

THE PETER SCHROCK LETTERS
(Installment IV)

We present more letters from the Peter D. Schrock collection of German letters. These letters came to Ohio Amish Library in a wooden box labeled "Pure Castor Oil." Written by people who otherwise often did not keep many records nor record much history, such letters are a source of historical and geneological information and provide an insight into life in another century.

Peter D. Schrock (Schrack) was born in the Somerset Co., Pa. settlement in 1829 to David and Mary Schrock, and died in Holmes County in 1902. After marrying Susanna Miller of Brother's Valley Twp. in Somerset Co., they lived there until 1860 when they moved to Aurora, Preston Co., Virginia. (After the Civil War this area became West Virginia.) Peter was ordained minister in the Amish Church there. In 1868 the Schrocks moved to Holmes County. Here they purchased a farm in Walnut Creek Twp. behind Chestnut Ridge School which has remained in the Schrock family. Many of Peter's descendants live in Holmes and Geauga Counties, Ohio. (See the *Heritage Review*, vol. 8, 1999; vol. 9, 2000; and vol. 10, 2001 for more information on Peter Schrock and his family.)

The following letters are of general interest. One observation is that many of the letters were written in the winter, when the farmers had time on their hands. Usually they relate events that took place over quite a period of time, indicating that the letters were not too frequent.

Two important topics were the health of family and friends and the crops and farming conditions. Writing about one's health was important to them because sickness was often more serious and widespread, and often fatal. They write of health problems and epidemics which are of little worry to us today because of advanced health care. Markets for farm produce were not developed as they are today, so they had to process and store their crops in ways that are not commonly used today. In these letters they write of the making of wine as a means to preserve their grape crops, as well as making cider from apples. Milk was made into butter which could be kept and sold later. Nuts were gathered in the woods and used as part of their diet.

Another curious practice is mentioned several times in these letters. That is, of not naming

babies until they were six to twelve months old. Before this they were referred to as "die Bub", or " 's Bubli."

The first letter is from Peter's brother Benjamin, who was also a minister. He had moved to Johnson Co., Iowa in 1857. He mentions an abundant grape crop, resulting in 80 gallons of wine, surely more than one family needed!

Johnson Co., Iowa Nov. 6, 1878
Iowa City, Iowa

First, a heartfelt greeting of love and peace to you, dear brother and fellow worker in the vineyard of the Lord. Hereby I wish you everything good to body and soul in this time and eternity. Further, I let you know that we are quite healthy, as long as the dear God wills. I hope these few lines will also find you healthy.

Further, the people are fairly healthy. But Abner hurt himself. The horses ran away and hurt his leg so that he can not walk well. It is not broken. The rest of the relatives are well as far as I know. The sore throat is around some. Five children died of it.

Yesterday we were at the wedding at John F. Millers of Crist F. Miller from Holmes County, Ohio and Mary M. Bender. Communion services are to be at Abners tomorrow. On Sunday at Deer Creek and on next Sunday at our place if the Lord gives us good health.

Solomon Miller was at our place. He says you have so many apples in Ohio, and not many grapes. We have more grapes than apples. I made 80 gallons of wine again. So we made use of many [grapes].

I think I have written you the last letter. If you were here we'd spend several days together. I do not think that I can go walking much any more. I am "going down the mountain" fast. I have lost much of my strength in several years' time. I think my time is short. I am in bad condition in my head. It sings (rings) continually and rattles so that often I do not hear well. By evening I feel sick all over from it.

Until now we have had nice weather. Concerning the markets, there is not much to say. Today someone was here and offered \$2.40 per hundred live weight [for steers]. There are 50 here being fattened. Abner has 70 [bushels] of good wheat, 60 of rye, 30 of oats, 20 of potatoes, 25 lbs. of butter.

Remember us in your prayers. We also have in mind to do so for you. So much from your brother.

Benjamin Schrock

The following letter is from Peter Schrock's good friend, Christian Petersheim, from Aurora, W. Va. He writes of drying grain indoors before threshing it and of making wine.

Aurora Post Dec. 28, 1888
Preston Co. W. Va.

First, a heartfelt greeting to you Peter Schrock and your children, and also to all our good friends and acquaintances who ask about us. [We wish you] everything good to body and soul in this time and in eternity. Further, I let you know that we received your letter and I saw that you were fairly healthy, God be thanked. We are also fairly healthy. My wife was sick the whole summer, but now is fairly well again.

We also had much rainy weather. It was wet the whole summer. Several times we had good sledding roads, but it was soon over with. The snow was not deep yet and the people are already busy hauling lime with oxen and horses.

I guess you know that Eli Yoder has your old place and Benj. Schrock has the Megroman place and Jeremias Millers live where Joseph Kemps lived. This summer they built a new house and had only lived in it about 6 weeks when it burned down, and everything in it burned. They were all away in church services.

The wheat harvest here was not very good. The oats were good and the corn was also fair. The barley was not much when it was sowed early. But the boys sowed quite late in July. They got a good crop, I believe, 76 bushels from about 3 acres, but it was not dried properly for threshing. They worked it into the attic and have turned it so that it will not spoil.

There were not a lot of apples, but we had peaches and pears. I made about 6 gallons of grape wine from one plant. We used elsewhere, and still some froze which were not fully ripe. If you would come in, then I would like to give you some to drink. I believe it is better than that was which we tasted that time at old Isaac Hostetlers. I put in a pound of sugar and almost a quart of alcohol.

