What's in a Name?[1]
Exposing the Nefarious Plot to
Disenfranchise the Hueberts!

Helmut T. Huebert, *Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*

Introduction

Our daughter graduated from the faculty of education at the University of Manitoba and was looking for a teaching job. She applied for a position at the Border Valley School in Reinland, near Winkler, Manitoba. She was interviewed by members of the local school board, all of whom were Mennonites. Among other questions asked was why she, with the name of Huebert, would apply for a position in an entirely Mennonite district. Her final convincing argument that she was indeed of Mennonite stock was that her grandfather was a Rempel.

I myself am an orthopaedic surgeon practicing in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Both my father and mother were born in the Molotschna Mennonite colony in the Ukraine. My father was a Mennonite Brethren minister, teacher and writer. We lived in such Mennonite strongholds as Gem, Hepburn, Hillsboro and Winnipeg, In school I was taught Mennonite History by the late Gerhard Lohrenz, well-known Mennonite lay-historian. I am a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church and have long been involved in local church and conference activities. As a consultant knowing a number of physicians in the area, I see many patients referred from southern Manitoba. Despite obviously knowing about Mennonites

and their history, despite speaking to them in either High or broken Low German, a considerable number of people remain unconvinced that I really am Mennonite. Hiebert they know; Huebert is some kind of foreigner to them.

It is this common perception among those who should know better that has prompted my study of the origin and subsequent development of our family name Huebert.

Huebert was an early Anabaptist first and family name. In the Vistula Delta area the use as first name was abandoned. With Dutch influence in the region the family name was modified to Hübert. Through Low German usage, where all versions are pronounced "Hiebat," an increasing number of people, either through lack of historical knowledge, through indifference, or deliberately, have switched to Hiebert. This, however, does not negate Hübert (Huebert) as an authentic Mennonite name.

I fully realize and agree that "Mennonite" is basically a religious designation, regardless of cultural or social background. In this article, however, I will use it principally as an ethnic term, denoting the Dutch-Vistula-Russia stream of Anabaptists. Anabaptist will be used until they arrive in the Vistula area, after which the settlers will be labelled Mennonite. Throughout the article the term "first" name will be used rather than Christian or proper name. "Family" name will denote the surname or last name. I assume that in many instances "Huebert" is simply a version of "Hübert," as it is in our own case. The "ue" signifies the umlaut "ü". Despite this I will meticulously copy the exact version from my sources, although I realize that some authors have already converted all to the "ue." When reference is made to the name complex in all its variations I will use "Hubert-Hiebert" throughout, although in that specific instance other versions may be included.

Origins

Hubert, according to Webster[2] is a French name of Old High German origin. The old Germanic name Hugibert[3] is derived from "hugu" (mind) and "beraht" (bright), literally meaning "bright in spirit." It has usually been a masculine first name.

Saint Hubert[4] (655 - 727 A.D.), also known as Hubert of Maastricht, was a hermit working for Saint Lambert of Maastricht. According to legend he was converted in the Forest of Freyr in 683 by the vision of a stag with a crucifix between its antlers.[5] For this reason he became one of the patron saints of hunters. He succeeded Lambert as bishop in 705 A.D., and worked to convert the last of the pagans in the Ardennes area. In 717 or 718 he moved the episcopal seat and Lambert's remains to Liege. He died on May 30, 727, although the feast celebrating his life is November 3. His own remains were transported to the Abbey of Saint Hubert in the Ardennes in 825, but during an invasion in 1616 his coffin was hidden by monks and never found again.

In the Middle Ages Saint Hubert also became protector against mad dogs

because of a miraculous stole he supposedly received from the Blessed Virgin. St. Hubert, a city in south-eastern Belgium, and Liege claimed him as patron. To this day there are towns, streets and institutions named after Saint Hubert in many parts of the world.

