

THE PETER SCHROCK LETTERS

(Installment II)

The following letters are from a collection of letters which were sent to Peter D. Schrock (1829-1902). The collection consists of ca. 152 letters written in German and ca. 170 in English. The German letters are in the archives at Ohio Amish Library.

Peter D. Schrock (Schrack) was born in 1829, in the Glades settlement in Somerset Co. Pa., to David and Mary (Stukey) Schrock. In probably the fall of 1850 he was married to Susanna, the daughter of John P. and Anna (Beachy) Miller. They lived in Brother's Valley Twp., Somerset Co. until they moved to Preston Co. Virginia in January, 1860. During the Civil War this area became the state of West Virginia in 1863 and the settlement was known as the Aurora, West Virginia settlement. In the fall of 1860 Peter was ordained as minister here. Daniel Beachy was the bishop at that time. Tensions between conservative and progressive elements in the church prompted Peter, a conservative, to look for a new home by 1865. It went until 1868 that Peter, with his family of seven children, ranging from 16 year-old Anna to 5 month-old Peter, moved to Holmes County, Ohio, where he died in 1902. Susanna had died on Sept. 17, 1869, only about a year and a half after they had come to Holmes County. Peter bought the farm where his son Peter P. Schrock and grandson Joe P. Schrock lived, and where his great-grandson Ervin J. Schrock now lives. Many of Peter's descendants live in Holmes and Geauga Counties, Ohio.

The letters cover a wide variety of subjects, such as can be expected that correspondence from family and friends would in the days when mail was the primary means of communication across state lines. The three main subjects, however, are the weather and crops; the health of their families and friends; and church matters. The letters presented here were selected to give us a window into the church issues and conditions at that time. A sample of the original German script and grammar is found at the end of this article, on page 28, 29. Most of the words are phonetically written in the Pa. Deitsch dialect.

The years from 1860-1890 were difficult times for the Amish descendants of those Anabaptist forebearers who had braved persecution, a dangerous journey at sea, as well as the red men and wild animals, to carve out a niche for their descendants in the "new world" frontiers. The pressures those next generations faced were more subtle: acculturation, pietistic influences of other plain groups, and the changes brought on by material prosperity and the fast-growing western settlements. In this time frame the Civil War (1861-1865) took place with its uncertainties for the "wehrlose" groups. The Dunkers, John Holdeman, and the "Sleep Preachers" were active in this era and presented different and unsettling religious emphases.

The *Amish Ministers Meetings* (Diener Versammlungen) of 1862-1878 took place in this period also. With them came the questions of rebaptism, stream baptism ("Waldenser"), the ordnung, and worldliness, etc. which were the issues precipitating the Meetings. The tensions which resulted in the Old Order / Amish-Mennonite distinctions were wide-spread and are evident in this selection of letters.

The first nine letters are from the east: Pennsylvania, W. Virginia, and Ohio; and the last nine are from Iowa. Each group is arranged in chronological order and show the progression of the church issues in their area. Most of the letters were written in German script.

The following (part) letter was written during the Civil War to Peter while he still lived in Aurora W. Va. Peter was already ordained a minister by then. This letter was written mostly in English and was from Peter's father-in-law John P. Miller from Cove, Garret Co., Maryland. He had apparently visited Holmes County and reports about that visit. We present the letter in its original spellings.

PAGES 28, 29

April 13, 1862

Mr. Peter Schrack, Esq.

Zum ersten die Mamma hot der schnupfen rechtschaffen. Ich bien gekummen den 4ten April. Di leid in Ohio siend ziemlich gesund. Sie hatten mener dreck wie etwas schee iest.

Now I will tell you something els about the church matters. The Walnut Crick ar by themselves and I cannot think they ar on good way but my Cuson Moses ["Gla Mose"] Miller is as near rite yet as any to be found yet with their mode or fashion. It pleased me very much to see them. And all the others round their ar starded purty well too but yet far from unkel Moses Millers ["Gros Mose"]. Wewant to go to Jonas Musser. Their child will be buried today.

Your sinseer friend

John P. Miller

Cove, Addison, Pa.

The next letter was written to Peter while he was still in Aurora, W. Va. It appears that he had written Levi Miller about moving to Holmes County and this was Levi Miller's reply. Miller was the third Amish bishop ordained in the new Holmes County settlement. When the first church needed to divide because of size, Moses P. (Gros Mose) Miller was ordained bishop in 1840 for the second congregation. When the first bishop, Moses Beachy, Sr., died in the fall of the same year, Levi Miller was ordained bishop in his stead. "Gros Mose" Miller was married to Levi Miller's sister Catherine, making them brothers-in-law. During the ensuing differences in the Amish church a decade later "Gros Mose" was the leader of the progressives and Levi Miller was the leader of the conservatives. The remarks Miller makes in this letter are interesting in light for those differences.

