

Heinrich and Aganetha (Eitzen) Peters - A Family Reunited

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Reunion With Peters Nephews & Nieces, ca. 1955

Back, L-R: **Wilhelm** Peters, Peter Bartel, **Helena** (Peters) Bartel, **Anna** Peters, Heinrich Bartel, Margaretha (Neufeld) Peters, **Heinrich** Peters, **Johann** Peters.

Front: Anna (Giesbrecht) Peters, **Maria** (Peters/Hein) Paetkau, Maria (Eitzen) Loewen, Abraham Jacob Loewen, **Aganetha** (Peters) Paetkau, Margaretha (Klassen) Peters.

(Peters siblings in bold lettering)

Heinrich Wilhelm Peters, 1868-1926, was one of three Peters brothers who purchased a large estate, north of Ignatyev, in the village of Wassiljewka. The Peters employed 160 labourers and appeared to be quite wealthy. Heinrich married Aganetha Eitzen, 1870-1922, my grandmother's older sister, in 1896. The Peters had nine children, one of which died as a child.

Heinrich Peters was a strong advocate of education, and particularly for his daughters. It is not clear to this writer the extent of their education, other than that of Aganetha, Abram and Maria. They attended university in Odessa; all three trained as high school teachers and Aganetha's husband was highly educated as well (perhaps a professor).

In the years during and following the civil war, the Peters were continuously harassed by bandits. On one occasion (1922) after food had been demanded of them, Aganetha proceeded to retrieve food from the cellar, and in the process, tripped going down the stairs and fell, impaling herself on the butter churn handle. She died later in hospital. She was 52.

Heinrich remarried to Katharina (Woelk) Peters, his brother's widow. Having a premonition of challenging years ahead, Heinrich was forced to walk away from his estate and moved to New York in Ignatyev. The family had owned a home in New York for many years for shopping purposes or simply as a retreat, and this is where they moved to. Shortly thereafter, in 1926, Heinrich died. Heinrich's widow, Katharina, suffered a stroke and died shortly thereafter.

Five of the children, all single, very quickly came to the conclusion that they should make preparations to emigrate at the earliest opportunity. They sold household possessions and furnishings, followed by the house. Without collecting the last payment, they departed quietly and unexpectedly, not wanting to draw unnecessary attention to themselves or suspicious questions from neighbours that might jeopardize their plans. Sister, Aganetha, arrived at their home to find them gone, unable to experience that last farewell.

The five, Anna, Helena, Wilhelm, Heinrich and Johann, made their way to Moscow where they gathered with thousands of other Mennonites that fall of 1929, in a bid to emigrate. The Peters siblings were among the fortunate one-third of the thousands gathered in Moscow to succeed in emigrating. According to Aganetha's daughter, Lucy Meyer, the new owner of the Peters' house was able to assure Aganetha that her siblings would secure a berth on the train out of Moscow in return for having extended her forbearance on the last payment for the house.

The Peters siblings arrived in Alberta on February 19, 1930, where they were welcomed by my grandparents, their uncle and aunt, Abraham and Maria (Eitzen) Loewen, who had sponsored them.

Aganetha and her husband, Georg, elected to remain, both having good jobs. Georg went missing in 1941 during the war. Abram too, had a good teaching position, however, he too was eventually entrapped by the circumstances of Stalin's policies, and became dependent on the charity of family in Canada. Abram, who was married, died in 1936 at age 26. He had been accused of spying because he was receiving money from relatives overseas, causing him great despair to the point that he took his own life. As a result, his family disowned him, compounding this tragic story. Maria, the youngest in the family and a teacher as well, also chose to remain.



Heinrich & Aganetha (Eitzen) Peters
ca. 1896

In 1943, Aganetha was able to evacuate to Germany with the retreating German army, and managed to emigrate to Canada in February 1948. Her sister, Maria, also found her way out of Russia with the retreating German army and emigrated to Canada in October of 1948. After a reunion with their siblings, Aganetha and Maria moved to Vancouver. Wilhelm settled in Winnipeg, Heinrich in Didsbury, Alberta, and Anna, Helena, and Johann moved to the Fraser Valley.

Sources:

- Interview with Lucy Meyer, granddaughter of Heinrich & Aganetha Peters, 2022
- Phone interview with Lucy Meyer, March 10, 2023
- EWZ 946 601
- GRanDMA
- Personal photos and notes
- Canadian Board of Colonization cards
- *Auswanderung nach 1945* (Ship lists)