In the Middle Ages pilgrims commonly travelled to the well known shrine of Saint Hubert in the Ardennes. With such a feature attraction near at hand it is not surprising that people in the region were named after the saint. Horst Penner feels that Hubert, or variations of it, was first known among Anabaptists in this area, around Aachen and Monschau.[6]

A list of 63 Anabaptist families moving from the Monschau region includes four with first or family names probably of this origin. Hupert Bungardt, Huperdt Gerhardts and Mergs Hupert left Kesternich, a town just north-east of Monschau. Elsgen Hupert departed from Simmerath, which is a few kilometres nearer Monschau.[7]

Five kilometres south of Monschau is the town of Kalterherberg. In 1591, just at the time the Anabaptists were arriving, this unusual name was transferred to the Vistula Delta as Kalteherberge, likely by immigrants from the Monschau area. In 1648 Hans Hübert is recorded as living in Tiegenort, near the Vistula area village of Kalteherberge.

It is noteworthy that when the Hueberts moved to their new homeland they continued the Monschau method of naming.[8] They did not use the -son, -sen nor the -ing to denote children in the fashion of the Dutch or the North-West Germans. There might be Dirks, then Dirksen, but there were never any Hubertsens.

In 1991, in an attempt to verify or even amplify Penner's data, the archives of Monschau and Simmerath and the mayor's office in Kesternich were contacted. The scholar answering for the Monschau archives was unclear as to what Anabaptists were and certainly could trace none with the family name of Hubert.[9] The Simmerath archive material goes back only to 1680, and therefore was not helpful.[10]

Undaunted, my wife and I visited the area in the summer of 1991. Monschau is a bustling resort nestled in a mountainous area of Germany very near the Belgian border. Simmerath nearby has some beautiful half-timbered houses and is replete with names such as "Restaurant Schröders Eck." Kesternich, a smaller town, also has some older buildings and a church which was renovated after World War II. Its surrounding cemetery has mostly more recent graves, with such names as Helene Claassen quite common. A fair number of tombstones record Hubert as first name, but none as family name. Interestingly, a Hubert Gerard died in 1983—much the same name, possibly a distant relative, of the Anabaptist Huperdt Gerhardts who left the town in 1598. The name is also used in a feminine form; a Hubertine died in 1963. The ultimate connection, particularly for Mennonite Brethren, is a Hubert Wüst who died in 1966.

A review of family names in telephone directories of the area showed that the Hueberts had not quite died out. In 1991 Aachen, the city closest to the area, had
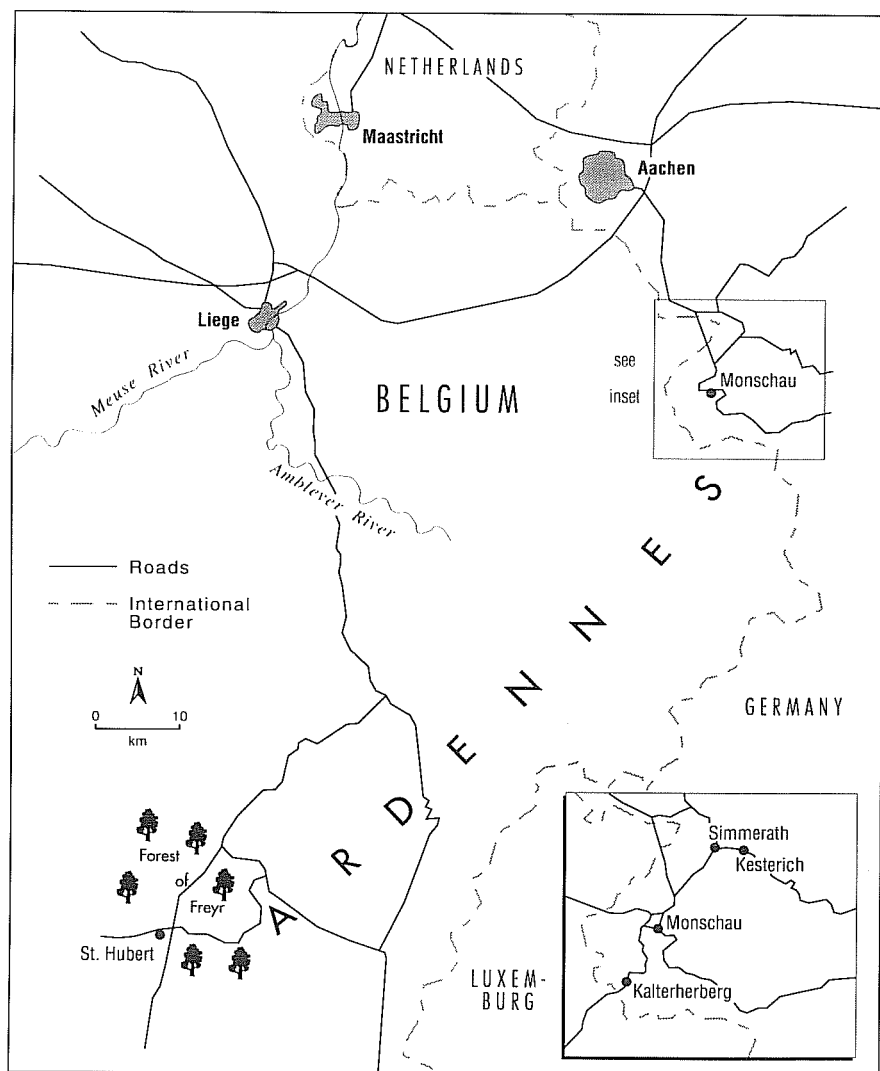
(W. Hiebert, The University of Winnipeg, Geography Department)