To: Peter Schrack German Settlement, Preston County, West Virginy

Holmes County, Ohio

March 4, 1867

First a heartfelt greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and to your wife, wishing you everything good in body and soul, here in this time and in eternity. Herewith these few lines we let you know that we received your letter of February 8 only on March first. Which was completely unfamiliar to me at first until I had read it. Then we rejoiced over it, because it appears that there are still such church members here and there who want to follow our faithful Redeemer and Saviour Jesus Christ in simplicity and humility and seek to be separated from the evil and wicked world. For Matthew says in the eleventh [chapter] "Come unto me all ye weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take upon you my yoke and learn of me for I am meek and humble at heart, then you will find rest for your souls. And He says, My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

We have nothing to boast at all among us concerning the pomp and pride (Pracht und Hochmuth) rather much more to lament. It may well be the time whereof our Saviour said in the 24th [chapter] that the unrighteousness will take the upper hand and the love in many will grow cold. Further, there are 4 congregations here who try to remain upon the old ordnung with the help and assistance of God, and one of the apostate ones (abgefallenen). So it is very bad among us. Where there are vain young folks (stolze Yunge) among us, they go to the Walnut Creek [church] where the freedom in pomp and pride (pracht und hoffart) is all tolerated. I do not think to say much more, because I for my part want to commit it to the great God. So the best counsel I can give you is to come to us yourself. Then you can see for yourself.

With this I want to close and to say with the poet: " Finally, it is my wish to be remembered with the Lord , as I am also minded to do and watch all together through Jesus Christ, Amen."

Further, we are, as usual, healthy and the people mostly also. Only those older people have sicknesses. We have had very cold weather this winter until the beginning of February. Then it was nice until the last Saturday it began to get cold. Yesterday it began to snow and now it is quite wintery. The land is quite high in price, from 30 to 60 dollars per acre, but always there is land for sale. You wrote me concerning the stopping place(s). From your area go to Wheeling, then up

the
towards
Ohio (River) until Wellsville. Then take the road towards Cleveland until Bayard, then
Canal Dover and then to Shanesville.

So much from us, Levi Miller and Maria

The next letter was written to Peter Schrack at the Walnut Creek Post , from Christian Petersheim who was a good friend living in Aurora, W. Va. Petersheim was wanting to also move to Holmes County, but couldn't sell his farm. Peter and his family had moved less than a year before and his wife Susanna was still living.

Germantown Settlement ,W. Va. February 26, 1869 (begun)

First, a heartfelt greeting to you Peter Schrack and to your wife and children ,wishing you everything good in body and soul in this time and in eternity. Further, I let you know that we are as healthy as usual, as long as the Lord wills. This week I got your letter which you wrote the tenth. I saw that Mose Miller¹ got the letters from Daniel Beachy¹. About three weeks ago he was here and said he got an answer and should write again. Mose Miller wrote that he knew nothing about the matters, and if it (would suffice) if you could confess that you failed. Then I said we had thought it was all settled and no one should speak of it any more. Then he said the reason was that you had promised to come to church again and to take the church again.² I said I knew nothing like that and I think neither did you. Then he said the others who were there also say this, and he also thinks it was so. They were of the opinion you would come again. I said it was because of the pride (hochmut) that you did not come. Then he said they did not know that, and that we should have said so. I said we said enough and saw that we could not accomplish anything. So we said we will not say more but will sell and will go as soon as we can. Then he said we have no word in the Scrip- tures which say how the clothes must be. I said, but we are not to be conformed to the world. And Hans Schlabach had promised you the spurs must be put away, and I think the jeans also, and what else, I don't remember anymore. That the very next time they would be disallowed (abgestellt) even if it were not council meeting. Then there was council meeting and I was there but not a word was said about those things. Then he said maybe it was forgotten. Finally he said he feels it should be left up to the majority. Last Sunday the church was there. I was there and thought it would be brought up but they said not one word about it.

You asked whether they did not have communion since it was held at the Selders. They did not have another. It will be two years in the spring. I could indeed say more about these things if we were together but it takes me too long to write. I do not know if I can sell or not. There is a man here who burns lime who says he wants to buy it. His name is Daniel King, but he says the time is too short until spring. He does not know whether he can get his money. I did not have a good chance to talk with him yet. The Bredes do not know about it yet. They would like it (the property) but cannot afford it. They had bad luck burning lime. They built a furnace in which to burn coal. They said it cost over \$300 and they can not do anything with it. They say the coal are are not like in Pennslyvania. Now they have[Mr.] King here to set up piles and burn them with wood. They say he has a patent-right for the big United States. They burned one pile but it did not burn all the way through. They said the limestone were not good, that the ones in the other field were better. They would like to buy it over to the orchard, but I said I don't want to sell except everything.

Frank Sol said... the times are so hard that there is no money to be had. That the richest farmers will break up. The richest man in Chambersburg is going to break up and he owed old Sol 3000 (dollars). He must lose it. Brede says that will not faze him.

.....You wrote that the snow was about 3 inches thick there. Here it was about 3 feet thick where it had not blown. That day Selders went out to get someone and could not get through. The tenth he came walking and the eleventh we broke out with six sleds and a large crew of shovelers. Since then the snow was not all gone. We have cooked some (maple) sugar. The elder Dans and Bredes also cook. They have not bored the trees yet. They had Benj. Miller to help cut wood. It is said they they want to sell their land in the spring. ...I do not know exactly how much corn the Bredes got. They have fed some of it. Recently Tobias threshed the last, 6 bushels. King said he could carry it all on his back at once. I must put my name down. So much from me, Christian Petersheim.

1. Mose Miller was probably "Gla Mose" who would have been Peter's home bishop in Ohio. Daniel Beachy was bishop in the Aurora, W. Va church. Peter apparently had some differences with Beachy concerning the ordnung.

