

*Liedersammlung für die  
Volksschule in Ziffern:*  
**A Notable Book Added to the  
Mennonite Historical Society  
of Saskatchewan Archives**

**Victor G. Wiebe, *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan***

**Introduction**

My lifelong fascination has been with the physical printed book. With this research interest I am known as a bibliographer. A bibliographer looks for details that reveal information on the author, editor, printer, and publisher, as well as contextualizing the book's history, its audience and cultural impact. This is separate from what the text in the book says to its readers. A physical book anchors its content and form for all time. However, a book can be written in, defaced, beautified—transformed to make an object with its own individual history. Such a book provides information about the culture and people who made and used it.<sup>1</sup>

In our digital age many people have almost unlimited access to the world's digitized texts and e-books. Readers of that format have access to the author's words but not to the physical object—the paper, the leather, the binding—that contributes to the sensory impact of holding a book. Just as seeing a real object, like a locomotive, imparts more understanding than just a picture of one, seeing the physical book can also impart more. Further, online digital

texts are currently easily and subtly changeable, erasable and unstable. The physical book still exists in niche markets, and many continue to be published, and all remain to be analyzed. A bibliographer will never run out of books to examine.

The Archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS), in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, recently received a donation of the book titled *Liedersammlung für die Volksschule in Ziffern*. This is a small, ordinary-looking songbook but it is rare and was published in Imperial Russia. In this article I outline the process that I use to learn about the book as a historical object and what historical facts are revealed.

### Descriptions of *Liedersammlung für die Volksschule in Ziffern*

Below is a technical bibliographical description of this book and further on in this document is a scan of its title page. Brackets are used to indicate that page numbers are missing or to note a description of a special feature. Translations have been added in square brackets and the ellipsis indicates that the full text of the Bible verse on the title page has been omitted from the description.

[Neufeld, P. J.] Нейфельдъ, П. Я. *Liedersammlung für die Volksschule in Ziffern*: [Song Collection for Elementary Schools in Numbered Musical Notation] (short double rule), *zusammengestellt von einigen Lehrern*. [Compiled by Some Teachers.] (short double rule), Motto: ... Psalm 147, 7. (Ornament), Гальбштадтъ [Halbstadt], Типографія П. Я. Нейфельдъ [Typography: P. J. Neufeld]. 1896. (8), 152pp. Black cloth spine, plain light gray paper covered boards. Size: 20.3 x 13.9 cm.<sup>2</sup>

This copy was donated to the MHSS by Mary Wiebe of Kamloops, B.C. The book came to Mary via her mother whose name "Tina Kroeker / Hespeler / 1928" is written in manuscript on the front fly leaf. Also inscribed there is the name of Tina's husband, "J. Reimer / 1939," and then on the title page in the same hand is "Johann Reimer / Port Rowan / 1939." The book was used as a schoolbook by Katherina "Tina" Kroeker (1909–1959)<sup>3</sup> in Russia, and brought to Canada when the family emigrated after the Russian Revolution and settled in the Ontario region of Hespeler, now part of Cambridge. Johann J. Reimer (1906–1998),<sup>4</sup> also a Russian Mennonite immigrant from the 1920s, settled and farmed in the Port Rowan region in Ontario and served from 1940 to 1965 as one of the pastors of the Erie View United Mennonite Church. Mary Wiebe reports that both parents, Tina and Johann, sang from this book in Canada. This personal information tells us of the book's

provenance—where it was used, by whom—and establishes that the *Ziffern*<sup>5</sup> system of numbered music notation was in common use in Russian Mennonite schools. Furthermore, this songbook was valued and a source of songs even in Canada where Mennonites continued to sing using *Ziffern*. On the last fly leaf, in pencil written in *Kurrentschrift*,<sup>6</sup> are three verses of the song “*Grüsse an die Heimat*” (Greetings to the Homeland), a song well known to Mennonites in Russia about a lost homeland. Both Tina and Johann Reimer were known to love music and frequently sang at home and in church and often wrote out their own music for singing, sometimes using *Ziffern* notation. However, neither were lead singers or conductors. Had they been, and had they used this book for that work, it would have held many more handwritten notes and comments on the songs.