four Hubertz and one Huebert. Monschau had one Huppertz, while Simmerath had one Hubbertz, one Huber and one Hilbert. There were no Hieberts.

There is certainly ample evidence, both historically and from what can be gleaned today that a name something like Hubert was used in the Aachen area both as first and family name. There is no evidence to substantiate any use of the name Hiebert. We have documented historical proof that Anabaptists, including Huberts, left the Monschau area. At least some of them, together with their heritage, arrived in the Vistula Delta region.
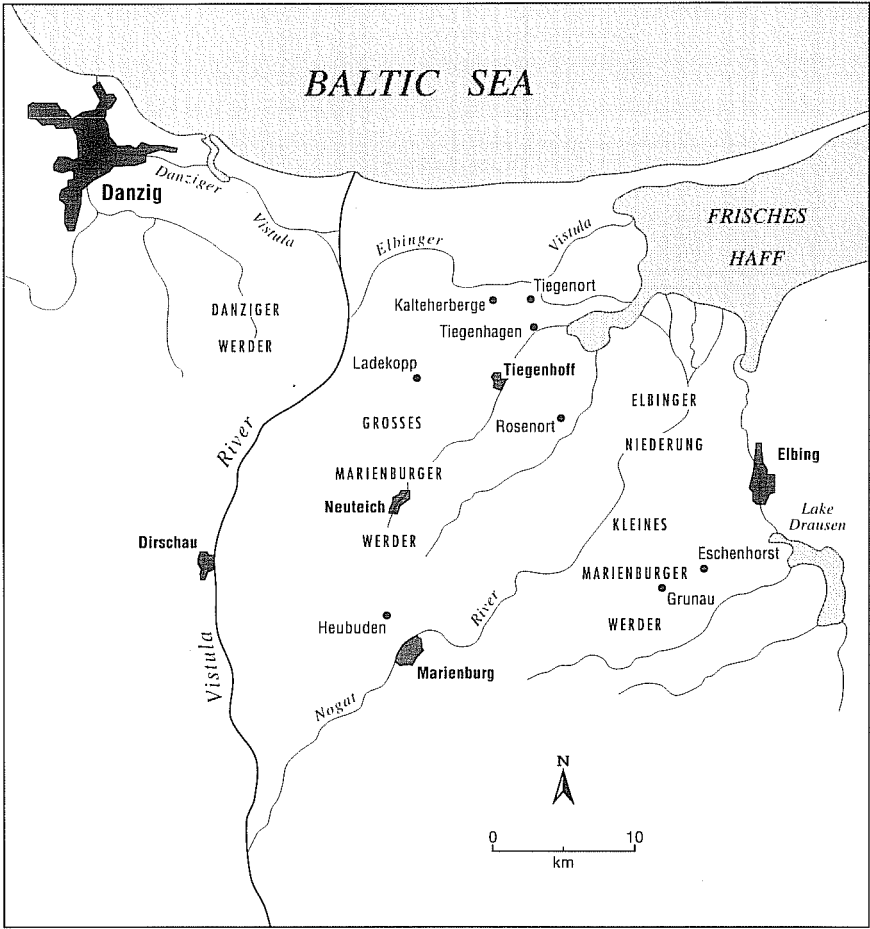
Vistula Delta

Penner records that in 1622 the village Grunau ceded 8½ *Hufen* land to the neighbouring Eschenhorst. Among the signators for the new settlers from Eschenhorst were Hubert Adrians and Jacob Hubert.[11] Hubert was used both as first and family name, and remained unchanged in the High German region of the Kleines Marienburger Werder.

