

Christine Hertz's Document

Biography of Jacob and Christine Heisler

Jacob Heisler, son of Michael Heisler, was born in 1870 in Blumenfeld, Russia. There he got married in 1903 to Christine Materi, the daughter of Peter Materi. This marriage was blessed with 8 children, 6 boys and 2 girls: Emanuel born Feb. 9, 1905, Peter born Dec. 30, 1906, Elisabeth born Jan. 6, 1909, Michael born July 5, 1910, Jakob born July 17, 1912, Theresia born March 3, 1914, Franz born April 21, 1916, Nicodemus born Oct. 29, 1917.

All children are married with the exception of Theresia who stays with her parents. Emanuel married Maria Antoni; Peter married Anna Boschmann, but he died already in 1940. Elisabeth married Alexander Kuhn. Michael married Eva Streifel, Jakob married Margareta Campbell, Franz married Lena Jangula and Nicodemus married Eva Immel.

The family emigrated from Russia in 1907, they had 2 children then. Oct. 16 they took the train in Nikolai to Antwerp, Holland. Here they boarded a boat which became their home for 14 days. A terrible fog reigned for 4 days and the voyage went on only slowly but finally on Nov.1 they arrived in Quebec. From there they continued by train till Winnipeg. They had to stay there for 4 days, then they continued to Estevan. The train ride was good. Mr. A. Marsall, his wife, a sister of Mrs. Heisler and their 2 children joined the Heislars and now they were a group of 8 people. Unfortunately Mr. And Mrs. Marsall are dead already. In Estevan they bought out a farmer for \$ 1100. Now everything was loaded onto 2 box cars and the trip continued to Irvine. The 2 men travelled in the box car with the chickens, ducks, cows, and horses, the women with their children in a passenger carriage. None of them had any reason to get bored. Especially the men. With them it was like in Noah's ark only not as orderly. Everything became rather rebellious. Constantly they had to make peace. But when even the horses got at each other's throats, their knowledge had come to an end. And because they were so afraid and frightened and did not know any English they cried out in Russian: "Basta Rabjati", in German: "Halt_ Kamerad_" (Stop, Comrade_) Both must have had a good voice because the train stopped and the conductors brought order into the chaos. Without any further accident the trip continued till Irvine. There both families temporarily rented a house. In December 1907 the men went out to find land. By train they went till Calgary. Without finding anything they returned home to Irvine. Here they found 2 men, Friedrich Weiss and Karl Bennet, who told them that 90 miles outside of Irvine land was available in the Happyland district. In the meantime about 20 men had come together, all looking for land. Most had emigrated from Romania. They got organized a little and 8 men were chosen as scouts for the whole group into the promised land. They brought back a number for every family which represented a homestead. Then all drove to Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan to register

their land as their own. Back from Regina they got ready for the trip. Two wagons were loaded with everything they owned and in addition a hay loader had to serve to place all their belongings. They started the trip in good weather on February 24. Everybody was happy and hoped for a good trip without any interruptions. But here too it went like always: Man plans but God rules. They left Irvine in the morning in beautiful sunshine. But less than 4 miles outside Irvine they were surprised by a snow storm. It got terribly cold and you could hardly see the prairie trail. But on they drove. They hoped it would get better towards evening but instead it got worse. No farm far and wide and darkness approached. There were 4 little children 2 and 3 years old. There were chickens, ducks, and cows that had to be milked. What was to be done if it got pitch dark before a farm was reached?

But in the greatest case of need, God's help is nearest. That's how it was here too. They finally reached a sheep dip where sheep would be washed before market. There they found a scanty shelter for the night with enough coal to keep a fire through the night. The shelter only had 3 walls, so in order not to freeze everybody had to stay close to the fire. Only the dog lost his life because he could not stay close to the fire. How should they continue when they were just 12 miles away from Irvine? When they were ready to continue next morning, no road could be seen. One man had to go ahead to find a road, which was not too hard as the prairie grass was lower and trampled down where the road was. So they drove on but not out into the blue but into the infinite white prairie. When they were about 25 miles away from the sheep dip they met a sheep rancher by the name of Wogert. He tried to find his sheep which had been dispersed in the snow storm. When he saw that the 2 men had their families with them, he invited them to stay overnight at his place. Of course this invitation was accepted gladly. How happy everybody was to have a roof over the head again and to thaw out the frozen limbs. To travel for 2 days with the family is no pittance especially not in bitter cold weather. Mr. Wogert was not married but very hospitable nonetheless. They could bring all their things in order again and prepare for the next day. In the morning it still was miserably cold, the window panes were covered with a thick layer of ice. But they had to continue. So right into the everlasting snow desert. This day too they only travelled 25 miles. In the evening they again found a rancher whom they asked for shelter for the night. He asked them where they came from and where they were heading. When he learned where they were going, he shook his head and said: "This is not the time to travel and especially not with a family. I cannot keep you. I don't have room for so many."

