshift bed was made up for mother on the wagon. She was in bad shape. Her face was swollen and she looked horrible. Then I was told that she was expecting yet another child. We packed what we could find to load onto the wagon but space was limited because of the bed and room needed for the small children. We had been able to rent two more wagons to bring some things such as utensils and bedding along. Our two day trip with all this brought us to father's cousin in Halbstadt.

Schönbrunn was finished.