Also early in the seventeenth century, in the northern part of the Grosses Werder, the Dutch influence is seen in the modification of the name to Hübert. Peter Hübert together with Philipp van Dyck and Zacharias Petersen, all of Tiegenhof, are recorded as going to court in Danzig in November 25, 1637, with a complaint against a farmer in Tiegenort.[12] Hans Hübert of Tiegenhof, likely the same one mentioned previously as living near Kalteherberge, paid 1500 marks to Hans Kreker on June 6, 1648.[13] Probably the same man, together with Hans Thiessen and Jacob Peterson, was listed as landowner in the Zehnhuben area.[14] The Hübert variation of the name was taken along when the Mennonites migrated to Memel (Klaipeda) in 1740.[15]

But further influences came to bear on the Huberts. The Werder people pronounced the "ü" the same as "ie". Presumably this played a part in the development of the current Low German, where all brands of the name are pronounce "Hiebat". Assuming that the pronunciation, particularly among non-academics, might eventually influence the written version, it is not surprising that in the year 1679 the name Hiebert is, for the first time, seen in a Danzig Mennonite church membership list.[16] The Hieberts must have moved or died out rather quickly, since none are mentioned in the Danzig list of Mennonites of 1681.[17]

Extensive listing of farm owners in the Vistula area covers the time from the seventeenth, but concentrates on the eighteenth century.[18] Wilhelm Hübert owned one *Hufe* of land in Rosenort on 1727. Jacob Hybert rented land in the Grosses Marienburger Werder in 1710,[19] while Peter Hybert had one *Hufe* in Ladekopp in 1727. Hans Hiebert farmed in Tiegenhagen in 1727 on 15 *Morgen* of land.[20] By 1776 three main spellings of Hubert are present in a list of Mennonites of East and West Prussia.[21] There are two Huberts, one Hübert, one Huebert and ten Hieberts. One of the Hieberts is also listed as Gubert, casting

BALTIC SEA

Danziger

Vistula

Danzig

Elbinger

Vistula

FRISCHES

HAFF

DANZIGER

WERDER

Kalteherberge

Tiegenort

Tiegenhagen

Ladekopp

Tiegenhoff

ELBINGER

River

GROSSES

Rosenort

NIEDERUNG

Elbing

MARIENBURGER

Neuteich

WERDER

KLEINES

Lake Drausen

Dirschau

Eschenhorst

MARIENBURGER

Grunau

Heubuden

WERDER

River

Vistula

Marienburg

Nogat

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km

(W. Hiebert, The University of Winnipeg, Geography Department)

some doubt on the specificity of name spelling at the time, either by the Mennonites as a whole or the secretary in particular.

Gustav E. Reimer studied Mennonite family names in West Prussia before 1800 and included a listing of "Huebert, Hiebert, Hubert."[22] They lived in Tiegenhagen, Ladekopp, Rosenort, Heubuden and Danzig, all of which had Flemish Mennonite churches. They were also listed for the Neugarten Danzig church, which was Frisian. Presumably most of the Hubert-Hieberts were in the Flemish division of the church. Reimer comments that the family name Hübert derives from the first name, and was still, during that time, also used as a first name.

Possibly a wider selection giving a more accurate indication of incidence of names was recorded by Karl Stumpp.[23] In his listing of German emigrants to Russia from 1763 to 1862, 26 families with the Hubert-Hiebert name are mentioned. There are two with the name Hubert, 20 Hübert, one Hybert and three Hiebert.

B.H. Unruh also recorded lists of Mennonite inhabitants of East and West Prussia, Poland and several Russian colonies during the sixteenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[24] Alan F. Peters has catalogued all the names on these lists. Of the 161 people with the Hubert-Hiebert name there are 104 Huebert, two Hueberts and 12 Hubert, comprising 73.3% in this category.[25] The 31 Hiebert, seven Hibert and five Gibert are 26.7%.