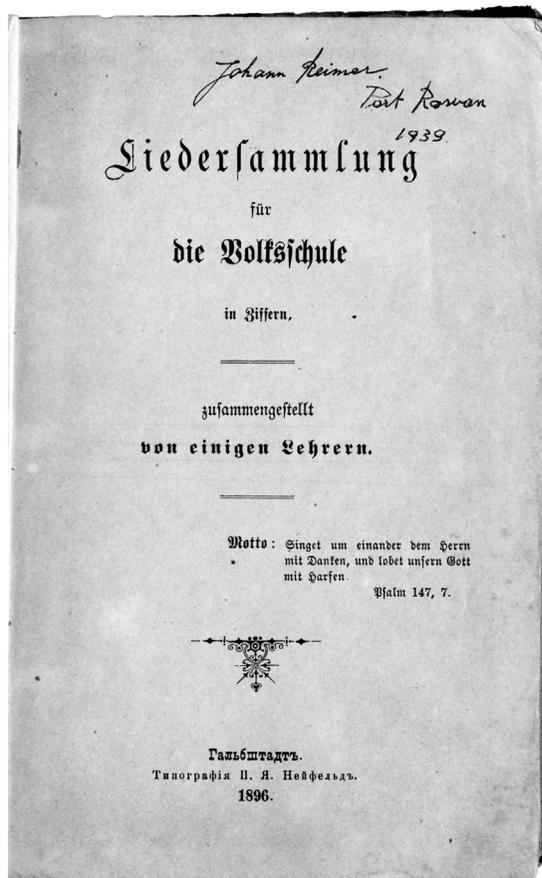


Figure 1. Title page of the *Liedersammlung*

This MHSS copy shows some wear but is in very good condition. There is no text printed on either the book's spine or cover, which indicates that it was planned primarily for use in schools and probably not for general sale in bookstores. I consider the book to be rare, for the *Mennonite Bibliography, 1631-1961*<sup>7</sup> lists this book as #14046 with one copy held by Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. Copies are also held in the libraries at Canadian Mennonite University and Fresno Pacific University. However, there are already two copies in the MHSS Archives and a few other copies can be found in other archives holding Russian Mennonite materials.

I have examined and compared five copies of this book to determine the standard form of the publication. There are some slight variations in the size of the copies, which is usual when hand trimming, but means that a process to open the pages is needed. Similarly, there are slight variations in the binding covers, though all are blank, with most copies having boards with smooth shiny paper and a mottled design. The difference in cover materials is slight and may just indicate that either a variety of papers were at hand and used when binding or not all copies were bound at the same time. The paper, binding, and layout are common and utilitarian, and familiar to its audience, which makes the work inexpensive and traditional. Most Mennonites prized their Bible and hymnbook more than schoolbooks, thus the former are the books that often were published with more expensive leather bindings.

There is no documentation available from the printer, thus we have to speculate on the number of copies printed, distribution, and use. From carefully examining the content of the copies one finds from the text, the type, and layout that only one printing was made. Schoolbooks are usually printed in large numbers, sold for a modest price, and receive heavy use from students. I estimate that in 1896 about ten percent of Russian Mennonites, or about six to eight thousand students, were in Mennonite elementary schools. Since there was no standardization of text books, schools could choose this *Liedersammlung* songbook or pass over it. Tina Kroeker, the book's owner, received it while attending elementary school in her village school of Schönau, Molotschna. As a grade three student she would have received it in about 1918, which is 22 years after it was published. This extended availability of a single printing suggests that the songbook was not popular with all schools. Those students who did learn singing from it are known to have had a great attachment to it. The publisher may also have printed too many copies, perhaps three to five thousand, to reasonably meet the demand. Though it is known that German Baptist

and Lutheran choirs in Russia also used Ziffern<sup>8</sup> there is no indication that they had any interest in this book.

