

Interview with Anton “Tony” Metz (TM)

With comments by Celestina Metz (CM)

Conducted by Brother Placid Gross (BG)

November 17, 1998

Dickinson, North Dakota

Transcription by Margaret Templin

Edited and Proofread by Lena Paris

BG: Today is November 17, 1998. I am Brother Placid Gross a volunteer interviewer for the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection of the North Dakota State University Library at the North Dakota State University in Fargo North Dakota. We are at the home of Tony Metz in Dickinson, North Dakota.

BG: What is your name?

TM: My name is Tony Metz and we have lived in Dickinson for 26 years.

BG: Your date of birth is?

TM: I was born December 19, 1912.

BG: Where were you born?

TM: I was born on a farm north of New Hradec.

BG: What is the name of your wife?

TM: Celestina Metz.

BG: When did you get married?

TM: July 10, 1934.

BG: What was your father's name?

TM: My father's name was Joseph Metz. My mother's name was Margaret Haag.

BG: Do you know when your father was born?

TM: No, but I can look it up.

BG: Do you know where they [your parents] came from in Russia?

CM: They came from Germany to Russia, and then to South America. They came here [to the U.S.] from Argentina in South America.

BG: You don't remember what town in Russia they came from?

TM: No. You know I had a stroke and since that time I can't remember.

BG: What was your father's occupation?

TM: [He was a] carpenter.

BG: So when he was in Argentina he was a carpenter?

TM: Yes in Russia, I guess he must have been a farmer.

CM: He went to Argentina when he was quite young.

BG: You say your father was born in Russia. Do you know how old he was when he went to [Argentina]?

TM: No.

BREAK IN DIALOGUE

TM: He caught on fire and was burning. He caught him and put him in the water tank to get the fire out.

BG: He was two years old?

TM: Two and a half years old.

BG: And his name was Ben, like Benedict or Benjamin?

TM: Benjamin

BG: Where is he buried?

CM: Out in that cemetery north of town.

TM: Out in the Roshau yard, in the cemetery there.

BG: In the yard? Is there a farm there?

CM: There was a farm there, just west of the church.

BG: That was everybody's cemetery?

TM: Yes. Mr. Roshau made the coffin and the cross.

BG: We should put that on again how it came about. What you read before about when he left Russia. Ok, that is [about] Tony's parents now or is it just his mother?

CM: No. That's both of them. You see Ma [Tony's mother] came over from Russia at the age of sixteen. She went to Argentina [South America]. They were married in Argentina. Dad had been there before her. They lived there until 1909 when they came to the United States. They farmed in Dunn County until 1922 when they moved to Stark County. They lived there until they retired due to ill health. Then they moved to Dickinson.

BG: And they are buried in St. Joseph's cemetery?

TM: Yes. They belonged to St. Joseph's right away when they moved into town [Dickinson].

BG: Then your dad was younger when he moved to Argentina?

CM: I had heard he was 19.

- TM:** I thought 16.
- CM:** No, Ma was 16. I had Dad's history about when he moved there [to Argentina].
- BG:** So, they both went to Argentina with their parents?
- CM:** No, Ma went over with her sister.
- BG:** Your ma's parents are buried in Russia. Then she [ma] came to Argentina and then to North Dakota.
- CM:** Dad came up here, but his parents moved to Argentina and stayed there a few years. Just dad came to the U.S.
- BG:** So, are they buried in Argentina?
- CM:** The grandparents and brothers.
- TM:** Two of my dad's brothers had two sons. Both sons became priests. The Metz grandparents are buried in Argentina.
- BG:** Did they talk about what it was like in Argentina? Did they tell you what it was like down there?
- TM:** No. We never talked about it.
- CM:** They raised sugar beets down there. I remember talking to Dad about eating sugar beets.
- BG:** So they could talk Spanish and German, but he couldn't talk Russian?
- TM:** I don't know if he could talk Russian. He could talk English after he came over here.
- BG:** Was it warm down in Argentina? Did they have winter also?
- TM:** I don't remember him talking about that. I guess when they first came over they talked about it, but after we grew up we didn't talk about it anymore.
- BG:** What made them come to Dickinson in North Dakota?
- CM:** Well some of Mother's brothers and sisters had moved over here. They came here from Russia, and so they came up here too. They lived right next door, his mother's brother, only about a block apart.
- TM:** Where we lived was about one block from my mother's brother, John Haag, in North Dakota on a farm north of Dickinson. One of my mother's sisters was married to Anton Armbrust (SP) 172. Have you heard of Anton Armbrust? There were two of them. One they called "The Red" and one they called "The Black". The "Red" was sheriff of Dickinson. And mother's brother-in-law, Anton Armbrust, lived right next to St. Joseph's Church.
- BG:** Did your dad have brothers and sisters here [in America]?
- TM:** No. My dad was the only Metz here that I know of.
- BG:** Your dad's brothers and sisters and his parents stayed in Argentina?
- TM:** Yes. And his parents stayed in Argentina.
- BG:** Your mother came over here with some of her brothers and sisters? Did all of them come over here?