From this extensive data it can be assumed that in the latter part of the Prussian and early part of the Russian period Hubert had almost universally been modified to Hübert. The Low Germanization to Hiebert had begun, but had not yet been a major influence. Use of Hubert as a first name occurred in Prussia, but the practice does not seem to have carried over to Russia.

Russia

We have several windows into the life and times of the Mennonites in Russia. Molotschna village reports were commissioned in 1848 and include many names; a number of villages even list all the first settlers.[26] There is an Aron Hübert in Tiege, and a councillor Hübert in Liebenau. One wealthy farmer from Lindenau is claimed by both camps, being listed as Hübert in one place, Hiebert in another. Only one consistent Hiebert lived in Tiegerweide.

Heinrich Huebert of Liebenau was probably the best known Russian Mennonite with the Hubert-Hiebert name. He was one of the original signators of the declaration of secession of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Elisabetthal on January 6, 1860. He became a leading minister and an elder of this denomination.[27] Hübert is mentioned as one of the nine commoner Mennonite names among the Templer movement of the mid 1860s. Most moved to new settlements like the Kuban.[28] In the political field Johann Hübert from Einlage was *Oberschulze* of the Chortitza Colony from 1908 to September of 1909.[29]

P.M. Friesen's history of Mennonites mentions many names from all aspects of Mennonite life. A.A. Vogt has indexed these names; those of the Hubert-Hiebert name which appear to be from Russia include 12 Huebert, five Hiebert and one Hieber.[30]

We also have a good exit poll for Russian Mennonite names with the late nineteenth century migration to the United States and Canada. From 1874 to 1884 approximately 18,000 Mennonites left Russia, representing from a quarter to a third of the total population.[31] Clarence Hiebert has collected and published Shantz lists (for Canada) and ship lists (for U.S. arrivals) of this migration.[32] In all 16 families with the name Hubert, Hübert or Huebert sailed across the ocean, a total of 61 individuals. There were 37 families of Hiebert, Heibert or Hilbert, totalling 163 individuals, representing 72.8% of the Hubert-Hiebert population. Distribution in Canada and the United States was roughly proportional.

Clarence Hiebert himself feels that the lists may be inaccurate. The German and Russian speaking Mennonites sailed on German, English and Belgian ships, often with no translators aboard. The persons making the lists likely spelled the names the way they were pronounced. Hübert would have become written as Hiebert in many instances, assuming Low German pronunciation. It is also remarkable that all colony lists and all but one ship had either Hüberts or they had Hieberts, but not both. This predilection likely represents the supposition or tastes of the secretary rather than the actual names of the individuals. It is therefore difficult to say whether this change from Hübert to Hiebert is apparent or real. Probably there has been some Low Germanization of Hübert, but not as much as might be supposed from the statistics. With an increase in the percentage of Hieberts it could also be postulated that they were more prolific than the Hüberts. Some evidence favours this theory. The average size of the Hübert family leaving Russia, according to the lists, was 3.81 members, that of the Hieberts 4.41. We have no other corroborating proof that this was a significant factor. Regardless of what the explanations are, however, and what the specific numbers were, it does seem that a fairly high percentage of the Hubert-Hieberts who landed in North America in the 1870s assumed that their name was Hiebert.

We have another opportunity to discover Mennonite names in Russia during the 1920s. Unrest, destruction and migration afford excellent opportunities to draw up all kinds of lists. Many were published in the Mennonite newspapers of the time. A review of all those murdered in the Chortitza colony from 1917-21, of deaths from typhus, of villagers in Kleefeld and Sparrow, of delegates to the *Bundeskonferenz* in Moscow in 1925, of people requesting food packages as well as extensive lists of people migrating to Canada and Paraguay gives a good cross-section of Mennonite names.[33] The people are from various colonies all across Russia. The *Mennonitische Rundschau*, my primary source, did not seem to have editorial spelling bias, since various Hubert-Hiebert names occurred side-by-side. In total there were 193 individuals with the Hubert-Hiebert name. Of these 152 were

Hübert, one a Huebert, representing 79.3% of the total. There were 40 Hieberts, 20.7%.