2. It was a common reaction then, unheard-of among the Amish today, that people would refuse to take the church services into their homes if they disapproved of something. It also appears that many people did not attend services regularly, especially if they had differences with the church. Benjamin Schrock writes of the same practice in Iowa.

The next letter is also from Christian Petersheim. Peter's wife Susanna had died over a year before. He addresses the letter to "Peter and your children." The greetings in all of Christian's letters are practically identical, such as in the previous letter, dated Feb. 26, 1869. Therefore we skip over that portion.

German Settlement December the 4th, 1870

A friendly greeting to you Peter Schrack..... Further, we had an uncommonly nice fall so far. We had snow several times but I was still plowing the oats fields this week. And Tobias helped Valentine Selders dig (limestone?) He helped us burn lime. When it freezes hard enough I want to haul it onto the seeded fields.

Further, concerning the church... They are now in the process of dividing. Hans Schlabach does not go to church anymore at all. He is now on the same trail as Sam Gnegi. He wants to do away with the silent prayers and he wants the (holy) kiss to be practiced. He says to lend money and take interest is usury and he is against voting. Where worldly people have a gathering, there shall be no church members there.

Today the 12th it is very unpleasant. It is raining and freezing. Further, we have not sold yet. It is still difficult here with us. I have already wished that if only all the proud people would keep to Hans, but they all stay with Beachy. The river preachers were here because of this.

I believe today 12 weeks ago the church was at the Selders and they took council (roth gehalten) Old Yutzy said he does not know who worldly people are. And old Schrock and Joel Schlabach said if they cannot vote any more, then the guns have to go also. I said the most important would be to get rid of pride, that things could come back to the old ordnung. Then Hans said with that he is totally agreed, but concerning the guns, God the Lord created all sorts of animals and said that man shall rule over them. And how shall we rule over them if we don't have any guns? Peter Miller and Joseph Kemp held to him and Christ Yutzi did too, but he doesn't any more. And Peter M. also says he doesn't want anything to do with him anymore. Gnegi's wife says she dreamed that Beachy's light has been burning darkly for a long time and now it is completely extinguished. But that Hans's is burning brightly.

I think it is 6 weeks that we got word that the elderly Mrs. Gnegi was sick. Then Hanses and ___? and Lydi Gnegi went down. She was a little better when they came down. Then they got word that Mrs. Abraham Miller had died. Then they went over to the funeral. As they came back to the river, old Mrs. Gnegi had also died. As they came home Lydi was mixed up and also dreamed such (strange) things. I must close..So much from your well-wisher, Christian Petersheim

The following letter is from Christian Petersheim, who is still in Aurora. In the previous letter he speaks of the discontent of Hans Schlabach. In this letter he relates that John Holdeman was Schlabach's mentor. He also speaks of the importance and costliness of lime for their lean soil.

German Settlement May this 6th, 1871

First a friendly greeting to you Peter..... We had a beautiful spring. About a month ago it was very dry. Now it is very wet. This week it has rained every day. The fruit has not frozen yet, if it will not yet do so. It is presently cool and rainy.

Tomorrow it will be two weeks that I was at Hans Schlabach's schoolhouse at church. Holdeman was there. Mondays they had services again and again in the evening. Def Schrack was there again in the evening. He said that Tuesdays Hans will be baptised, but Benj Miller was also there and he did not know anything about that. Since then I have not heard anything whether he was or not. I do not think anyone holds to Holdeman but Hanses and the Gnegis. So much about that.

The winter crops look pretty good. Flour is from 9 to 10 dollars the barrel. The oats is not all sowed yet. Old Dans and us are going to burn limestone this summer in partnership. We get the wood there and they get the stone and we burn them. Then I get half and they get half. But I have to watch myself closely or I will come out at the short end. If I could better stand the work then I would want nothing to do with him. My idea is to spread lime like one should until I can sell. To hire people to burn lime when you do not have the money right away to pay them brings one deeper into the hole rather than out of it. Brede went backwards faster than forwards. He bought (lime) from the store for himself and old Dans.

I want to let off my humble writing. Remember us to the Lord as we are also minded to do. Now watch all through Jesus Christ, Amen. So much from me, your well-wisher, Chr. Petersheim

The following letter is also from Christian Petersheim. He gives more information on the activities of John Holdeman in the Aurora community.

German Settlement July 23, 1871

First a friendly greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and your children. I expected you would get yourself a wife again by this time. Yet if you are content then it is not necessary that anyone be concerned about that. I saw in your letter that you are healthy which brings us joy. We are also quite healthy as long as the Lord wills. We had a very wet summer. In the spring it was very dry for a while. It did not give much hay and it is so wet that we almost could not get it made. On the 4th of July we began to mow but have not put much away yet. The wheat we harvested in urgency. The corn is not all cut off. It went down so that we almost could not cut it off. Eight nights ago it rained so that the water ran off all over. The corn lay on the ground but most of it stood up again, but not all. We had mowed grass along the road and it washed a lot of it onto the road. The fence was stuffed full with hay. It washed much dirt and stones and logs away.

Hans Schlabach and his wife were baptised by Holdeman this spring. Now they and the Gnegis have their church by themselves. No one else holds to them. Hans's Lena also does not hold to them. She is at Henry Schlabachs and is taking instruction classes. Valentine Selders, Si Schlabach is also going and Anne Miller. Tobias is also going (to instruction). In the spring he said he wants to go and I did not want to discourage him, but it would suit me much better if he could have gone to instruction at your church. Selter's Dena and young Jacob Bitschi and Joseph Miller's Johan are also going. That is all.

