

# **Incidences in the Molotschna Colony: 1841**

**Odessa State Archives, Odessa, Ukraine  
Fond 6 Opis 1 Delo 5953**

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Genealogy and Family History are often considered separate topics: genealogy being the collection and integration of genalogical data on the person or persons of interest, whereas family history is considered the telling of the life's stories of these people, often in the context of the events that were happening around them. Below are translations of several events that tell us something of the family history of the people involved.

Note that only Mennonite events are included here. Those involving only Russians and/or German colonists are not included.

GRANDMA database numbers for the persons of interest are provided if they are reliably known.

## **Description of the document found in Odessa Fond 6 Opis 1 Delo 5953:**

Correspondence of the Welfare Committee with the Ministry of State Goods, the overseers Pelecha and Schmidt on conducting an investigation into fires in the colonies, on sudden deaths by accident and suicide of the colonists: the Mennonite Justine Gossen (Gossen, K. Blümstein), Johanna Hucke (K. Kostheim), Valentin Bobe (K. Heidelberg), Gottlieb Strecker (K. Alter Nassau), Friedrich Prinz (K. Neuhoffnung), Wilhelm Hoffmann (K. Hochstedt), the Mennonite Anna Rempel (K. Tiegenhagen), Jakob Hartwiege (K. Darmstadt of the colonist district Molotschna, according to other documents – K. Kaisertal), Decision of the Palate of the Criminal Court Tauria on the pardon of the colonist K. Leitershausen Margarete Dus, because of the debt of having allegedly set fire to the house of Schulze K. Blumenhort Peter Epp (copy).

No. 22, January 20, 1841, Arch. No. 5953

Acts of events in the colonies of the Taurien Governorate in 1841.

2nd Division

Created: January 20, 1841

Completed: December 29, 1842

## **Description of the incidences:**

### **1. About the fire in the house of the Mennonite [Johann] Regier.**

January 1841

Ministry of State Property. Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, 9 January 1841, No. 36. Colony Molotschna. About the investigation into the fire at the house of the Mennonite director.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The investigation of the local policeman of Ujesd Melitopol, Mr. Babenko, into the fire in the house of the Mennonite of the colony Gnadenheim Johann Regier, has revealed: no oath [taken by Regier]. He, Regier, went to the stable before 8 a.m. on November 28 last year to feed the cattle. His wife Susanna stayed in the house, fired up the oven and started cooking lunch. After not too long, he heard his wife screaming that the house was on fire. He ran out of the stable into the yard and saw that the wooden tube on the roof was burning. He immediately started extinguishing the fire. Neighbours came to the rescue, the Mennonites Peter Born, Johann Geddert, Dietrich Engbrecht and Heinrich Schulz, but all attempts to extinguish the fire, which quickly spread to the whole roof, did nothing. The house, the stable attached to the house, all the household goods and the grain supplies, worth a total of 86 silver rubles, are burned. The cause of the fire is unknown to him, but he rules out arson. He suspects that the wooden cladding of the chimney of his house may have cracked over time and that a spark of fire from the furnace has entered the thatched roof through the crack, causing the straw to flare up. His wife Susanna confirms her husband's claims, adding that she suddenly heard loud noises from the roof of the house while heating the oven in the kitchen, and saw the chimney, and the straw around it, burning. She then started screaming, but she deliberately did not cause the fire. The four named Mennonites said that when they saw that it had burned around the chimney of the house of Johan Regier, they arrived, but could not extinguish the rapidly spreading fire. They do not know the cause of the fire, and they cannot confirm the cause of the fire, but that the couple's governess had made mistakes in dealing with the fire. They can confirm that the wooden chimney of the houses was not defective.

This information complements my report to the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia of 16 December 1840 under No. 2028, about which I have the honour to report.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

**2. About the drowning of the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen [#54056].**

March 4th, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, February 24, 1841, No. 331.

Colony Molotschna. About the drowning the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The Mennonite district administration of Molotschna told me that a daughter of the Mennonite of the colony Blumestein, Peter Gossen's Justina, who was staying with his brother Gerhard Gossen, the teacher in Muntau, drowned herself in a well, in a state of mental confusion. This happened on the night of the 21st to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February. Since the local policeman of the 1st Stan, of district Melitopol, has carried out the corpse examination and other investigations, about which I have the honor to report also to the welfare committee of foreign settlers of the southern areas of Russia.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

No 1125, 10 March 1841, Subdivision 2.

