

This is the translation of an article by P. H. Griess appearing in the German newspaper, the *Dakota Freie Presse*, Aberdeen, South Dakota, issue of November 18, 1909, translated from the German by Theodore Charles Wenzloff. Retyped from the translated copy by T.R. Boyer, 2015.

“In June 1873 a large number of families, about 400 souls, joined together from Worms and Rohrback, German colonies in the Ukraine, South Russia, to follow those families which had already departed for the united states. Leave-taking from the old country and from relatives and acquaintances who remained behind was a painful one, yes, for many a never-to-be forgotten one. At the station Wradiewka we mounted the train to journey through Austria and Berlin to the glorious land of freedom. Besides my family, there were among others the families of John Grosshans, Schoolmaster Jakob Orth, Schoolmaster Nuss, H. Hoffmann, and my parents Heinrich and Margarathe Griess with their children and brothers and sisters.

In Berlin we stopped for a few days in order to negotiate with the steamship company for the trip. We utilized these days to sightsee the beautiful Berlin. We visited the zoological garden the museum, the armory, the townhall cellar, and the king’s castle. Then on a Sunday evening we went by train to Hamburg from where we planned to sail on the following Wednesday on the steamship *Thuringie*. But before the steamer sailed, on account of the sickness of the Hoffmann children, we had to make an unpleasant change. We had to divide ourselves into two parties, the larger party sailed on the planned steamer, whereas we proposed to sail on the steamship *Cymbria* on the following Wednesday. The one week passed quickly for us as there were many things to see in the large Hansa city Hamburg. Unfortunately the Hoffmanns could not even then accompany us as the sickness of their children delayed them for four more weeks.

Our sea journey was very nice, and after a 13 day trip we arrived safely at the harbor of New York on 6 August where we were amicably received by the harbor missionary, Pastor Schweigent, and to whose care we entrusted ourselves until we set out on the next day on our long journey to the far West. Our destination provisionally was Burlington, Iowa, as Mr. Schweigent had informed us that our first party would await us there. After a long trip we finally reached our destination and celebrated a happy reunion with our comrades. There we also met a number of our country people who had come to America more than 24 years before, and the most of whom our parents still knew. At best I can only remember Abraham Spranger and his family.

From here, after we had provided ourselves plentifully with guns and ammunition because we had been told that it was extremely wild in the West, our route took us to Lincoln, Nebraska. Arrived there, we next concerned ourselves about lodgings. We rented several small houses and so far made ourselves comfortable until we had found suitable land for our purpose. In the meantime, our less wealthy comrades were housed at the Immigrant House. From here, excursions in all directions were then made in order to find a suitable region in which to settle.

Lincoln then was still a small city but had a good future since it was then already a junction point of the Burlington Railway. Land was available at that time for \$12 an acre, but our leaders, having those of our countrymen yet to follow us, having more in mind than themselves, believed they had not yet found the desired region. They wanted to find a region in which later they could have their own churches and schools, and in which, following the custom an usage of the Fatherland, they could maintain their mother tongue without interference.

After we had been in Lincoln for two weeks, the Hoffmanns, who had stayed behind in Hamburg, arrived. Unfortunately, the joy of the reunion was saddened by the shadow of death. The Hoffmanns' 18-year-old son had died on the trip and was buried in a watery grave in the depth of the ocean. The Bachmann family had attached themselves to the Hoffmanns on leaving Russia, and they too were joyously welcomed by all of us.

Meanwhile our hunger for land grew even larger, and here in the State of Nebraska, except for the extreme west which was entirely in the hands of the big cattle men, there were no prospects for government land, so one family after another took leave of Nebraska to turn to unsettled Dakota leaving only a small number remaining here.