I will now close.....so much from me, Christian Petersheim.

The following is another letter from Christian Petersheim. He mentions the opinion Hans Schlabach had of Holmes County. Christian uses the term "Waldenser," referring to those who advocated stream baptism. Probably it came to mean more broadly those who were of a progressive persuasion. Before 1850 a young Mifflin County bishop, Solomon Beiler, began teaching that baptism should be performed as the applicant kneels in a stream. He based this on a Waldensian Creed which he had. This was one of the first open differences between progressives and conservatives, but it really was more a token rather than a critical issue.

December the 31, 1871

First a heartfelt greeting to you Peter.....A while back we had quite a lot of sick people. Joseph Kemp's children had the scarlet fever. One of the boys died and old Peter Feib also died. Last summer old Yost Yoder down at the river died and old Jonathan Hostetler.

I want to let you know that only last Wednesday I got your letter which you wrote November 30. You asked how and where Hans Schlabachs were baptised. They were baptised in the house. I heard just like they were baptised before. Holdeman was here again this fall and baptised Sam Gnegis. Then they and Hanses went out (to Ohio) with him. He lives in Wayne County. Hans said to me they do not have to dress all alike, but that their church members are from all areas. When they were there, there was also an Amish man there. He was the most worldly dressed man there. Then I said he probably was a "Waldenser" and he said he was. Then he (Hans) said they told him in Holmes County they are more plain and simple (niedertrechtig) but their speech is very loose and they are boastful. Then I said I would not think that it is like that. He said he thinks it is.

I guess the land is nothing cheaper around you, than it used to be. Maybe I could sell this winter if I sell cheap enough. Old Rimple came up from the river and bought the Miller place where Henry Schlabach lives. He bought 500 acres for 2300 (dollars). And he bought the Schlabach place for 1800 (dollars), also over 500 acres. And Hefner Grete's son bought the Maers place for 1000 (dollars) for 100 acres. Tobias Moser was around here several times. He wants to buy here but has only 600 (dollars) to put down.

I must close.... So much from me, Christian Petersheim

The following letter is from Peter's father-in-law John P. Miller. They lived in Cove, Garret County, Maryland at this time. We have only part of the letter, originally written in English.

December 13, 1873

Peter Schrack

We have all our trouble this winter and for to leaf the pleasant cove next spring. Rudi is preparing for a new house and barn. Christ Beachy sold his farm. He is going on the Dan Hershberger farm.

I am afraid we have bad business going on in our church. Some want meeting houses and some don't. Some want to quit giving something to eat. I am afraid it will make bad business yet.

*John P. Miller
Cove, Garred County*

As Christian Petersheim wrote this last letter from Aurora (in this series,) he still had not sold his farm. And he never did get it sold, but in this letter he speaks of quitting farming. The Dunkers were frequently drawing members from the Amish there during this time.

German Settlement January 31, 1866

Now I will write you a few lines. . . As far as I know, the people are healthy yet here and there are sick people. Old Joseph Miller is not well. He has cancer on the nose. Christian Millers joined the Dunkers. I should have written to you sooner but through neglect and unskilled hand it so happens that I don't get to write. Old Dan's Benj also went to the Dunkers. The rest of the boys, I believe, are all with the Lutherans and think they are big gentlemen. So much for that.

We already had cold and stormy weather, but not much good sledding roads. Now it is quite good again and is snowing again. It is colder again.

Noahs and Joni and Mommi went to Selders. Leah and I are at home alone. I think the feed will become scarce till spring. It did not give much hay. Wheat, corn, oats, and rye were relatively good. I do not know exactly how much wheat we got but I believe around 60 bushel. Oats, I also don't remember, but it was around 200-300 bushel. I believe we got 40 bushels rye and about 300 bushels corn on cobs.

I guess in the spring we will quit farming and will have sale. Noah and Levi can farm the place. Noahs want to build a house back by the spring on the "new" fields.

Now it is February. Today the boys went for coal again. They have hauled about 500 bushels by now. They want to burn about 2000 bushels of lime this spring. I want to close....so much from me, your humble friend and well-wisher Christian Petersheim

The following letter is the first of a series which Peter received from Iowa. Peter's brother Benjamin, also a minister, had moved to Johnson County, Iowa City, Iowa in 1857. Their brother Christian moved to Iowa the year this letter was written. Another brother, Daniel, (mentioned in the letter), as well as Peters, still lived in Aurora at this time. The Abner mentioned by Benjamin is probably Abner Yoder who was married to the Schrocks' sister Veronica. They had only recently moved to Iowa. Benjamin relates interestingly about the weather they have had in Iowa.

Johnson County, Iowa City, Iowa August 18, 1866

First I wish to bring a heartfelt greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrock and your wife and to all our good friends and also to brother Daniel. Wishing you everything good in soul and body in this time and also in eternity. Further we are fairly healthy and the people in general are in good health as far as is known to me. I hope these few lines will again find you healthy. I received your letter which you wrote. We were very glad to hear from you. We had quite warm weather this summer. It was warmer than it ever was since we have been here. It was very dry until about 8 days ago it rained. Now it is soaked up. The people are finished with the harvest. It turned out good. Wheat was good and the rye was good. The oats was very good. I think it yielded 50 bushels per acre in this area. The corn looks very nice. Joseph took corn into the city for me today, 38 bushel. Abner got two loads yesterday. I still have about 600 bushel left.

