

# **Chortitza Family Registers**

## **State Archives of Zaporizhzhya Oblast**

### **Mennonite Library and Archives (Fresno, CA) and California Mennonite Historical Society**

#### **Introduction**

Among the documents of the Zaporozhye State Archive which relate to the Mennonite history of Chortitza colony, the family lists are of special significance.

These lists were compiled by Aeltesters of the congregations. Information about every family registered at the village religious community was entered as well as information about people from other colonies or other religious Mennonite communities. Altogether over one thousand family lists have been preserved.

Until the middle of the 1980s these books were stored in the Zaporozhye Regional Civil Registry Office to which they were transferred together with other books containing vital records of Zaporozhye (formerly Chortitza) raion from the Zaporozhye raion Civil Registry Office. The search for family lists of other church communities of Chortitza colony, carried out in the raion archives and civil registry offices, have not produced any additional results. One may suppose that these books were destroyed during World War II along with many other materials important to understanding Mennonite history.

As an example of lost documents about Mennonite history one can cite the collection of the "Chortitza Volost Administration" which was taken to Germany in late 1943 and to the present time has not been found. The inventory of these files in this collection has been preserved in an archive in Stuttgart. Another unique collection known as "Letters of citizens to H.A.Bergmann" also has not been found after the war.

The preserved family lists contain data from the middle of the nineteenth-century into the 1920s. These lists are of special significance for genealogical researchers as they contain exact dates and places of birth, marriage, death of individuals as well as information about their parents.

Of great interest is the information these lists contain about the migration processes among Mennonites: resettlement of families within the limits of Chortitza colonies, to other Mennonite colonies: Siberia, Central Asia as well as

about emigration to North America in the 1920s. There are data in the family lists concerning the transfer of Mennonites from one church group to another, in particular to Mennonite Brethren communities. Of interest for researchers is information about marriages of Mennonites with representatives of other religious and national groups including Russians and German Lutherans. It is well known that many important sources on history of Chortitza Mennonites in late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries have not been preserved. Among the losses are census records and many church records. The surviving family lists, to a large extent, compensate for these lost archival records and permit us to study demographic trends among Mennonites.

These family lists of some Chortitza villages are being released, for the first time, for scholarly investigation and for a broad circle of researchers who study the history of Mennonites in Ukraine and who are interested in family history.

Alexander Tedeyev, Director  
Zaporozhye State Regional Archives  
Ukraine

[Chortitza Family Register Book 1](#)  
[Chortitza Family Register Book 2](#)  
[Index](#)

Note: the pdf files for the two registers have links on each page to the original Russian source document. Those source documents are not yet available.

## **Document Guide for the Chortitza Family Registers**

As Alexander Tedeyev has mentioned in his introduction, these registers are two volumes of Mennonite church registers from the Chortitza Colony. Analysis of the registers themselves, as well as comparisons of these registers to extractions brought to North America in the 1920s, indicates that these registers were originally from the Chortitza Mennonite Church, the principal church of which was located in Chortitza-Rosenthal.

Birth dates are given in the church registers for 7,641 different people from about 1000 families. The total number of people mentioned in the registers is probably about 8,000 since the names of many parents of the husband and wife in each family are given in the church registers, but birth dates for these parents aren't given in the registers.

It is difficult to know exactly when people began to initially make entries into these particular church registers, but it seems highly likely that Volume 1 was begun by the 1890s. Dmitry Meshkov, a former archivist at the Dnepropetrovsk Archives, has stated that these volumes date to 1888, which may well be the

correct year that Volume 1 was begun. It appears that Volume 2 was begun after 1899 as an entry of the birth of Jacob Penner in 1899 on p. 232 was clearly added after the entry of the birth of his younger sister Maria in 1901. There are also other evidences that Volume 2 was compiled later than Volume 1. There are no references in Volume 2 of families leaving the Chortitza Mennonite Church prior to 1910. However, in Volume 1 there are numerous references of families leaving the church prior to 1910 to move to other colonies or to come to North America. The earliest reference to someone leaving the church is a reference that a person left in 1887. This doesn't necessarily mean that Volume 1 was started prior to 1887, but taken in aggregate these references in Volume 1 would suggest that Volume 1 was started no later than the early 1890s. It seems probable, however, that Volume 2 was begun sometime between 1905 and 1910.

Entries were made into these church registers by various Mennonite ministers and possibly by church clerks as well. May 27, 1934 is the latest date found in the registers entered by anyone associated with the Chortitza Church as on this date a large group of people is recorded as having been baptized in Chortitza. It seems that shortly after this the registers were placed in the Zaporozhye Regional Civil Registry Office where they were used to provide documentation for people who needed birth certificates. Notations in the registers indicate that they were used to provide birth certificates between 1935 and 1961, after which time there were no further entries made into the registers.