With the original migration into Russia Hübert and variants comprised 73.3% of the Hubert-Hiebert name. Over time there was some increase in the use of Hiebert through Low Germanization, although it is doubtful that the true number was anywhere near the 72.8% suggested by the emigration statistics of the 1870s. Perhaps the 79.3% Hüberts in the 1920s lists represents a rebound in the use of the name in Russia. It is possible that after the departure of the more conservative elements, and the ever increasing education of those remaining, which would have been in High German (and increasingly in Russian), that they became more cognizant of their own past heritage. More precise knowledge of their own history and use of High German would have favoured continued use of the name Hubert or Hübert.

The New World

In North America, likely fuelled by the misguided presumptions of the 1870s immigrants, the process of change from Hübert to Hiebert continued, possibly for three main reasons.

There has been continued use of Low German, particularly in areas such as southern Manitoba. Some people in the region do no even know High German, speaking either Low German or English. This would make it difficult to maintain a name such as Hübert. Originally 22.9% of those of the Hubert-Hiebert name were listed as Hueberts. There was a new injection of Hüberts into southern Manitoba in the 1920s, at least four families with 15 individuals arriving in the area.[34] The Low Germanization has been so relentless, however, that in 1993 there were 164 Hieberts listed in the telephone directory for Steinbach, Winkler and Altona, but not one Huebert. In Winnipeg the decimation was not quite as complete. In 1993 there were 260 Hieberts, representing 91.2%, and 25 Hubert-Hueberts. Perhaps Low German is used less in Winnipeg, or else the urban Hueberts are a little more stubborn in retaining their original names.

In the Paraguayan Chaco Low German is the operative language, so the process has also been going on there. In 1990 a computer print-out of all Hubert-Hiebert names showed 13 individuals with family or maiden name of Hiebert. There was one lonely spy in the region with the maiden name of Huebert.

Some people simply do not care how they spell other people's names, although they may be quite particular about their own. My father, Gerhard David Huebert, a prominent teacher and preacher at the time, was host minister for the Northern District Mennonite Brethren Conference in Hepburn, Saskatchewan, in 1941. The yearbook describing the conference on different pages lists him as Hübert, Huebert and Hiebert. The following year he is listed twice as Hiebert and once as Hübert. This despite the fact that most of the delegates knew

each other well, and should have known what their friends' names were.[35]

Then there are also deliberate attempts to change the name from Hubert-Huebert to Hiebert. Some people seem to feel that the Hueberts simply do not know how to spell their own name and need editorial assistance to correct this ignorance.

In 1925 someone with the initial "W" studied the names of those who had migrated from Russia to Canada up to and including 1924.[36] There were 152 different family names, among which Dück (277), Friesen (163) and Wiens (145) were the commonest. Twentieth on the list was Hiebert with a total of 60 individuals. On reviewing the lists myself I found 17 families in this time-period with 71 individuals, every single one of which was clearly spelled Hübert. There was not one Hiebert in the lot. Why someone who obviously knew about the *Umlaut* in Dück simply ignored it in Hübert is difficult to understand.

But the plot thickens. The 1848 Molotschna village reports were originally printed in the *Odessaer Zeitung* and the *Mennonitische Rundschau* without footnotes regarding names. A book version published in 1941 was edited by Margarite Woltner.[37] For each of the three times the name Hübert is used a "corrective" footnote was added. Twice it is mentioned that "The name is also written Hiebert" and once that "The family also calls itself Hiebert." There is no such footnote when the name Hiebert is used. How an editor in 1941 would know what the families called themselves in 1848 is difficult to comprehend, but it is certain that she felt that Hiebert was the only correct version.

A recent indexing of names found in B.H. Unruh's book on the Mennonite migrations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is very helpful.[38] As previously mentioned the Hubert-Hiebert name occurs 161 times, of which 118 are Huebert or Hubert. The first 12 names on the list are Huebert. But where, alphabetically, do you find the list? Under "Hiebert"!

Conclusion

I think I have proven that Hubert, then Hübert or Huebert is indeed a bona fide Anabaptist/Mennonite name with a long and honoured history on our sojourn in various countries. Hiebert is a later derivation, a sort of Low German degeneration of this name. An increasing number of people in the New World, either through lack of historical knowledge, through indifference, or deliberately, have switched to Hiebert.