Abner is building a house. The region (landschaft) suits him very well. Harry Miller was here with us and it also pleases him very well. He worked for me for ten days. We built a shed.

Concerning the church, it is not to be praised. There is no peace yet, but I hope it will straighten out. Ten young people are taking instruction class again. (Today is the 19th.) The church is at Daniel Yoders. I should have written to you sooner, but I did not have time. I helped in the harvest for about 3 weeks, and I have my lands to tend also.

I think we could entertain ourselves for quite a while if you were with us, and I do not think it would spite you to spend some time here. I used to think no one can make out here in Iowa but the people get a good chance and they build good barns and houses, but it is true that it costs quite a lot.

I will now close and again wish to greet you warmly. The grace be with you all, Amen. Further, remember us in your prayers. We also have in mind to do so for you. Joseph Gasho died in Indiana

So much from me, Benjamin Schrack

The following letter was written to Peter in Aurora, W. Va., from Benjamin in Iowa. Benjamin would like to see Peter move to Iowa instead of Holmes County. Benjamin's greetings are almost identical in all his letters, so we will omit that part in the following letters.

To Peter Schrack, German Settlement, Pristen(sic) County, W. Va.

Johnson County, Iowa City February 16, 1868

First a hearty greeting to you... There were several funerals here. Old Christian Swartzendruber was 90 years and about 10 months old. Widow Schlabach's Jacob was 13 years, 8 months, and 20 days old. He was in school. They played with a ball, and another threw a frozen clod after the ball and it hit him in the temple. It made him dizzy. He was a good learner. This was on Friday. It hurt from the beginning. By Tuesday evening he had died.

You wrote you have so many apples, and black walnuts, and cider. Apples, walnuts, hickory nuts, and hazelnuts we have plenty of. Cider we don't, but we have wine in the basement. We had a lot of grapes.

Concerning the church, it appears to be peaceful again but I don't know for how long. There was [a delegation] of men here. They pretty well agreed with us. The others practically all take the church again, but pride (Hochmut) still wants to prevail. It is very bad. So many sorts [of people] come here. There are people here from 12 or 13 congregations. Some comply with the ordnung, and some only half. Maybe you think we do not want to have an ordnung anymore. Often we are simply sick about this but it does not help a bit. [This concerns] the gowns and the (Veshing ?!) among the women. I think they want to force things.

I thought you would come here to us and would see how we live here. The land is not as expensive as in Ohio. I believe, as far as earthly things, one can make good progress here. Joseph made about 2 thousand dollars off my place this year. But I do not want to beg you. One cannot buy the land as cheaply as at first. It is around five to six thousand dollars for 160 acres.

*I will now close ... so much from me, Benjamin Schrack
Benedict Hochstetlers have a baby son. Sems are all healthy. Give a greeting to Daniels.*

This letter was written by Benjamin Schrack from Iowa. Peters had moved to Holmes County about a year prior to this letter, and his wife had died in the meantime. So the letter is addressed to *Peter Schrack and children Walnut Kreak, Holms County, (sic) Ohio*

Johnson County, Iowa November 21, 1869

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack and children....There have been a number of sick people here because of typhoid fever. They are up and going again.

I received your letter, for which we were very thankful. Please excuse me because I should have written you long ago. I know this well, but I do not write much. I hear about you every once in a while. From Daniels I hear nothing.

On the tenth of November it began to snow. The eighteenth it snowed again. Now the sled riding is going quite well. The ground is not frozen, and there is a lot of corn still out. Among us most of it has been husked, but at Deercreek there is a lot to be husked yet. They have not thought about winter yet. It appears it will be a long winter.

Further, we have not gotten ahead with holding communion yet. It appears that the unrighteousness will take the upper hand and the love in many grow cold. The spirit of toleration (macht-nichts Geist) wants to take over. I guess we can not keep all [of the people] with our ordnung. I believe the church will divide.

Today I am going to the city. You have lamented that you are now alone. If you will trust in the Lord then He will not forsake you. He will be with His own until the end of the world, if we always have rejoicing. The pleasures of this world will pass away but the will of God remains unto eternity. Further, remember us in your prayers...so much from me, your humble brother, Benjamin Schrack

In this following letter Benjamin writes again about the conditions in the church. He mentions "der Paul" who was Paul Hershberger. Peter Schrock bought his farm in Holmes County from this Paul Hershberger, who then moved to Iowa. Hershberger was a minister and in another letter Benjamin asks Peter if he knew why Hershberger "had gone the other church", probably referring to the Walnut Creek congregation. In Iowa Hershberger seems to have been the leader of the progressives. Benjamin mentions that is frequently dry in Johnson County.

to: Mr. Peter Schrack, Walnut Creek, Holms County, (sic) Ohio December 26, 1870

First a greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and children... Old Henry Hochstetler has had a stroke. He can still speak and his mind is clear. He can still do a few things. Old Magdalena Kempf broke her leg 8 weeks ago. She is sitting up again.

Yesterday I was at church at Jacob Yoders. There I saw B. Hochstetler and M.P. Miller, and Abner Yoder. They are all in good health. The others are also healthy as far as I know. Tomorrow we want to go the wedding at Frider Schwartzendruber. Their Barbara and Mose J. Stutzman will marry. On Thursday Jacob D. Yoder and Susanna P. Swartzendruber will get married.