To the Minister for State Property.

The local administration of the colonies of the Taurien Governorate informed us that the daughter of the Mennonite of the colony Blumestein Peter Gossen, Justina, in a state of mental confusion, during her brother's visit to the colony Muntau, at night, from 21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> of February, has left the house and drowned in a well. The Guardianship Committee of Foreign Settlers of the southern regions of Russia has the honour of reporting to Your Excellency, and add that the necessary instructions have been given to investigate the cause of death of the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen.

April 8th, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, 21 March 1841, No. 499.

Colony Molotschna. About the drowning of the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

On the case of drowning in the well in Muntau of the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen from Blumestein. The local policeman of Ujesd Melitopol, Babenko, examined the case in my presence and found that Justina Gossen, since her father's illness 4 years ago, is also mentally ill ...

May 20th, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, May 10, 1841, No. 740.

Colony Molotschna. About the drowning of the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

In the case of the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen, who drowned in the fountain [well]. The Ujesd court in Melitopol, in my presence on 18<sup>th</sup> of April, decided that there is no culprit in the violent death of the Mennonite daughter Justina Gossen, the file is to be transferred from the stack of unsolved cases to the archive. It has been submitted to the Governor for confirmation. I hereby issue a report to the Committee of Concern of Foreign Settlers in the Southern Territories of Russia and add Raport No. 331 of 24 February.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

#### **4. About the fire at the widow Thiessen [#46590] in Altonau and the suicide of Giesbrecht.**

April 12th, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Supervisor of the Colonies of the 2nd District, April 3, 1841, No. 561.

Colony Molotschna. About the fire at the widow Thiessen in Altonau and the suicide of Giesbrecht.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The district administration of the Moloschna colonies informed me that on the night of March 29, at about 1 a.m., there was a fire in the colony of Altonau near the widow Elisabeth Thiessen. Burnt is the house, the stable, the hay shed, the bakery, many pieces of agricultural and domestic equipment, 8 horses, 13 heads of cattle, 2 pigs and the stock of grain; total to a total of 3885.36 silver rubles. The fire was probably set by the foreigner Peter Giesbrecht, who was employed in the widow's windmill. He then also set fire to

the windmill and shot himself. The fire in the windmill has successfully extinguished. The investigation of this case was carried out by the local policeman of the 1st Stan in Melitopol district, Babenko. I have the honour of reporting on this to the Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

Ministry of State Property. To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia. Subdivision 11, Odessa, 30 April 1841, No. 2011, about the fire at the Mennonite Elisabeth Thiessen.

To the Minister of State Property.

The local administration of the colonies in Taurien has informed us that on 29 March in the colony of Altenau the house, barn, bakery, cattle and all the housekeeping of the widow Elisabeth Thiessen was burned. Mrs. Thiessen has lost a total of assets to the sum of 3885.36 silver rubles. The Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia has the honour of reporting to Your Highness and informs you that the fire was set by a mill worker, Peter Giesbrecht, who was probably mentally ill, as the local officials suspect. He set fire to the mill at the widow's house and shot himself. When people from the neighborhood came to the rescue, the fire in the mill was extinguished. In order to investigate the exact causes of the fire, the appropriate instruction was given.

Superior, General of the Infantry: --

April 28th, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, April 21, 1841, No. 670.

Colony Molotschna. About the fire at the widow Thiessen in Altonau and the suicide of Giesbrecht.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The investigation of the fire at the widow Elisabeth Thiessen from the Mennonite colony Altenau was carried out by the local policeman of the 1st Stan in the melitopol district of Melitopol, Mr. Babenko in my presence, and found that she, Thiessen, has stated, without oath, that she lives with her brother-in-law, the Mennonite Peter Loewen, his wife and daughter Elisabeth and with her unmarried daughters Helena and Anna. They were also joined by a worker, Lasar Yakovlev, a state builder from the village of Bunina, Ujesd Timski, and a miller, Peter Giesbrecht, who operated two mills (water and windmill), a Mennonite from Prussia. He operated the mills for a year. On the

evening of March 28, they, Thiessen, and the other occupants of the house went to bed after dinner. The worker Yakovlev went to sleep in his chamber. The miller, foreigner Giesbrecht, went to one of the mills where he slept alternately. In the middle of the night the worker came into the house and woke everyone with the cry that it was burning. Everyone ran to the yard and saw that the roof of the barn with the extension (where the worker slept) and the heap of grain-sheaves were burning. The fire quickly spread to the adjacent house, and with all efforts it was no longer possible to extinguish. Burnt is the house with the adjacent stable, barn with extension and separate bakery, various agricultural equipment, the grain, 9 horses, 13 head of cattle ...