Now what could be done? Where to go for the night? So they explained that it was against Canadian law to refuse shelter in such weather. When he heard that, he changed his mind and they could stay. They entered the house and unpacked the children, then the fun began. The children had been tightly wrapped all day so that they could hardly move and now they were free. Now they could run around like savages and that they did and that actually pleased Mr. Bitie very much. Next morning he asked them to stay for a while yet and that

because of the children. But it could not be done, they had to continue because they were still 30 miles away from their homestead. Again it turned night before they reached their temporary living quarters. They could not get to their own homestead as there was no water. Almost all new settlers had settled near the South Saskatchewan because of the water problem. And both our families joined them. Here they now had water and enough fire wood. Already in Irvine they had rented a small hut as shelter from a man who had been there before. So they were happy to have their own home when they arrived there in the evening around 9 o'clock. But this joy did not last long because this hut only had 3 walls also. Now what was to be done? As there were several settlers present already, they asked around if somebody would house the 2 families at least for one night. But all had just enough room for themselves because they too had only recently settled there. So everybody had to help himself as much as possible. The one missing wall was temporarily covered with blankets and with whatever was available, then an oven was set up and fired up so much that it glowed in the dark. It actually did get fairly warm. But all of a sudden it was too warm, at least for the boards of the hut which were close to the oven. They caught fire and now our new arrivars were too hot too. They really did not want to be burned. Luckily there was enough snow to extinguish the fire. Then the night in their new home continued without any accident.

Right away next morning work was started. Wood had to be collected and split. Fish had to be caught, you had to have something to eat. The hut had to become more liveable. When the season became a little warmer they started a garden. The garden seeds started and progressed well. Already they thought: Now we made it. Everybody looked forward to the first fruits from the garden which they themselves had raised. But they had hoped too soon. Exactly at Pentecost, in early June, the river rose tremendously and flooded all the newly started gardens and took along all their work. In this way the first harvest was totally ruined in 1908. The river was so high that it even tore off many a ferry. Many domestic animals, even houses fell victim of the flood. Luckily the houses of the new settlers were far enough away from the river that no damage was done to them.

It was a sad sight so see how the river carried away everything. Much of the wood they had collected painstakingly became victim of the rapid waves. The flood rose so quickly that some saw themselves surrounded by water while working outside. But here neighbours helped each other. Ropes were thrown to those surrounded by water and he and the wood he had split were pulled to shore. Nonetheless the flood brought something good. A lot of drift wood was fished out of the water and used for buildings later on their farms. When they had fished out enough wood they started to drive it on their farms (homesteads) which were 18 miles away from the river. On the farms they cultivated a good piece of prairie. Mr. Heisler and Mr. Marsall cultivated 30 acres each. In the Spring of 1909 they erected their log cabins and moved with all their belongings and their children onto their farms and started their first sowing. That year they sowed wheat, flax, and oats. The crops started beautifully and grew really splendidly.

Unfortunately they lacked the necessary machines that year. The crop was cut with a mower and then raked together. Naturally half the harvest was lost this way. Then the wheat or flax was gathered on heaps and threshed with the horses. The horses were driven to and fro over the heaps. By this primitive method further loss was registered. For example the flax harvest should have rendered 15 bushel per acre but they only got 5 bushel.

In 1910 things improved a little already. They already had a self-binder and a threshing machine which was driven by horses. Now conditions progressed. Mr. Heisler and Mr. Marsall severed their partnership and everybody farmed alone. However in this year the Heislars had an accident with their son Emanuel who was shot at by one of his friends. Because no doctor was close by, they had to take the boy per special train to Swift Current. An expensive undertaking. This disaster cost 343 dollar. Sanitary conditions were very primitive those days. The nearest doctor was in Maple Creek, 90 miles away. People did not need a doctor very often. The stork too did not have it as comfortable as today either. He just showed up on a farm and accepted a little help from a neighbour lady or even from the husband himself and then disappeared again for a year. He did not need a doctor to help him then as it is today.

Concerning the church, it did not exist those days. Nonetheless the people met every Sunday and prayed the Rosary together. In 1910 the first children were baptised when the first priest, a Pater Meyer, came to that region. The first baptisms took place on the farm of Mr. Peter Kosolofski (6 miles SE of Prelate). At this baptism some children were already 3 years old.

Mr. Heisler farmed here until 1925. Then he sold his land and settled close to Scott. There he farmed for 2 years. But because he could not get enough land, he sold out again and moved to Smiley where he farmed for another 2 years. Because religious conditions for a growing family were very bad there, he sold everything again and moved back to Mendham (1930).

Here in Mendham he continued farming till 1940. That year he retired because his health was not very good. He always was sickly until in 1944 he underwent a big operation. From then on it was better. As in war time workers were rather scarce he moved to Moose Jaw and worked for the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) for 18 months. In 1946 he moved back to Mendham. On March 11, 1955 his wife had a stroke which paralysed her right side. She is improving now.

Presently Mr. Heisler is 75 years and 5 months old and his wife 71 years and 11 months.

(This biography was written down by Mr. Johannes Ries just as Mr. Heisler related the events).