We did not hold communion this spring in the lower congregation. There is far too much confusion with the spirit of toleration (*macht-nichts Geist*). I guess our old *ordnung* will be ruined. Too many want freedoms and too much is compromised. Paul [Hershberger] is in Henry County right now, visiting. He thinks a lot of them.

Concerning the weather, we had a very dry summer until into the fall. There was no pasture left for the animals. The fields were completely red. Then it rained again and the pasture is plentiful again. We had good wheat: 80 to 85 [bushels to an acre (?)]; corn 30 to 37; oats 35; hogs 5-20 [dollars per head (?)]; pork 6-25. The livestock is very "cheap-sale". Yesterday a week ago it snowed a little, but it is melted again. The last week it was quite cold. The road is very nice. (My letter was not finished, Today is Jan. 6.) We saw no more snow. This week J.P. Miller's Barbara broke her leg. She walked to the creek on crutches and slipped and fell. She has broken it several times already before this, one time her arm. Writing goes badly for me. I think I will close my poor writing and greet you again heartily.... Benj. P.S. If you write Christian, direct your letter to Iowa City. Mine in the same box.

In this letter Benjamin writes about the "Waldenser" spirit and puts it in the same category as the "*macht-nichts Geist*." He also relates a tragic accident in their community.

Johnson County, Iowa City, Iowa August 6, 1871

First a greeting of love and peace to you Peter Schrack and your children... Mose P. Miller's Mahlon was killed by a hay rake. The horse ran away and threw him off and broke his head. (!) He was dead on the spot. He was 11 years, 3 months, and 26 days old.

I would have written you for some time now but I heard from you occasionally. The weather is very warm, from 86 to 96 [degrees] every day. It is very dry. The grains are all shocked. The wheat is not very good. The rye and the oats are very good. We got good hay and the corn is good so far.

I wish we could talk with each other about the *ordnung*. Here almost everything is the toleration spirit or Waldenser. Much is attempted but little is accomplished. I guess if we want peace then we must all become Waldenser. But I have always thought that as I have accepted the Lord Jesus, so I want to stay with that and help prevent all disunity, as much as possible.

(Today is the 9th.) Tomorrow I have the opportunity to send (this letter) to the city. We had a lot of grapes this year. On Monday it rained very hard, and there was hail in places. It stormed very hard and the shocks and the hay was torn apart. It shook the apples, of which there are a lot. I suppose the apples are plentiful with you. Frider Schwartzendruber married Elizabeth, Jacob Yoder's daughter. I will now close my inept writing... So much from me, Benjamin Schrack Box 360

In this letter Benjamin speaks of "Waldenser" ministers "from Ohio" who held services in their community. He says Abner, who was probably Abner Yoder, his brother-in-law and a fellow minister, attended the services diligently. Abner didn't follow this persuasion though, as a later letter will show.

to: Peter Schrack, Walnut Creek, Holms County (sic) December 1872

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack... Old Schöttler has been very poorly for a long time. He had fever but is better now. Daniel P. Brenneman is poorly with consumption. I do not think he will make it very much longer. On Sunday (?) there was a wedding at P. Brenneman's. Daniel P. Miller's William, from Illinois, and Demi Brenneman were married. I was at the wedding.

I have not heard anything from you for a long time. I did not get an answer to my last letter. We helped butcher at Lisbets on Monday. Sam's brother-in-law was also there. Ann is better again and is working. Benedicts, Christians, Abners, and Mose P.'s are in good health.

We had visitors from the East and from Ohio. There were 6 preachers here, but I didn't see them. They were Waldenser. They had services at J.P. Miller's in the evening, and twice the next day at

M.P. Miller's. I did not go but Abner and Paul attended diligently. Then they went with one [from here] to Henry County to Eicher and from there to Schlegel. They really stick together. I can barely stand it any more. I guess they are doing this for themselves. They [feel] tied down too much. The rest are still strong in the faith and in hope. May the loving God still be with us and lead and direct us until a blessed end.

Concerning the weather, the 19th it snowed a little, maybe several inches. It is quite cold. It had not snowed worth speaking of until now. It was dry but nice until now. It was fairly cold occasionally.

Write us again how you are coming along in your church. Whether you are so entwined with the falling away and with deception? So much from me, your brother Benjamin Schrack

In this letter Abner Yoder (from Johnson County) relates that Paul Hershberger broke away and formed his own church. Abner apparently had given himself off with Paul Hershberger, but in this letter he makes it clear that he doesn't support him and that he is faithful to the old *ordnung*. Paul Hershberger apparently left the community soon afterwards, it is known that he later served as pastor in four Mennonite congregations in Nebraska. His descendants say that Paul was a progressive who always strongly advocated Sunday Schools. Abner reports that the reliability and speed of the postal service in those days was less than desirable.

To Peter Schrack Walnut Creek, Holmes County

Johnson County, Iowa February 9, 1873

The grace of God and the pure love of Christ and the working together of the Holy Spirit, we wish unto you Peter Schrack and yours, as a warm greeting. As also to all those who love the Truth and stand with us in the same faith and hope.

Thanks to God, we are yet fairly healthy and hope these few lines will also find you in good health. Yet there are quite a few sick people in our area this winter. We had a harsh cold winter and since December 19, some snow and good roads for sledding. Recently it was mild several days and thawing temperatures which spoiled the sledding.