The church registers were written almost entirely in Russian, although some comments written in German are occasionally found sprinkled throughout the registers. There appear to be more entries written in German in Volume 1 than in Volume 2. Based on the handwriting styles used in the registers it appears that at least three people made entries into the church registers over time. It seems that one person did the initial entries for the earliest families listed in the registers. Much of this information was likely copied from older church registers. Based on the changes in the handwriting a new person began making entries in the church registers sometime between November 1913 and September 1914. Entries that were made in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s were clearly made at the time the events occurred as evidenced by the differences in the colors of ink used in the registers at various different times and by changes in handwriting style.

The registers are laid out like other typical Mennonite church registers from this time period with multiple columns in which various types of information is entered. In the first column numbers are entered for each member of the family. In the second column the names of the family members, as well as the dates of marriage of the parents, are entered. In the third column the names of the parents of the mother and father in each family are entered. In the fourth column the name of the village where the family (or their parents) were

registered in a previous census is entered. It is difficult to know which census was being referred to by this information, but it was likely the 1858 Census or in some cases the 1897 Census that was being referred to. In the 5th through 10th columns the birth dates, birthplaces, dates of baptism, baptism locations, death dates, and location of death are given. The 11th column provides information about when people transferred into the church and which church they had previously been members of. The 12th column gives information about any transfers that occurred where people left the Chortitza Mennonite Church to become members of a different congregation. Finally, the 13th column provides supplemental notes about various people. In most cases these notes contain references to other Chortitza Mennonite Church registers in which a particular person could be found. Occasionally the name of a man who married one of the daughters in the family is noted in this column.

Supplemental information is also frequently entered near the headings of the second and 13th columns. In most cases a number appears in the heading of the second column just above the name of the head of the household in each family. This number is a reference to the page on which that particular family was recorded in a church register that predated these registers. Just below the heading in the 13th column the family number for some families from Neuenburg, Einlage, and Blumengart is given in Volume 1 and for Nieder Chortitza in Volume 2, but not for any of the other villages.

Analysis of the families listed in the church registers indicates that they lived primarily in the following villages in the Chortitza Colony: Chortitza, Rosenthal, Einlage, Nieder-Chortitza, Burwalde, Insel Chortitza, Rosenthal, Blumengart, Neuenburg, and Rosengart. Volume 1 primarily contains information about Mennonites who attended the main Mennonite church in Chortitza-Rosenthal and who lived in Chortitza, Rosenthal, Einlage, or other nearby villages. However, Volume 2 primarily contains information about Mennonites who attended the Mennonite church in Burwalde and who lived in Burwalde, Nieder Chortitza, or other villages nearby. There were also Mennonite churches in Kronsweide, Neuendorf, Schoenhorst, and Neu Osterwick. These particular church registers thus contain little information about people from those villages. Not very much information about people who lived in the villages of Schoenwiese, Kronsthal, or Schoeneberg is included in these church registers either.

Some of the families recorded in the church registers appear to have been living outside of the Chortitza Colony but maintained their membership in the Chortitza Mennonite Church. Quite a few families lived in Ekaterinoslav and others lived in more distant daughter colonies of the Chortitza Colony. Notations were sometimes made in the church registers about such families who were residing in distant colonies.

Review of the church registers reveals that families were generally grouped in the registers according to which village they lived in. The following table shows how the families were organized in the registers according to the villages where they lived:

<b>Volume 1</b>	
<b>Village</b>	<b>Page numbers</b>
Chortitza	2-76
Rosenthal	77-114
Rosengart	115-151
Insel Chortitza	152-165
Einlage	166-220
Kronsweide	221-232
Assorted villages	233-235
Neuenburg	236-256
Ekaterinoslav	257-270
Kronsgarten	271-275
Assorted villages	276-302
<b>Volume 2</b>	
<b>Village</b>	<b>Page numbers</b>
Burwalde	17-93
Blumengart	94-148
Kronsweide	149-152
Burwalde	153-155
Nieder Chortitza	156-312