... that he lay in his chamber. This chamber, along with the works and the oat-sheaves, was under one roof and he awoke and saw that these sheaves were burning. He ran outside and then into the house of the widow Thiessen and woke everyone, and when they ran into the yard, they saw that the fire was jumping over from the roof of the barn onto all the buildings. The fire was obviously set by the foreigner Giesbrecht in the barn on the sheaves, because the gate of the barn was open; through this he entered the shed and laid the fire, and the sheep were able to save themselves through this gate. Afterwards he also set fire to the mill and shot himself in it. After examining Giesbrecht's body, it was found that there was only blood on the face, a rupture on the back of the skull, and traces of gunpowder and spare bullets were found on his body, and a bullet hole in his mouth. From this we concluded that he, Giesbrecht, shot himself. Four Mennonites have confirmed the information provided by the widow Thiessen. They added that there was no dispute or other displeasure between Giesbrecht and Mrs. Thiessen or other relatives, and have no explanation for the fire at Thiessens. However, they also suspect that the fire of the aforementioned Giesbrecht must have happened before the shooting. But they don't know why he did it. The file on this case was handed over by Mr. Babenko to the Semstwo Court. I have the honour of reporting on this to the Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia, in addition to my Raport of 3 April under No. 51.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

... total to the sum of 3885,36 silver rubles, whereby the passport of the worker Yakovlev is burned. As the fire grew stronger and the wind was blowing toward the mill, two Mennonites, Isaac Dyck and Jacob Loewen, were sent there to make sure the sparks did not set the mill on fire. They went there and reported that it was also burning in the mill. When they tried to get in, they realized that the door was locked. More Mennonites came to the rescue and the door was opened. Inside on the lower floor, they saw burning stacked firewood next to the beams. He managed to extinguish the fire and when the smoke dispersed a bit, they saw a candle lit on the upper floor. As they approached, they saw the body

of the aforementioned miller Giesbrecht lying on the ground and his rifle beside him. Why should he have set the fire in the barn? Because the gate in the barn was open and the sheep had run out. Through this gate Giesbrecht probably came in and lit the sheaves in the barn. He then went back to the mill and set the fire on the lower floor and then shot himself. She doesn't know what may have led him to do that. He, Giesbrecht, was mentally healthy, there were no signs of nervous illness, but someone else who might have set fire to her house wouldn't know her. These members were also confirmed by Peter Löewen, his wife Elisabeth and the unmarried daughters of Elisabeth Thiessen, Helena and Anna, as well as the worker Lasar Yakovlev, who added...

June 23rd, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Supervisor of the colonies of the 2nd district, June 16, 1841, No. 987.

Colony Molotschna. On the verdict on the fire at the widow Thiessen in Altonau and the suicide of Giesbrecht.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The court of Ujesd Melitopol has in the case concerning the suicide of the Prussian national Peter Giesbrecht in the colony Altonau and on arson in the house of the Mennonite Elisabeth Thiessen, where a total of assets are burned to the sum of 3885,36 silver rubles, and the named Giesbrecht is suspected of having set the fire, it is stated that the interrogations of the Mennonite widow Thiessen, her daughters and other witnesses leave no doubt that the fire was caused by the foreigner Peter Giesbrecht. His suicide by a shot with his own rifle in his mouth speaks for it. According to Book 15 of the Criminal Code, Article 145, this suicide is not pursued as a result of the death of the person concerned, but because he, Giesbrecht, caused the fire, his surviving property, in accordance with the same criminal book, Article 688, is attributed to the damaged widow Thiessen. The judgment and the file of the proceedings are forwarded to the Palace of the Taurien Criminal Court for review. I have the honour of informing the Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia, as a supplement to my report of 3 last month under No. 561.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

## **5. About attempted arson of the colonist Dush at Mennonite [Peter] Epp [#44912]**

May 20th, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, May 10, 1841, No. 734.

