

Section 10.17: Abraham F. Reimer 1808-92, Kleefeld.

Abraham F. Reimer (1808-92) was the son of KG founder Klaas Reimer. Abraham grew up on his father's prosperous Wirtschaft in Petershagen but did not inherit his financial acumen. He married Elisabeth Rempel in 1835 (see Section 10.07). In 1836 they moved to Rosenort, Molotschna. Here the family received financial assistance from the Gemeinde from 1847-58.

The Reimers moved to Kleefeld, Molotschna, possibly with sons Klaas and Abraham who moved there in 1857 to start a blacksmith shop. Abraham F. Reimer encountered controversy with Margaretha Friesen, daughter of neighbour and cousin, Jakob F. Friesen. Reimer had difficulty paying his debts, something unacceptable in the KG which assumed full responsibility for all debts of its members. In 1859 he was called before the brotherhood "because he had not kept his word regarding payment of debts". He was also admonished for "his daughter's embellishments with her clothes", possibly Elisabeth, age 16, later Mrs. Peter P. Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba.

In 1860 Abraham "was dismissed" by the brotherhood. After expressing repentance and a desire to improve those separated for relatively minor offenses were typically taken back the following Sunday. Abraham F. Reimer learned from these experiences, as no record of any subsequent discipline has come to light, as surprising as this may be considering his unorthodox lifestyle and attitude.

In 1864 the Abraham Reimers moved to Markuslandt living with son Abraham and family. In 1869 they moved to Steinbach, Borosenko. Abraham was interested in astronomy and other intellectual pursuits, acquiring the derisive nickname "Stargazer" Reimer. His journals are filled with observations, calculations, facts and figures. They provide valuable information about life in Russia during the 1870s and the pioneer years in Manitoba. Abraham had a fine ear for the voices of those around him and the realities of social relationships, the mundane details of day-to-day living, household chores, and of course, recording the far more prestigious career of his vivacious wife, Elisabeth.

In 1874 Abraham and Elisabeth immigrated to Manitoba. By this time, he had acquired a new nickname, "Fula Reima" ("lazy") Reimer, which speaks for itself. The appropriateness of this nickname is illustrated by the story of how his insatiable curiosity caused him to miss a train connection during the immigration, "Fortunately, though, he was able to catch up with the others by taking the next train." John C. Reimer once related to me that Abraham also did some selling for son Klaas, when he started his pioneer store in Steinbach in 1878.

Three letters written by Abraham F. Reimer shortly before his death are still extant. In an 1888 letter to his very beloved friends and acquaintances in Russia, Abraham wrote that "he has gained about six pounds and that his wife has lost about the same amount, but that notwithstanding she works as hard as her strength allows her to." Abraham then gave a lengthy report of the journey from Russia to Manitoba in 1874.

In a letter to brother-in-law Martin Barkman, Jansen, Nebraska, dated June 26, 1889, Abraham asked about cousin Abraham W. Friesen formerly from Rückenau



Klaas W. Reimer (1864-1944), grandson of Abraham ("Fuela") Reimer, with his wife Maria Brandt, daughter Maria (Mrs. J. R. Friesen), daughter Anna (Mrs. John R. Toews), and son Henry B. Reimer. In 1889 Klaas W. Reimer built and operated the first cheese factory in Steinbach in conjunction with a general store. Within a few years he added two cheese factories in Kleefeld and Blumenort. Photo courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Historical Sketches"/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 8. Klaas' granddaughter Bev married Jim Penner of the Penner Foods chain, Steinbach.



Abraham ("Fuela") Reimer's grandson Peter W. Reimer (1868-1946) and wife Gottliebe Schrien, a German immigrant girl from Poland. In the 1890s Peter established a livery barn and cordwood business on Elgin Avenue, Winnipeg. Later he expanded into a lumber and cordwood business with operations in the Sandilands. He also served as a Justice of the Peace. Photo courtesy of Klaas J. B. Reimer, "Historical Sketches"/Pres., No. 9, Part One, page 8.

who has died. He requested a favour of his relatives in Nebraska that they should buy him a German gardening book if they had occasion to go to the city. He also wrote of two species of rare flowers he found and which he had grown, "...the one he gave to Abraham Friesen in Steinbach who has planted it in his garden." Abraham F. Reimer was also a basket weaver in his senior years. Abraham died in 1892 and was buried in Blumenort.

Abraham was an extremely intelligent man, totally unsuited for the drudgery of life as a 19th century dairy and grain farmer. In another time and place, he would, no doubt, have been a Doctor of Philosophy, perhaps in Astronomy, or even a Professor of English, like great-grandson Al Reimer, one of Canada's foremost Mennonite novelists.

Certainly Abraham was eccentric and a non-conformist and if the conclusions of the "Shunning", written by Patrick Friesen, were anywhere near to reality, he would have been excommunicated and shunned a hundred times over. But to the contrary, the structures of the Gemeinde gave him the freedom so that like Oata, in Armin Wiebe's novel, *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst*, he could indulge in his stargazing and recording the feverish activities buzzing all around him.