Incidentally, our daughter did get the teaching job in Reinland. She married and now lives in Winkler. With the family name of Sawatzky she moves in that Mennonite community with no one to doubt that she is typically Mennonite. Obviously she has a longstanding name of unequivocally pure Mennonite derivation. I only hope that the Polish Embassy will not dispute this well-known fact!

Notes

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene 1, Line 43. But does a rose by any other name really smell as sweet?

[2] *Webster's New International Dictionary*, Second Edition (Springfield, Mass., U.S.A., G & C Merriam Company, 1950), Vol. II, p.210.

[3] Victor Peters, Jack Thiessen, *Mennonitische Namen, Mennonite Names* (Marburg, N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1987), p.71.

[4] *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), Vol 7, pp. 182-83.

[5] *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. 1977), Micropaedia Vol VIII, p. 784.

[6] Horst Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen* (Weierhof, Pfalz, Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein e.V., 1978), p.282.

[7] Penner, ibid, p.282.

[8] Penner, ibid, p.283.

[9] Personal letter from Stadtdirektor, Stadt Monschau, April 17, 1991.

[10] Personal letter from Gemeindedirektor, Gemeinde Simmerath, March 22, 1991.

[11] Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, p.283.

[12] Horst Penner, *Ansiedlung Mennonitscher Niederländer im Weichselmündungsgebiet von der Mitte des 16 Jahrhunderts bis zum Begin der Preussischen Zeit* (Weierhof, Pfalz, Mennonitscher Geschichtverein, 1940), p.46.

[13] Penner, *Ansiedlung*, p.49.

[14] Penner, *Ansiedlung*, p.43.

[15] Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, p.283.

[16] Peters and Thiessen, p.71.

[17] Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, pp.469-471.

[18] Penner, *Ansiedlung*, pp.71-86.

[19] Penner, *Ansiedlung*, p.62.

[20] *Hufe*—a land measure used in Prussia at the time. One *Hufe* equaled 30 *Morgen*. Traditionally a *Morgen* was the amount of land that could be plowed in one morning. In 1849 a Prussian *Morgen* was 0.631 acres or 0.255 hectares. Farms on the lists varied in size from 1.5 *Morgen* to 9 *Hufen*, although most had one to three *Hufen*.

[21] Penner, *Die ost- und westpreussischen Mennoniten* pp.416-467.

[22] Gustav E. Reimer, *Die Familiennamen der westpreussischen Mennoniten* (Weierhof, Pfalz, Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1940), p.110.

[23] Karl Stumpp, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1673 to 1862* (Lincoln, Nebraska, American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1978), pp.182-83.

[24] Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16.,18., und 19. Jahrhundert* (Karlsruhe, Im Selbstverlag, 1955).

[25] Alan F. Peters, "A Comprehensive Index of all Persons Recorded in the Family Lists and other Documents contained in the Appendix to the Book *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe*."

[26] Jacob Stach was the original collector, but it seems they were not published at the time. The *Odessaer Zeitung* printed them in 1904, followed a year later by the *Mennonitische Rundschau*.

Woltner edited a book which included them in 1941.

27 Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, Translated from the German (Fresno, California, Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp.104-105, 230-32, 242-43.

28 *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol IV, p.693.

29 *Mennonitische Rundschau* No.30, July 25, 1923, p.9.

30 A.A. Vogt, "Register der Personennamen die in dem Geschichtswerk der *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruederschaft in Russland* von P.M. Friesen vorkommen" (Steinbach, Manitoba), pp.21-22.

31 Helmut T. Huebert,*Hierschau: An example of Russian Mennonite Life* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1986), pp.88-89.

32 Clarence Hiebert, compiler and editor, *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1974). Lists found throughout the book.

33 *Mennonitische Rundschau* reviewing many issues between 1921 and 1930.

34 *Mennonitische Rundschau*, immigration lists 1921 to 1930.

35 Yearbooks of the Northern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of 1941 and 1942. As a matter of fact the conference secretaries for both conventions were good friends of my father, and one of them was a very meticulous German scholar.

36 *Mennonitische Rundschau*, No.16, April 22, 1925, pp.5-6.

37 Margarite Woltner, editor, *Die Gemeindeberichte von 1848 der deutschen Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer* (Leipzig, S. Hirzel, 1941). Molotschna villages are on pp.88-163.

38 Alan Peters, "A Comprehensive Index...."