- TM:** No, not as far as I know.
- CM:** I have it here that he [dad] went to Argentina at the age of 15.
- BG:** How many of your mother's brothers and sisters came over here?
- TM:** There are two brothers that I know of [that came over] but there was more than that [in the family].
- CM:** I don't think that any of them went to Argentina, I think all that came over here [to the U.S.].
- TM:** Some of them came here and one of them moved to Seattle, Washington.
- CM:** They lost track of one sister.
- BG:** They don't know where she went? Did she perhaps stay in Russia?
- CM:** That's the one who went to South America with Ma. Where she went from there no one knows. They just lost track of her.
- BG:** She stayed in South America then?
- CM:** They don't know. Anyway they lost complete track of her.
- BG:** One sister went to South America and all the rest came to America. Did they all come at the same time?
- CM:** I don't know. Mother couldn't write so she didn't write [what happened].
- BG:** Did you get letters from South America?
- CM:** No. I don't remember.
- TM:** Yes. They used to a long time ago. They got letters from Russia but from South America, I don't remember if we got any. I know my mother wouldn't talk American. When someone talked American to her she answered them in German. Dad was different, he would try to talk in any language.
- BG:** So your mother never really learned much English?
- CM:** She didn't care to either.
- TM:** She couldn't read or write as far as I know. I never saw my mother with a recipe for anything she cooked. She was a good cook and cooked a lot of things but she never had a recipe as far as I know, she didn't need any. I never saw her write. When they went to town and she needed some groceries she told Dad, "Write this up on a piece of paper." She was afraid she wouldn't remember it but she couldn't write.
- She was almost as bad off as I am. I can't write that good either. I went to school until seven grade and then I went out north on the farm. We had one farm six miles north of New Hradec and one six miles southeast of New Hradec. I went out there with them most of the time. I didn't have a pencil or paper or anything to read or write with. So, I forgot most of what I learned. I could figure some arithmetic before I had that stroke, and could find out how many bushels were in a bin or anything you wanted me to figure. But reading and writing I was no good.
- BG:** You always talked German when you were young?

- TM:** Actually when we went some place we talked the American language. We talked the American language until the first one went to school, Lester. He had to talk the American language. We decided we had better learn the American language, so when the rest went to school they would know [how to speak English].
- BG:** So you started talking the American language. You didn't talk German that much anymore? Could you still talk it now if you wanted to?
- TM:** Oh, yes.
- CM:** I don't think they could sell us.
- BG:** No, I don't think so. Your folks didn't speak Spanish here either?
- TM:** No.
- CM:** Ma didn't know how [to speak Spanish].
- BG:** Your dad knew how, but there was no one here for him to talk it with.
- TM:** We went out west and stopped at my sister's daughter. She was married to a Spanish man. He said after we had left that for someone to be here as long my dad had been, he remembered a lot more than he thought he would. My dad had a good memory.
- BG:** Was there any connection with you and the Shaefer's with Nick Shaefer's? Nick and his parents came up here from South America?
- TM:** I don't remember.
- CM:** Yes, they used to live up at Subiaco Manor.
- BG:** He still is there.
- CM:** Is he?
- BG:** He is not at Subiaco anymore, he is at Evergreen. Ida Shaefer lives near the hospital. They came from Argentina and they must have known each other down there.
- When you were young what chores, or farm work, did you enjoy doing?
- TM:** It was all farm work. I milked cows. We had pigs and everything. I always used to run the binder and the header. I enjoyed working with the horses.
- BG:** How many horses does it take to run the header?
- TM:** Four. Some people used to run six but we always had four. There would be horses behind the header to kind of push. When you turn the corner you would have to turn out to pull them around.
- BG:** When those two horses went out how did the other two go around?
- TM:** Well they would go side ways.
- BG:** I know that two horses would go out...