City of Orehow. About attempted arson of the colonist Dush at the Mennonite Epp

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

In the case of the colonist's daughter Margarita Dush from the colony of Leuterhausen, who tried to set fire to the house of the village *Schulze* Peter Epp from Blumenort on 17 April this year, the court of Ujesd Melitipol found in my presence: the accused colonist Margarita Dush does not deny her misdemeanour and says that she did it because a black man appeared to her at night. That sounds implausible and she says it, probably just to hide her evil intent, but since she hasn't finished her plan and has extinguished the fire herself, the procedure is stopped. Epp also thinks that Dush did it not with evil intent, but out of stupidity or recklessness, and that the house was not damaged. The court sentenced the Dush, based on Article 15 of the Criminal Code, Articles 115 and 128, to 12 lashes without excluding her from the village. The verdict will still be forwarded to the Taurien court for review today.

When forwarding the verdict to the Taurien Criminal Court, we ask that the pardon of the colonist Margarita Dush be granted in the revision of the proceedings by the Supreme Court. ...

October 3rd, 1841

The Criminal Court of Taurien, No. 1328, 29 September 1841, Simferopol.

The Criminal Court's trial of attempted arson at the home of the Mennonite Peter Epp from Blumenort by the colonist's daughter Margarita Dush, 22 years old, from Leuterhausen decided: since the offence of the accused Dush took place before the Supreme Manifesto of 16 April this year and because their offence is not subject to the exceptions from the pardon cases of the manifesto, Margarita Dush is to be released from the sentence of the court. The decision is to be notified to the Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

Reason: The named Miss Dush was questioned by the police officer Tverdochlebov in the presence of the overseer of the colonies and stated on September 19, 1840 that she started working four months ago with the consent of her mother as a maid in the house of the Mennonite Johann Wiens from Blumenort, for 54 rub. in bills and for a scarf. She assured that she had no quarrel or other trouble with the relatives of the Wiens. On September 7th, after the work she had done in her chamber, she went to bed and when she was already asleep, a black man appeared to her and told her to set fire to her

neighbour's house, the village Schulze (mayor) Epp. If she won't, he'll break her backbone, he threatened. She got very scared, ran into the kitchen and took embers out of the oven with trembling hands, wrapped it in a rag, went to the neighboring Epp house and put the embers in the back, next to the stable door in the thatched roof. Then she went back home and when she recovered from the horror, she woke her landlord and said there was going to be a fire at the neighbor's house. Then she took a bucket of water in the kitchen and ran back to the Epp's house and extinguished the fire that had already flared up on the roof. This is also attested by the Mennonites who joined. She said she didn't start the fire because she wanted to harm Epp, but only because she was scared of the black man. The village Schulze Epp explained that he heard a loud knock at the front door at 9 o'clock in the evening, and he went out on to the yard and there met Margarita Dush and the neighbor of Wiens. Then Margarita told him that the house would burn immediately, but he saw no fire and did not believe Margarita at first. But Margarita then ran back and pulled the already burning rag out of the thatched roof and extinguished the burning straw. When Epp asked her how she knew the house was going to burn, she said that she had set the fire herself, which was ordered by the black man who appeared to her. Wiens confirmed the information provided by Dush and Epp. The explanation of the accused Dush sounds implausible, but because she herself has extinguished the fire she has set and awakened Wiens and Epp there is no suspicion of intentional arson, but the accused has apparently acted out of superstitions and stupidity. The village of Epp agrees. For this reason, the Taurien Criminal Court pardoned the accused Dush. ...

## **6. About the fire in the house of the Mennonite [Franz] Quiring [#8877].**

June 2nd, 1841

Ministry of State Property. Supervisor of the Colonies of the 2nd District, May 26, 1841, No. 850.

Colony Molotschna. About the fire in the house of the Mennonite Quiring

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The district administration of Molotschna told me that it burned on May 14 at 10 a.m. in the house of the colonist Franz Quiring in Konteniusfeld for an as yet unknown reason. The house is completely burned. Burnt are assets to the sum of 850 silver rubles. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

June 5, 1841. The investigation into the fire at the Quiring family home in Konteniusfeld.