Further, I want to give you a report about our church. But with this I do not want to slander anyone. I believe we all are reason to this. For a long time we had two churches in our area. In ours there are some in the sixty households and at Deercreek a few less. Since 14 days ago we have another church besides. Paul P. Hershberger serves it by himself. The first time their church was at Bollers schoolhouse. Today they announced it to be at Henry Hochstetler's. Where he (Paul) expects to obtain help from here on, is not known to us. As far as concerns me, I am still in the same faith as I received it, and hope to remain faithful with the Lord's help. As you can imagine, this causes much sorrow and concern. It often divides between a man and his wife and between parents and children. Only God knows what will yet happen from here on.

Now I want to give you a list of the deaths. Daniel Brenneman died December 23, 1872. I do not know how old he was. He leaves to mourn his parting, his wife and two small children. On January 13, 1873 Maria, the wife of Christian Bender died. She leaves behind her husband and 9 children. One child had died previously. On February 6, 1873 Samuel, an infant child of John G. and Magdalena Miller died. His age was 9 months and 21 days. He died from the measles. William, son of Daniel Miller of Illinois and Anna, daughter of Peter Brenneman of Johnson County married on December 15, 1872. On January 21, 1873 David Raber married Maria, daughter of Joseph Schwartzendruber, both of Johnson County, Iowa. On January 16, 1873 David S. Yoder and Eliza Anne Stutzman married, both of Johnson County, Iowa.

Benjamin Schrack told me that you wrote to him that you have written to me several times already but you have never received an answer from me. I have not received any letters from you. I wrote to Daniel Schrack in Virginia but I received no reply from him. I thought I will write you. I would like to hear whether you get it or not.

Herewith I hope to have written enough and want to commit us and you together to God who will guide and direct us until a blessed end, through Jesus Christ, Amen. From me, your friend and well-wisher, Abner Yoder
Write again soon.

The following letter is from Benjamin Schrock from Johnson County, Iowa. In it he mentions that Paul [Hershberger] is now in Henry County. Apparently he moved there soon after starting the new church in Johnson County. Benjamin wishes to be able to discuss these things with Peter and has a solution of what to do should they get tired of talking.

To Peter Schrack Walnut Kreek, Holmes Co.

Johnson County, Iowa November 19, 1874

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack.... The people are mostly in good health except for old Knepp, who has dropsy and is very poor. My wife was not in the basement for a whole year. She can get around well in the house. She cannot go outside when it is wet. We have a maid all the time. Recently two Germans moved in with us. She is the maid and he is a blacksmith. We built a blacksmith shop and he wants to do shoeing. The people here have wanted a shop for a long time. I made five bobsleds this fall and a lot of wagon tongues and other things that were broken.

I got your letter and was glad to hear from you again. Paul has now gone to Henry County. I guess he will not bother us much anymore. I will be happy to hear that they like it there. He will not visit us very often. We divided the church into two districts and held communion in the two places. Presently we have church services every Sunday if they can find enough places. We have some that want to have a church house. They do not take the church at their homes, but they gladly sit in the foremost seats if something is going on.

If we could be together we could talk about a lot of things. We would not be finished in three days! If we would get tired, then we would drink a little wine, and we would go on again. I made about 70 gallons. We had quite cold weather already. One time it snowed about 4 inches, but it is all gone now. I will close now ... so much from me, Benjamin Schrack

In the last letter in this series, Benjamin writes to Peter that their church problems are not all past. Although Paul Hershberger drew away many progressives, many differences remained within the group. Benjamin died in March, 1879, only a little over two years after this letter was written.

To Peter Schrack Walnut Kreak (sic), Holmes County

Johnson County, Iowa January 15, 1877

First a greeting to you Peter Schrack...The people are, for the most part, healthy. Isaac Esch had a start of consumption and Lena's Katie has rheumatism and I guess also consumption. On the 6th of January we had a very sad funeral. A horse kicked Daniel H. Gingerich in the face, as he was leading them to water. One of them came loose for him. He was by himself. He still came into the house by himself and spoke a few words yet. By the evening of January 4 about 4:30, he died. We are not assured of our life. We do not know how soon our time will be up. Therefore be prepared for the Son of Man will come in an hour in which you think not. The Apostle says, What I say I say to you all! So watch!

I would have much to speak about if you were here. We have brethren here who do not obey at all. They begin to do merchandising with buying and selling, with shipping and dealing. They are itching to run around in the world, to sell patents, and do not take the church services in their homes any more. Should we tolerate or use such people in the church? They do exactly as they please.

One couple married recently: Steven J. Yoder to Lucy Miller. Christ L. Gingerich and Lena G. Swartzendruber were published to be married on the 7th. Mose P. Miller's Steven and Steven Yoder's Katie will marry on Thursday the 25th.

The weather was quite dry and cold until now and we had no snow worth speaking of. The 15th it snowed very hard, about one foot deep. The road is now good for sledding.

We have not heard from you for some time. I have hauled home quite a lot of wood. I guess you do not have so many problems with wood as I do. I paid one dollar per load to get it hauled. I now have about 22 loads and have cut most of it to stove length.