It is clear that these two church registers were only two volumes in a large series of these registers. There are approximately 300 pages in each of these two church registers and likely other church registers in this series were of similar size. The pages in Volume 1 were originally numbered 1 to 301 and the pages in Volume 2 were originally numbered 2102 to 2400. These original page numbers were in most cases stamped, or in a few cases simply written in by hand, on either the left or right upper corner of each page or on both corners. At a later date the pages in both volumes were renumbered. The pages in Volume 1 were renumbered so that the new pages numbers were all one number higher than the original page numbers. The pages in Volume 2 were also renumbered and were given new page numbers ranging from 17 to 312. Thus page 2102 became page 17, page 2103 became page 18, etc. The page numbers that were added at a later date are the page numbers given in the translation of these registers in the upper left corner of each page. These are also the page numbers referenced in the source field for data from these registers that is found in the Grandma database. In the case of two pages there was no page number written on the page when the pages in the volume were

renumbered. For these two pages (the pages that appear between p. 202 and p. 203 and between p. 216 and p. 217) the pages have been arbitrarily given the page numbers 202b and 216b. When the pages in Volume 2 were renumbered two pages were both renumbered as page 48. These pages have been arbitrarily given the page numbers 48a and 48b. The original page numbers are entered in the right upper corner of the translation so that users of the translation can readily view both the original page numbers as well as the page numbers that were added later.

Careful review of the reference numbers given in the “Notes” column for each page reveals that these two church registers were part of a series of volumes that is referred to in the registers as the “C Folio”, or commonly seen simply as “C=Fol”. Volume 1 was the first volume of the “C Folio” series while Volume 2 was likely the 8th volume in this series. Besides the “C Folio” series there were originally also other series of registers that are referred to in the “Notes” column as the “A Folio”, “B Folio”, and “D Folio” series. There was also a church register that is simply referred to as the “Fol.” (Folio) register. If one had the other church registers then these reference numbers would allow a researcher to locate individual people mentioned in Volumes 1 and 2 in those other registers as well. The “A Folio” series of church registers, which is generally referred to as “A. F.” in Volumes 1 and 2, was likely started in the 1840s or possibly even earlier. The “Fol.” register also appears to have been started by the 1840s and may predate the “A Folio” series of registers. The “B Folio” series of church registers was likely started around the 1860s. The “D Folio” series of church registers was likely started in the 1920s.

All of the references found in Volumes 1 and 2 to the “A Folio” series of registers are particularly of interest. Analysis of these reference numbers reveals that the families were generally arranged in the church registers from the “A Folio” series by which village they lived in. This information is particularly helpful in trying to determine which village people came from if no birthplace is entered for them in the two church registers on this CD. The following table provides a summary of the villages people were from for those people for whom there is a reference in these two church registers to a specific page number in the “A Folio” series. The precise village associated with certain portions of the “A Folio” series is difficult to determine and these portions are thus not included in this table. This table should serve as a general guide only since not all families mentioned in a particular section of the church registers lived in the same village.

<b>Village</b>	<b>Page numbers in the “A Folio” series</b>
Chortitza	1-88

Rosenthal	92-170
Rosengart	176-213
Kronsweide	222-230
Insel Chortitza	247-260
Einlage	276-364
Burwalde	369-426
Nieder Chortitza	428-527
Schoenhorst	727-760
Neuenburg	786-817
Neu Osterwick	873-899
Schoeneberg	917-970
Blumengart	1017-1048

An attempt has been made in the translation to convey the meaning of the comments as clearly as possible. Many comments that appear only as short phrases in the original document are translated as such without an attempt to make them complete sentences. Such comments are placed in the translation at approximately the same position in which they appear in the original document. In general, all locations that are abbreviated in the original document are spelled out completely in the translation. However, names that are abbreviated in the original document also appear in the translation in their abbreviated form just as they appear in the original document. Given names such as Aganetha are spelled consistently in the translation no matter what the spelling of that particular name in the original document. Generally speaking, the most common forms of both given names and surnames are the forms that were chosen to appear in the translation. Some names, particularly some non-Mennonite names, are somewhat difficult to translate from Russian to English and the actual spelling of that surname in English possibly could be different from the spelling that appears in the translation. If you note any names that were definitely translated incorrectly please contact me about this. In a few instances the information in the original church registers is very difficult to read. In the translation the notation “(n/c)”, standing for “not clear”, appears after translated information that is very difficult to read in the original documents.

Since many of the place names given in the church registers are the Russian names for Mennonite villages in the Chortitza Colony it is appropriate to provide a list of the Russian names for Mennonite villages in the Chortitza Colony to serve as a reference to the researcher using these registers. The following table contains a list of the Russian names of villages in the Chortitza Colony that are found in the registers as well as their more common German names. The spelling of the names of four villages in the Chortitza Colony, namely Chortitza, Nieder Chortitza, Insel Chortitza, and Schoenwiese are given in the translation with their more common German spelling. Researchers should refer to the Location Guide that is also included on the CD for help in

determining the precise locations of other places that were not located in the Chortitza Colony but are mentioned in the registers.