Below is a compact description of the content of the book.

p(1) title page; p(2) Russian Censor's statement; p(3) "Vorwort" signed: "Die Herausgeber.;" p(4) blank; pp(5)–6 "Register.;" p(7) "Inhaltsverzeichnis.;" p(8) blank; pp(1–108) hold 135 German language song with numbered musical notation; p(109) second title page "СБОРНИКЪ / ПЪСЕНЬ / ДЛЯ НАРОДНЫХЪ ШКОЛЬ / ВЪ ЦЫФРАХЪ / (line ornament) / СОСТАВЛЕНЪ / НѢсколькими Народными Учителями" ["Collection Presented for Elementary Schools, in Numbered Musical Notation [i.e., "in Numbers"] Composed by Five National [i.e., Russian nationals] Teachers"]; p(110) blank; pp(111–112) "АЛФАВИТНОЕ ОГЛАВЛЕНИЕ" [Alphabetical Content]; pp(113–152) hold 45 Russian language songs with numbered musical notation.

This Mennonite work designated for public schools contains significant Russian language materials, indicating that by 1896 the Russian language had a valued place in Mennonite schools. This idea is reinforced with several other publications of the same time, for example, the publication in 1898 of the Russian language book *Краткая Немецкая Грамматика для Начальных Школ в России* (A Brief German Grammar for Elementary Schools in Russia), written by the distinguished Mennonite educator Kornelius B. Unruh (1849–1910). Also, Jakob Froese's 1914 *Sangesblüten: 205 der schönsten und beliebtesten Lieder in Ziffern für die deutsche Elementarschule in Russland* [Singing Blossoms: 205 of the Most Beautiful and Popular Songs in Numbered Musical Notation for the German Elementary School in Russia], included 61 songs in Russian, the remainder in German. From this I infer that in 1896 the Russian language was taught in many Mennonite schools, and if the Soviet Revolution had not occurred, in a generation or two Mennonites in Russia would probably have been functioning in the wider world in that language, though church business would likely have still been in German. The Russian language texts are pre-Soviet and thus some words contain letters that were later replaced when Russian orthography was reformed in 1918. With some of these Russian songs, the tempo notation like "Allegro" or "Adagio" are given in Roman type. The German printed text is in traditional Fraktur; however, the musical key notations and composers' names are printed in Roman type. It was a standard practice in German Fraktur printing to use Roman type to highlight a word where today we would highlight with bold or italic type. This practice seems to have been carried over to Russian as well.

The first Russian text encountered in the book is at the bottom of the title page, where the printer's location, Гальбштадтъ, i.e., Halbstadt (Molotschna, Ukraine), and name, П. Я. Нейфельдъ, i.e., P. J. Neufeld, are given.<sup>9</sup> Peter Jakob Neufeld (1823–1909) was a well-loved teacher, photographer, and printer who was fluent in Russian. Neufeld was the first Mennonite in Russia to print music.<sup>10</sup> He began in 1892 by printing Isaak Born's *Sängergruss* sheet music, and then later in 1892 the new Khortitsa Mennoniten Gemeinde *Gesangbuch*.<sup>11</sup> Neufeld printed and published several other books around this time and often listed his name and place of publication in Russian. He uses the Russian term Типография, which translates as "Typography," for his business of printing books. Normally his role would be called publisher (издатель) and/or printer (принтер). When in 1904 Neufeld sold this business to H. J. Braun and Company it was renamed in German as Druck und Verlag von H. J. Braun. Here the common German terms *Druck* (printer) and *Verlag* (publisher) are used. This business was soon renamed and became well known under the publisher's name, Raduga. The Russian word for rainbow is радуга, which is pronounced and written in German and English as *Raduga*. A printer just prints the text supplied to him by the author, but a publisher receives the author's text and is responsible for all the details of what the final book will look like: editing the text, choosing illustrations, size of the pages, typefaces, hard or soft cover, how it will be marketed, and so on. Though in the early twentieth-century publishing world the Russian word for "typography" was occasionally used just for "printer," the use of the word "typography" by Neufeld most likely indicates that he was highlighting his well-developed skills in music and text typesetting. These skills were considerable and demonstrated in this book with his use of various sizes and formats of fonts of Fraktur, Roman, and Cyrillic. It could also mean that he had a Linotype machine, a new invention that revolutionized typesetting about this time. That Neufeld was acting as publisher is noted on page 3, where he uses the title *die Herausgeber*, the editor. After selling his business, Neufeld continued to work as a major printer and editor with Raduga almost until his death.