So much from me, Benjamin Schrack

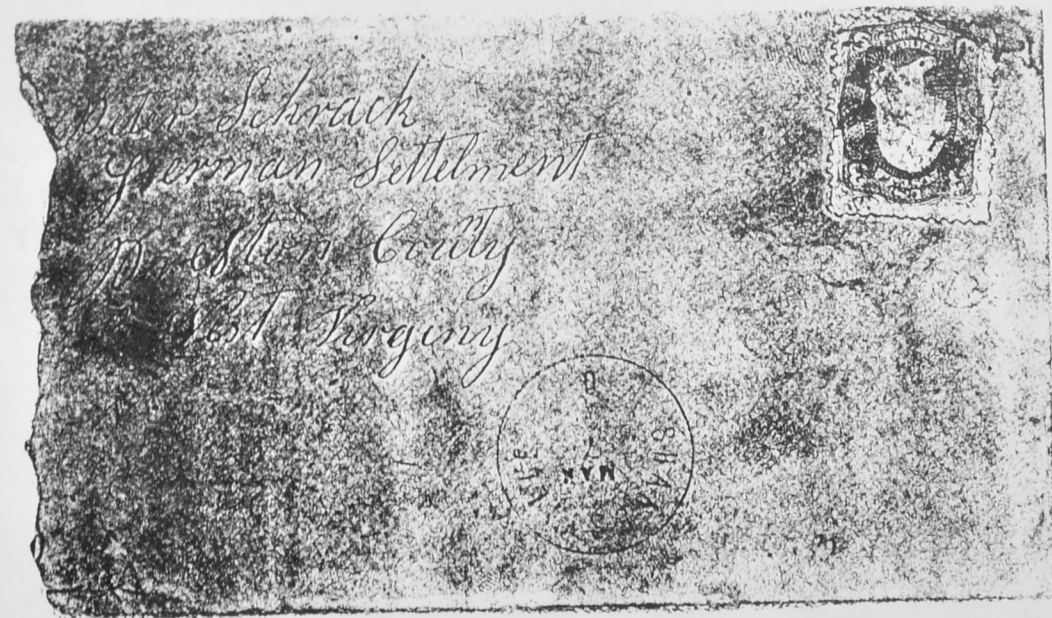
On the following page is a photo copy of the letter Levi Miller sent to Peter Schrock on March 4, 1867. His handwriting is exceptionally beautiful and easy to decipher. Below it is a copy of the envelope in which the letter was sent. The stamp was for 3 cents, and the postmark is from Shanesville, Ohio. The address is not very detailed but quite sufficient for those days.

Holmes County Ohio

March 4, 1867

Dear Peter
I received your letter
and was glad to hear from
you again. The people here
are mostly in good health
except for old Knepp who
has dropsy and is very poor.
My wife was not in the
basement for a whole year.
She can get around well
in the house. She cannot
go outside when it is wet.
We have a maid all the
time. Recently two
Germans moved in with
us. She is the maid and
he is a blacksmith. We
built a blacksmith shop
and he wants to do
shoeing. The people here
have wanted a shop for
a long time. I made
five bobsleds this fall
and a lot of wagon
tongues and other things
that were broken.
I got your letter and
was glad to hear from
you again. Paul has now
gone to Henry County. I
guess he will not bother
us much anymore. I will
be happy to hear that
they like it there. He
will not visit us very
often. We divided the
church into two districts
and held communion in
the two places. Presently
we have church services
every Sunday if they can
find enough places. We
have some that want to
have a church house. They
do not take the church
at their homes, but they
gladly sit in the foremost
seats if something is
going on.
If we could be together
we could talk about a
lot of things. We would
not be finished in three
days! If we would get
tired, then we would
drink a little wine, and
we would go on again.
I made about 70 gallons.
We had quite cold
weather already. One
time it snowed about
4 inches, but it is all
gone now. I will close
now ... so much from
me, Benjamin Schrack

2
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3) Mitter so sind noch 4 gemeinden bey
uns die Mitter beibehalten auf der al-
ten ertnung zu bleiben mit Gottes
Hilff und beystand, und wir von
den abgesehnen so ist es sehr selb
bey uns also solze stunde, und die gesa-
nach der Mitterbeibehaltung also die freyheit
in freyheit mit freyheit alle gemeinden
Mitter so gemeinden ist nicht viel zu ma-
= den dan ist für mein theil Will es von
grossem Gott ansichm gesalt haben
aber die beyte hat es ist die geban
den ist Mitter zu uns zu kommen den
hoyt in daltt fassung mit dem dalt
zu beyhalten und mit dem nichter sagen
zum und ist unser langstren gemeint
mhar in dem farran Mitter Mitter
auch gesimeut sind und Mitter alle
samen dines farran Christum am 12

4) Mitter so sind Mitter noch so viele
gemeindlich gesimeut in die lurt dalt
samtlich als abim solze die alle lurt
sitten haben und Mitter fatten auch
sagt hat Mitter gesalt dalt Mitter
bey anfang farran dalt Mitter
es farran bey am lurt farran seit
anfangen hat zu Mitter gesalt seit
es anfangen zu farran und ist es
ziemlich mitterlich es lurt ist
ziemlich sol im farran von 30 bey
60 dalt die dalt und aber noch
lurt zu mitterlichen und sagt Mitter
gesimeut Mitter dem farran lurt
so von uns nach Mitter den dalt die
farranlich Mitter dalt dalt dalt
nach Clearland bey nach lurt
dalt nach lurt dalt dalt
Shanewill so sind von uns
Lurt Mitter und Maria und