- TM:** Then those two would move the header (back-end) over and those two horses would move over and line them up straight. They could make sharp corners, up the hills, through the wheat.
- CM:** The second day after I was married I had to drive the header box. That was my honeymoon. I went with my father-in-law.
- BG:** What did you have to do in the header box?
- CM:** I drove the horses on the box and he put the grain in the box.
- BG:** Then you helped unload it, I suppose, or did you set the stack?
- CM:** No, I don't think I had to set the stack. I just had to drive the horses.
- TM:** I unloaded it. I had to change the team. Sometimes they were slow so I had to help change them. The horses, if you had made a round, would follow the tracks from before.
- BG:** The horse could walk in the track of the big wheel?
- TM:** Yes. I tell you a horse is smarter than people think they are. I have handled enough I know how smart they are.
- BG:** Did you break horses, too?
- TM:** Oh, yes. I've broke lots of them and I enjoyed it.
- BG:** You raised your own horses?
- TM:** Yes. We raised them most of the time. I traded a lot. I broke the horses and sold them. I got a little money to boot to buy a wild one.
- CM:** That's what we lived on when we were first married, horses that he traded and broke.
- BG:** Did you brake horses for riding too?
- TM:** Well, I wasn't a good cowboy but I broke them for riding. I broke most for riding. I used to go out and break them for riding, but I didn't let them buck, I wasn't good enough. I went out and calmed them down. We traded one who had never had a rope or halter on who was five years old, from Mr. Hecker. He was my brother Julius son's horse and Old Max didn't have him. All he did was chase cattle. Julius couldn't hook him up as he was scared of him. So I went out and hooked him up and in two days I came over there and was riding him bareback. When I came over, Mrs. Hecker never would come out if someone came in the yard until they knocked on the door. That day [when I was there] they all came out. I came up to the house and threw the lines out and turned around and slid off the back. They were so surprised. I have never been scared of a horse.
- BG:** How many horses did you have on the binder?
- TM:** Four on the binder.
- BG:** Headering was hard work.
- CM:** Years ago it was all hard labor.

- BG:** Did you drive the horses and run the binder? That was a lot of stuff to do.
- TM:** That never bothered me. That was one thing my dad taught us boys how to run the binder. I never remember him running a binder. If there was one loose bundle he stopped us and set that binder to make no loose bundles. He could set that binder just so.
- BG:** Did you always have a binder when you were growing up? Did you always have a binder?
- TM:** Yes, when I grew up. When Dad first come over, the first year, he didn't have a binder.
- BG:** They probably cut it by hand.
- TM:** I don't remember, but I remember they used to have to cut it and put it in a sack and carry the sack on their back into the granary to dump it.
- BG:** Carry it into the granary?
- TM:** Yes. That was hard work. Not everybody can pick up a sack of wheat and throw it on their back and walk in with it.
- BG:** How heavy is a sack?
- TM:** 2 bushels would be about 150 to 160 pounds, depending on the wheat. When I was single we had a grinder up-stairs and Steve and Dad filled the sacks and I took them and carried them over into the barn up-stairs. Some barley and some rye, and the rye weighed about as much as wheat. I had to carry the sacks about half a block.
- BG:** That would be a lot of hard work.
- TM:** I could pick up a sack of wheat or barley and throw it on my back to carry.
- BG:** You plowed with the horses?
- TM:** Yes. We plowed and dragged. With the drag you had to walk behind it. We also drilled.
- BG:** How many horses did you use to drill?
- TM:** Four on the drill. We sometimes had five horses on the plow. To plow we had five, two in the lead and three in the back. Then we had gas instead of the horses but we could hardly afford the gas. So I plowed with a tractor plow and had seven horses on there. With a tractor disk I had eight horses, four in the lead and four behind.
- BG:** That's a lot of horses to hitch up and to get ready. When you plowed with seven horses, how many plowshares did you have?
- TM:** We had three.
- BG:** I'll bet it was cold sitting out there all day long.
- TM:** With the tractor plow I had to stand. There was no seat. It was the same with the disk.
- BG:** Did you have enough warm clothes?
- TM:** Oh, yes. I can take a lot of cold.