Mennonite Franz Quiring and his wife have no explanation as to the causes of the fire. The fire in the oven was properly done and the chimney was not defective. There is also no suspicion of arson. This is also confirmed by the surveyed neighbours of Quirings.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

At the trial in Melitopol on 4 July, it was decided in my presence that there was no external fault in the fire in which the house and other buildings of the Mennonite Franz Quiring from Konteniusfeld,, worth a total of 850.84 silver [were burned], and therefore no one was convicted. The file on his case we submitted to the archive.

#### **14. About the drowned colonist daughter [Anna] Rempel [#103136].**

July 28th, 1841

Ministry of State Property.

Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, June 20, 1841, No.1223.

Colony Molotschna. About the drowned colonist daughter Rempel and about the investigation.

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The colonist administration of the Molotschna district told me that on June 13, the 19-year-old Mennonite daughter from the colony of Tiegenhagen, Anna Rempel, drowned while crossing the Molotschna River on the colonist side. The local policeman of the Melitopol Babenko district examined the body of the drowned Rempel in my presence and found no signs of foreign influence that could have led to her death. The parents of the drowned, Jacob and Maria Rempel, testified that their daughter went to the communal garden on June 13, together with other Mennonite daughters Margaretha Konrad, Agneta Kroeker, Maria and Helena Hildebrand to buy fruit. Half an hour later, Kroeker came back [ to Rempel's] and said that their daughter Anna came into the deep water while crossing the river Molotschna and drowned. Their son Peter Rempel and the Mennonite Abraham Enns ran to the river and rescued Anna from the water dead. The parents have no suspicion of external fault in their daughter's death. The mentioned Mennonite daughters Konrad, Kroeker and Hildebrand explained that, as they did last year in 1840, they wanted to cross the river Molotschna on foot near the orchard. When they were almost in the middle of the river, the water became deeper and deeper, and Helena Hildebrand, who was at the front, stopped and wanted to turn around, but Anna called her a coward, and went on. After two three steps, she steps into a muddy depression

and went almost under water. She grabbed Helene Hildebrand's hand and dragged her with her. Konrad and Maria Hildebrand tried to pull Helene Hildebrand out of the mud, but did not manage to do so. Then the Mennonite Johann Boldt came to the rescue and together they pulled Helene out of the mud, but Anna Rempel went completely under water and she could not be saved. Then Abram Enns and Peter Rempel came and pulled Anna out of the river dead. They tried to revive her, but they couldn't. Boldt, Enns and Rempel also confirmed this information. I have the honour of reporting on this to the Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

25 August 1841

The District Court of Melitopol has decided in the case of the drowned colonist's daughter Anna Rempel: There is no external fault in the death of the drowned and the procedure for investigating the cause of death is discontinued. The file for this will be transferred to the archives and this decision will be submitted to the Governor for signature.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

**19. About the fire in the house of the Mennonite [David] Ginter [#45308 or #60697]**

6. Oct. 1841

Ministry of State Property.

Overseer of the colonies of the 2nd district, 25 September 1841, No.1659.

Colony Molotschna. About the investigation of the fire at the Mennonite Ginter

To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

The district administration of Molotschna told me that on September 8th David Ginter of the house went up in flames with the Mennonites from the colony Sparrau and burned down completely. Damage of 389 silver rubles has been incurred. The investigation into the incident was carried out by the district police officer from Melitopol Babenko. I have the honour of reporting on this to the Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

**24. About the fire in the house of the Mennonite [Heinrick] Voth**

**(133, 133b)**

November 10th, 1841

Ministry of State Property.

Supervisor of the colonies of the 2nd district, 30 October 1841, No.1896.

Colony Molotschna. About the investigation of the fire at the Mennonite Voth  
To the Welfare Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of  
Russia.

The district administration of the Mennonite colonies Molotschna told me that on October 20th at 11 o'clock at night at the Mennonite Heinrich Voth from Landskrone his house together with the hay, grain and 3 pigs, worth 677 silver rubles, were burned. The incident was investigated in the presence of the Ujesd Melitopol police officer, Babenko and reported: Heinrich Voth and his wife Katharina stated that they did not know how the fire broke out and that they had no suspicion that anyone might have laid it. Four Mennonites, neighbors of Voth, said that she and Voth were always careful with the fire in the house, and that they did not know how the fire might have occurred. I have the honour of reporting on this to the Committee of Foreign Settlers of the Southern Territories of Russia.

Supervisors of the Colonies of the 2nd District: Pelecha

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**Formatting by Richard D. Thiessen**

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