The next Russian text is the censor's statement, "Дозволено цензурою. Одесса, 23. го Января 1895 г" (Censor Allowed, Odessa, 23 January 1895), placed on the back of the title page. Imperial Russia was an authoritarian state with controls on all media. Books in any language had to be vetted by the government censor and then published with this statement.<sup>12</sup> Without this inscription the book would have been declared subversive by the Russian gov-

ernment, copies seized, and the printer arrested and at a minimum fined.

Examining the sheets of paper that make up the book tells us how the printer composed his text pages for the book. The book's pages, compiled in sections, are assembled to make a work of standard octavo (i.e., sixteen-page) sections. This means that with 160 pages, ten sheets of paper would be used in printing, each folded three times to make octavo sections of eight leaves, or sixteen pages. The sections were bound, then trimmed to remove all but the spine folds. However, an examination of the binding and the signature marks in this specific songbook indicates a mixture of quarto (i.e., eight-page) sections, and octavo sections. The signature mark, which is not found in modern publishing, is a letter or a number that printers put on the very bottom near the front edge or spine of the first leaf of each section to help bookbinders put the folded sections in the correct order. In this case, the first and last sections are unnumbered, and each is a quarto. This is often found when the printer prepared the front introductory pages or the end index pages apart from the main text, printed them both on one sheet, and then cut his octavo sheet in two. This is probably what was done here. Next are octavo sections with signature numbers 1 to 9. All copies examined show that only sections 1 and 2 are bound as octavos, with the sections numbered 3 to 9 bound as quartos. One learns this by examining the insides of the folded pages and locating the threads used in binding. The signature on section 6 is misplaced. The splitting in two of the other octavo sections for binding is a minor puzzle. The pastedown and the single front and back flyleaves are not part of the printed sections but are on the same paper used in printing, which is a common wove paper. The paper is now beginning to show foxing, which is an age-related deterioration of paper causing brown spots and patches to appear.

Choral singing was introduced into and enthusiastically embraced by Russian Mennonite communities and schools in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Acceptance in churches occurred somewhat later. By 1893 the first *Sängerfest* (choir festival) was held, and by 1896, when this book was published, many schools had choirs, though most singing was *a cappella* (voices only), with a tuning fork for pitch. With all the songs using Ziffern, rather than modern Western staff notation, confirmation is given that the Mennonite schools in Russia much preferred teaching this easy-to-learn form to their students. Most Mennonite Brethren and Conference Mennonites who came to Canada in the 1920s had a good grounding in Ziffern. Its continued use in Canada is proven in letters describing private singing and choral workshops and in

manuscript choir books, as well as with the 1932 publication of Johann P. Claßen's hymnary *Liederborn* (Born Songs).<sup>14</sup> However, the Western notation system was standard in North America and Mennonites eventually had to adapt.

The 135 German language songs in *Liedersammlung für die Volksschule in Ziffern* are mostly praise and bucolic nature songs with religious themes for children, from various sources. Only a few are to be found in the standard Mennonite hymnbooks of the day. In the *Vorwort* (Foreword) the editor explains that the three-part songs are to be performed by both students and teachers: two parts sung by the students and the third sung by the teacher. The editor notes that contributions in *Liedersammlung* are from him and others, mostly teachers. He also remarks on the good quality of the texts with beautiful and simple melodies. The texts of the songs are simple and straightforward. To add variety, some songs include solo parts. The book was intended to provide students with a basic music education. The *Register* (an alphabetical list of song titles) has a number of minor sorting errors, indicating that it might not have been carefully edited. The Register is followed by the *Inhaltsverzeichnis* (table of contents). This would be familiar to most users of Mennonite hymnbooks: 12 sections with titles such as *Jesus, unser Heiland* (Jesus our Saviour) and *Morgenlieder* (morning songs). Section D, *Festzeiten* (celebrations) is subdivided into eight parts. Interestingly, the placement of the table of contents in front was standard for German publications, but not for Russian or French publications, where the table of contents was placed at the end of the book.