- CM:** He wonders why he has arthritis now.
- BG:** How many cows did you milk when you were younger? Those that belonged to your folks.
- TM:** We had about five or six. My folks, I guess, had about ten, twelve or fifteen cows. It depended on how many were fresh.
- BG:** Did you have a cream separator all the time?
- TM:** All the time. They have to skim it now but not then.
- BG:** What did you do with the cream?
- TM:** We separated it, made butter and sold some cream to the creamery.
- CM:** At that time we didn't have a creamery yet.
- BG:** You brought your cream to Dickinson then?
- TM:** Yes.
- BG:** How did you keep it cool so it wouldn't sour?
- TM:** We had a good root cellar. It would sour but they bought it. When we moved into this place dad built a root cellar. You could get down to it from the house. You could keep the potatoes down there too, and they would keep until you got new ones. Out there, at the other place, we used to have a good root cellar too.
- BG:** We talked a little about school but tell me again, how long did you go to school?
- TM:** The first year I went to school for five months and she [the teacher] got sick so we didn't have any school. The next year we moved here where we had eight months of school. I had the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade, I think. I know I went to school in the seventh grade, but I had to stay home in the fall to help. In the spring I had to stay out of school early because I had to help in the fields. That's why I say I ain't got much education but I manage.
- BG:** How old were you when you quit school, about thirteen?
- TM:** I think I must have been, I can't really tell you.
- BG:** Since you went to the seventh grade you must have been about thirteen.
- CM:** About fourteen or fifteen maybe.
- BG:** So you didn't know any English until you started school?
- TM:** Well, I learned some English because the older brothers and sisters could talk German or English. And my dad could tell you anything. When I went to school all the kids came to the teacher and asked how to do one problem. I didn't and she couldn't get it. Finally she said, "Tony did you get your arithmetic?"
- I said, "Yes."
- She said, "Did you get that problem?"

I said, "Yes."

She said, "Will you come to the board and do it?"

I said, "Yes." I went to the board and did it. She looked at me a little and said it was right. I had the right answer so she asked me who helped me.

I said, "My dad."

She said, "Well you have a good dad because I couldn't figure it out until you showed it to me."

BG: That's good. Did you have good teachers? Where did your teachers come from?

TM: At that time even after our kids went to school my niece came down [to teach].

CM: They were only out of high school, and taught school right after they got out of high school. They didn't have to have college then.

BG: I was just wondering if they were good teachers?

TM: Some of them were good. The one that couldn't get that problem was a good teacher. She had twenty-seven kids in every grade.

BG: All eight grades?

TM: Yes. She must have been good.

BG: When you went to church was it in German?

TM: Yes, church was in German.

CM: I think at that time most of it was in Latin. The sermon was probably in German but everything was Latin.

TM: I was a Mass Server but I could never talk Latin.

BG: When you went to St. Anthony's Church did your parents help establish and build that church?

TM: Yes. They and everybody offered to give so much to the church. I wouldn't know about the first church building but the second one they did. The first one burned down. They had a parish house, and a schoolhouse there where the kids went to Sunday school or learned this or that. I remember that.

BG: Do you remember funerals from when you were small?

TM: Yes.

BG: What did they do? Did they have a wake in the house?

TM: Yes. They had the coffin in the house.

CM: Yes. I remember that too.

TM: When my brother Martin died. He got killed at Yakima, Washington. Dad sent them two tickets to come to Dickinson on the train, he and his wife. They took him [Martin] out to my folks' place and someone was up day and night. Every so often they would say the rosary.

BG: Why did they stay up all night?

CM: That was their tradition. I remember when we were home that day. We stayed awake all night long.

BG: Did they think that maybe the person was going to wake up?

TM: No. Someone was with them and prayed for them all the time. Every so often they all got together, some even played cards. They couldn't all sit there all the time. Then every so often they would say the rosary.

I remember when John Haag died out there. I remember that so well. I was just a kid. Whenever I walked over I saw him in the coffin. That was my mother's brother. He got killed.

BG: How did he get killed?

TM: He was a person who was always in a hurry. He bought a thresh machine from Schmidt and Schmidt and they threshed all the rest. One day he bought the machine and was going to thresh for himself. He was so much in a hurry and didn't take time to hook the thresher machine on solid, where the pin was suppose to be hooked on with a little chain. He was sitting on the tractor and at one place it went just a little bit down hill. The machine went just a little faster than the tractor went and squeezed him.

BG: It ran into the back of the tractor?

TM: Yes. He wasn't dead right away but I don't know how long he was in the hospital. Schmidt went over and threshed for Haag and then took the machine back again [repossessed].

BG: You said your brother got killed out west?

TM: Yes, two of my brothers. Both of them got killed in a car accident. Martin got killed in 1931 and I don't remember when Bill was killed.

BG: So Martin is buried here.

TM: At St. Joseph's here in Dickinson.

BG: The other one is buried out west?

TM: Yes. Steve and Martin are buried here. We will be buried here at St Joseph's in Dickinson.

CM: Bill died in 1971 and is buried in Yakima, Washington.

TM: And Jack is buried in Spokane, Washington. Julius is buried in Dickinson, but is buried in the Hecker lot. My folks bought a lot of eight and that is where the folks, Martin, Jack and Al are buried. My brother's baby died and also is buried there. My wife and I will be buried down here and Steve and his wife over here. There is room for eight, that's all.

BG: Your son, Willard, is buried out west?

CM: Yes, at Albany, Oregon. He is in one of those mausoleums.