<b>Villages in the Chortitza Colony</b>	
<b>Russian Name</b>	<b>German Name</b>
Baburka	Burwalde
Dnyeprovka	Neu Kronsweide
Dolinsk	Kronsthal
Kantserovka	Rosenthal
Kapustyanka	Blumengart
Kitchkas	Einlage
Malashevka	Neuenburg
Novoslobodka	Rosengart
Pavlovka	Neu Osterwick
Polovitsa	Kronsgarten
Schirokoye	Neuendorf
Smolianoye	Schoeneberg
Ternovataya	Neuhorst
Vladimirovka	Kronsweide

For events that occurred between 1918 and 1921 the date for that event was recorded in the church registers under both the Julian and Gregorian Calendars. Russia switched using from the Julian Calendar to using the Gregorian Calendar shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

It appears that the families were not entered in Volume 2 in consecutive order. For instance, the pages just prior to p. 164 appear to have been entered into the church register in the 1920s, but the section beginning with p. 164 was entered into the register much earlier than the 1920s.

While the information in these registers appears to generally be highly accurate there are at least a few errors that appear in them. For instance, the year of death for Gerhard Dyck (b. 12 Feb 1874) given on p. 292 of Volume 1 is 1809, but it probably should have been entered as 1909. The year of baptism given for Jacob Hiebert (b. 13 May 1887) on p. 302 of Volume 2 is 1809, but probably should have entered as 1909. The year of death for Jacob Wall (b. 20 Mar 1873) is given on p. 240 of Volume 2 as 1993, but it seems likely that his death actually occurred sometime prior to 1934.

A fair number of out of wedlock births were recorded in these church registers. When such births were recorded the name of the illegitimate child was entered with the family of the father of the child's mother, but usually the name of the child was entered slightly to the right of other children in the same family on that page and a comment was made, usually in the "Notes" column, stating



which the daughter in the family was the mother of the child. The names of the fathers of the illegitimate children were not recorded.

Researchers reviewing the scans of the original church registers need to be aware that the top portion containing the headings on some of the scans is not the same heading that is found in the original registers. For some reason or another when the scans were created someone in the Zaporozhye Archives spliced a scan of the top portion containing the headings from page 43 in Volume 2 to scans of the lower portions containing the family information for pages 58, 59, 69, 73, 79, 90, 118, 156, 171, 180, 181, 182, 187, 191, 202, 210, 220, 239, 241, 264, 275, 288, and 301 in Volume 2. The same situation occurs in regards to page 33 in Volume 2 where the top portion with the headings from page 21 has been spliced with the lower portion of page 33. The original headings of these pages are thus not found in the scans on the CD. Olga Shmakina created the translation from the original church registers, however, so the translation is thus believed to be accurate even though the information found in the headings for these pages in the translation doesn't match the information such as the page numbers found in the headings in the scans of these selected pages.

The only other church register from the Chortitza Mennonite Church known to exist besides these two church registers is the register for the church in Schoenhorst. This church register was brought to Canada in the 1940s and remains in the private possession of a family in British Columbia. Microfiche and photocopies of this church register are at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Canada. An extraction of this church register made by Richard Thiessen may be found at <http://www.mmhs.org/russia/schoen2.htm>. Attempts have been made to locate additional registers from the Chortitza Mennonite Church, but no other church registers have been located to this point.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy the discoveries you make as you explore these wonderful records. If you note any errors in the translation as you compare it to the scans of the original registers please inform me about them.

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## **Acknowledgments**

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Mennonite Historical Society and the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno.

On a warm July day in 2000 I sat in the office of Alexander Tedeyev, Director of the State Archive of the Zaporozhye Region. We discussed the possibility of a number of joint publications of primary materials that are housed in the archive. The Chortitza Family Registers is the first of these CD-ROM publications.

The project is the work of numerous people. Alexander Tedeyev has a long history of working with Mennonites and cooperating with various North American archival agencies. He kindly made available scans of the original registers and also wrote the introduction to the project. Olga Shmakina, professional translator of Zaporozhye, translated into English these records from the original copies. Her knowledge of Mennonite names and place-names made her uniquely suited to the difficult task. Dr. Tim Janzen, Portland Oregon, proofread the translations and as advisable utilized the expertise of Rick Rye, formerly the chief German and Russian translator for the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, Lincoln Nebraska. Dr. Janzen also wrote the very helpful Document Guide and Analysis. Jay Hubert of San Rafael, California provided the computer expertise for the entire project, including formatting the documents in Adobe Acrobat.

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Mennonite Genealogy  
Russian Mennonite Genealogical Resource Page](#)