After more landed properties were inspected which were not suitable for settlement, there came one day a Lincoln from Omaha a Pastor Dickman through whose assistance the land owned by the Burlington Railway in the vicinity of Sutton was shown to us, which land our leaders liked very much. Without further deliberation, immediately on their return to Lincoln a contract for 3,690 acres was made at the land office. Under favorable sale conditions, the land was priced at \$5 to \$12 an acre, but because we were prepared to pay cash, the entire complex was sold to us for \$4.25 an acre.

Besides ourselves, the families of Grosshans, H. Hoffmann, M. Griess, Jose Rommich, Jacob Billigmeier, P. Lemar, Peter Heber, Schoolmaster Joh., Geo. Nuss, Joh. Bachmann, Geo. Sera and M. Nickolaus settled here. There were 22 families in all. This first colony in Clay County, Nebraska, was founded in September of the year 1873. The other families who left Russia with us all settled in Dakota. Then began a busy period. Houses were built; the grass was mowed and barns and granaries were erected. We had given over the building of all the dwellings to a carpenter in Lincoln, who also had to arranged for the materials.

Sutton was only a very small place, not even having a railway station building. Alongside the rail tracks, an old box car had been placed through which the telegraph wires ran, and this had to take the place of a station building. It was even reported that all of Sutton could count only 60 men and 3 women as inhabitants. But even for that I will not vouch for the place was very small. We could not even buy the needed necessities there and had to have our provisions shipped from Lincoln until we were settled and had our wives follow us from Lincoln. Toward the end of October our homes were ready and occupied without delay. But before we were fully settled in our homes, it was the middle of November. How much easier those who came later had it, such as Heinrich Griess and Johann Griess and others who arrived in September 1874 and found comfortable lodgings among their friends and relatives until their own homes were established. For us, at first, the sky was our roof and the haystack our lodgings while our families had to remain in Lincoln. And though warned about swindling soon after arrival here, they only became wiser after bitter experience.

In the fall of the same year, the Mennonites immigrants followed and settled north of Sutton in Hamilton and York Counties, but since at that time there was no railway north of Sutton, Sutton profited as the Mennonites were obliged to transact their business there. The first Mennonites settling here were the following families: H. Epp, Jacob Frieden, H. Pennen, Peter and Herhard Abrahams, Gerard Toews, P. Wahl, H. Pankratz and others.

Today Sutton numbers 2,500 inhabitants with a whole row of business houses, doctors, dentists, lawyers and even a hospital. We have two large school houses with more than 500

students and 9 churches, three grain elevators, two coal dealers, an ice company and a steam plant. In Sutton and vicinity there are now about 500 German-Russian families and as many, if not more, Mennonites, so that in the surrounding counties of Clay, Hamilton, York and Fillmore, the German-Russian population is estimated to be about 1,000 families.

Though Sutton is a German community, we must say to our sorrow that it is very poorly disposed toward German schools. In the year 1879, Mr. Eberhardt with his sons left Germany and settled north of the city. In 1884, he moved to town and founded a German school which he ran until his death in 1899, but unfortunately his endeavors after his death were not continued, and the German school now is completely abandoned.

Sutton at this time has two Reformed churches whose parsonages however are both vacant. The Immanuel congregation, which was incorporated in 1878 and served by Pastor W. Bonekemper as its minister since its existence, split into two parts on the 7th of August, the remaining part issuing a call to Pastor Kunsl of Cincinnati. The other division incorporated itself as a free Reformed church and chose Pastor U. Zogg as its minister.

Since the settlement of this region by Germans, land prices have continually raised, and it is quite unlikely today to be able to buy a good improved farm in the vicinity for less than a hundred dollars and acre.

In the years 1875-1877, the first Germans from the Russian Saratow district arrived, but as many were poor many of them had to migrate to the larger cities like Lincoln, Omaha, Hastings, and even to Colorado in order to find employment. Some came here and now have fine farms; others are trying their lot in business with success.

Often our little town is called Russian Town, but this cannot bring us shame for while other cities which were as large or larger than Sutton at first now have fallen behind. Our little town has steadily flourished and is esteemed today as the best along the Burlington Railway between Lincoln and Hastings.