

In Touch with Prairie Living

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The December 1984/January 1985 issue of *Prairies* magazine, pages 34-41, featured an article, "From Russia to Dakota: When there seemed little hope for advancement in Russia, the colonists of the Crimea dreamed of rich, virgin farmland in the Dakotas," written by Frieda Huber Juhnke.

Prairies was published by the Ashley Tribune. It is available online at the South Dakota Germans from Russia Cultural Center, Northern State University, Aberdeen, S.D. Original copies of *Prairies* (1975-1986) are available at the GRHC Archives.

Frieda Huber Juhnke shares the story of her great-great-grandfather, Phillip Jacob Huber, who was born in 1760. Phillip Huber and his neighbors were highly impressed with the promises and offers of the Czarina Catherine and her grandson. Along with others from Heilbron, village of Wellen (Germany), Phillip Huber immigrated in 1803 to Crimea. The settlers built a large church on a hill in the middle of the village, which was named Heilbron, after the village they had left in Germany.

In Heilbron, Crimea, the Hubers raised fruit and grew large vineyards. The son of Phillip Huber, Johann George, was the great-grandfather of the author of this article. He was born in Germany in 1803. The Hubers had seven children.

One of the sons was Phillip Huber, grandfather of Frieda Huber Juhnke, who married Emilie Huer, who had eight children.

Phillip Huber died of Tuberculosis in 1882. His widow, Emilie, in desperation, wrote for help to her brother-in-law, Georg, in America. Georg responded by sending money to Bremen, Germany, for a passport so that Emilie's oldest son, Wilhelm, could go to America. When Wilhelm arrived in Bremen, the passport was waiting for him. He had to work as a shipmate on the ship in order to pay for his meals. After four weeks at sea, he arrived in New York harbor, where he helped unload the baggage onto the docks for pay.

The author writes, "After Wilhelm arrived in Yankton, Dakota Territory, in the early 1880s, he stayed in living quarters owned by Mr. Katy, who owned the store. Then he set out for the farm of his Uncle

Georg in the Heilbron area, southwest of Freeman, South Dakota. There he began working to earn money to send to the family still in Russia and to pay back his uncle. Wages were 75 cents a week for farm labor such as pitching and hauling hay and cleaning out barns."

When Wilhelm had repaid his Uncle Georg for his passport, he was able to send enough money to his mother Emilie. She and five-year old Phillip Jr. and Wilhelm's five sisters came to America on September 19, 1887. Emilie then married Johannes Weber of Freeman in March, 1889. Johannes had previously been married to Elizabeth Metz.

"Emilie and Johannes Weber had a son, named Jacob Weber. Jacob became an elementary school teacher at Wittenberg, South Dakota, and married a young woman there. She died soon after their marriage, and Jacob enlisted to fight in World War I. He was killed in Belleau Woods, France. Weber Post in Freeman is named in his honor by the American Legion."

"Wilhelm Huber homesteaded near Lesterville, S.D., and later at Artas, S.D., but he did not like either location. He returned to Freeman and went into the furniture business with Christoph Guenthner. At that time, Freeman was still in its infancy. He told how he and Guenthner enjoyed watching the first sparrows that came into town haggle and fight in the trees and roofs. Later, Wilhelm started a dray service with the stable behind the Schamber store. He rented out horses and vehicles and delivered merchandise throughout the town.

Many times, wealthy men came from Chicago and other eastern states to hunt quail and other wild fowl. They rented buggies and teams from Wilhelm. They brought along their hunting dogs for which they bought the choicest beefsteaks at Phillip Mensch's butcher shop. Often the hunters imbibed so heavily that they had to hire young boys to go along simply to help steady them against the wagons so that they could shoot."

"My father, Wilhelm Huber, married Marie. She died from pneumonia within a year of their marriage. On June 7, 1901, he married Katherina Bachmann at her home near Wolf Creek, S.D."

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