The 45 Russian-language songs are organized into two parts, and the first begins with the well-known "Боже, Царя храни!" (God Save the Tsar!), the national anthem of Imperial Russia. This anthem is followed by several other nationalistic and religious songs. With these songs, it is inconceivable that the book would have been available in schools after the formation of the Ukrainian People's Republic or the Soviet Union in late 1918. These types of Russian-language songs are also found in the other Mennonite songbooks of the late Imperial Russian era. The inclusion of these in a schoolbook indicates that Mennonites were accepting of or at least adapting to Imperial Russia as their new homeland. The second part has bucolic religious songs relating to nature and the love of the homeland which have similar themes to the German bucolic songs. They were not folk songs and most are unknown to contemporary Russians.

## Conclusion

My final reason for writing this article is to encourage book owners when passing books on to other readers or to archives not to mutilate them by erasing or obliterating names or hand-writings added by readers. The marks tell a story of that specific book, and of its owners and readers. An old tattered book examined by an expert can often reveal valuable information about a people and their history. These markings are relevant and should not be discarded, but more importantly, should also be passed on. Lastly, as a nod to the digital world I have scanned all the pages of this book and readers can examine the pages themselves at the website of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan.

## Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge help received with the Russian language from Anna Gersher of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> David Pearson, *Books as History: The Importance of Books Beyond their Texts*, rev. ed. (London: The British Library; New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 2011).
- <sup>2</sup> Scanned images of the book are at the website of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, <https://mhss.sk.ca/vw/Liedersammlung-a.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> Profile #420284, GRanDMA (The Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) database, 17.09 ed. (Fresno, CA: California Mennonite Historical Society, 2018).
- <sup>4</sup> Profile #931501, GRanDMA.
- <sup>5</sup> The German term *Ziffern* is commonly known in English as “numbered musical notation” or the “cipher musical notation” system.
- <sup>6</sup> This term or its contraction, *Kurrent*, is the correct German term for identifying the old forms of German cursive writing that are often poorly labeled as “Gothic” or “Fraktur” handwriting.
- <sup>7</sup> Nelson P. Springer and A.J. Klassen, eds., *Mennonite Bibliography, 1631-1961* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1977).
- <sup>8</sup> Peter Letkemann, “The *Christlicher Saengerbund* and Mennonite Choral Singing in Russia,” *Mennonite Life* 41:4 (December 1986): 4–10.
- <sup>9</sup> Though Russian language text on title pages is found on several Raduga publications, its use was uncommon for Mennonite books printed for the Russian Mennonite community. One may speculate on what impact this may have had. A progressive teacher or urban community leader might have been encouraged by it as pointing to a transition from German to the national Russian language, and therefore promote the use of this book.

However, a poorly educated or reactionary rural leader may have been offended and felt the use of this language was a foreign intrusion into the Mennonite community and thus dismissed the book, making its use rare.

- <sup>10</sup> See *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, s.v. "Neufeld, Peter J. (1823-1909)," [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Neufeld,\\_Peter\\_J.\\_\(1823-1909\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Neufeld,_Peter_J._(1823-1909)).
- <sup>11</sup> Peter Letkemann, "The Hymnody and Choral Music of Mennonites in Russia, 1789-1915" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985), 432.
- <sup>12</sup> Mennonites in Imperial Russia sometimes avoided the censor by having their books printed in Germany. However, one finds catechisms presumably printed in Russia without a statement of censorial approval. I speculate that these works would have been under the careful control of congregation members and not available to the public; therefore, they deemed it unnecessary to have such approval.
- <sup>13</sup> Letkemann, "Hymnody and Choral Music," chapters V-X.
- <sup>14</sup> Johann P. Claßen, *Liederborn* (Winnipeg: printed by the author, 1932).