I believe I must quit writing. I have a head ache and it is getting worse.

Now it is Monday, the 31st. I will write a little yet, but have nothing new to write about, except that yesterday 8 days ago Manas Bitschi's Rueben married Moni Hershberger's Lydia. They had Lena Bitschi down from Virginia as a witness. Yesterday church was at D. Bitschis. Today it is raining again.

I will close now. Finally, remember us in prayer to God the heavenly Father, that he will forgive us our past sins. And I will try to do

so for you in my great weakness. Now everyone watch, through Jesus Christ, Amen. So much from me, your well-wisher.

Christian Petersheim

The following letter was written to Peter which he still lived in Aurora, W. Va. It is from his brother Christian, who still lived in the Glades area where Peter was born and raised. Five years later Christian moved to Johnson Co. Iowa where another brother, Benjamin, already lived. Christian remarks, almost casually, that his wife named their youngest son when he was 10 months old. He also writes of making vast amounts of butter, cider, and applebutter, obviously selling some of these products.

March 1, 1861

Grace, peace, and mercy from God our beloved heavenly Father and the pure love of Jesus Christ be with us and with you all. Herewith I, Christian Schrack, your fellow minister, greet you heartily, brother Peter, wife and children, and also Daniels, with wishes for everything good to body and soul in this time and eternity.

Further, I let you know that we are healthy at this time. But quite a few people died in this community since you moved away, and still quite a few are sick. Some complain of one thing and others of another. Def Schrack has kept to the living room and his bed since December 27, now for about 10 weeks. His leg hurts.

Further, Samuel Stutzman and Abner's two daughters joined church last fall. In the church things are going about like usual.

My youngest son was 10 months old on the first of March. He walks about the house if he can hold onto something. His mother says his name is David Schrack.

Concerning things to eat, there is nothing to complain. I believe God helps us every day. We have nice weather. There is much snow. The last part of February the people began to cook sugar. They have quite a bit of sugar [maple syrup] already.

Last summer we made 14 barrels of butter and had a lot of apples. We had 26 barrels of cider, and cooked 15 of them into applebutter, 5 crocks full.

March 15th. Further, I let you know that I wanted to visit grandpa but the road was terribly muddy and now so snowy that we almost cannot go. But I will go now as soon as I am able to get away. Then I want to see that country too.

I got your letter only this winter. Then I should have written you soon, but it didn't

happen. Have patience with me, for I had quite a bit of trouble this winter. I had a letter from Benjamin and one from Mose Miller. They are healthy and Lydia got married, a Shetler. They say I should come out some time, and see their country.

So much from your brother and well-wisher,
Christian Schrack and wife
Benjamin says the snow was 2 feet deep in Iowa

The next letter was written several months after the above letter. It was from Peter's father-in-law John P. Miller, who also lived in the Glades. He writes that the "butter business" was not very good. This letter was written in English and we print only part of it here.

Peter Schrock Oct. 8, 1861
German Settlement, Preston Co. Va.

It is a hard matter for me to answer your request about the butter business. I have now 66 kegs on hand to go to Johnstown tomorrow. Prices are running from 12 to 13 cents in the City for choice lots, common lots are no sale of any account. If no change in this there will be lots of butter left unsold this winter. I cannot give you any further advice at this time. Business is as dark as midnite in all respects but cattle are good prices and horses are good prices.

John P. Miller
Cove, Md.

The following letter is from Peter's brother Moses, who lived in the Glades. He names his oldest 9 children and says that three have died, probably from childhood diseases. He also says that "just now they have named the baby." We could surmise he asked his wife and children to come up with a name while he wrote the letter. The baby was already 15 months old at the time.

The Glades April 3, 1876
Accident, Md.

First a greeting to you. Herewith I let you know that we are still healthy. The people are quite healthy but the times are hard. Money is scarce.

Our winter was almost like yours. For about 10 days now it was very inclement. The snow is quite deep. Now it is raining. The snow will go fast now.

Write to me again. Now it is bed time. Come to visit us sometime. We cannot go to Iowa for the time being.

[My Children]

Manasseh Schrock was born Sept. 29, 1855
Susannah Schrock March 27, 1853
Jonas October 4, 1859
Daniel April 22, 1861
Christian August 25, 1863
Peter April 13, 1865
Sarah March 27, 1867
Elizabeth October 18, 1869
Benjamin May 8, 1872

Three have died: Peter, Susannah, and Elizabeth. They just now named the baby Samuel. Samuel Schrock was born January 4, 1875. So much from me,

Mosis Schrock

How are yours named?

In this letter, Christian Petersheim from Aurora, W. Va. writes of serious sickness in their home. In their day contagious diseases would often spread, almost unchecked. He mentions that measles caused a death. He also writes that a member of their church married a Mennonite girl and was put from the church.

German Settlement Jan. 26, 1873
Aurora, W. Va.

First a hearty greeting to you Peter Schrack and children, as also to all our good friends and acquaintances. Further, I let you know that we received your letter and saw that you are healthy.

You wrote that you hope your letter also finds us in good health, but it did not. We had our living room so full of beds that we had to take the table out. The children had the measles, the chicken pox, and the cold. We had to have the doctor, but they are all up again. There were eight all together.

Christian Bender's wife died of the measles. Old granny Wilk still lives and is healthy. I was there this winter and she was sitting by the stove. Old Dens (Daniels) still live where they did. I guess as long as Bitschi lets them live there, they will.

You wondered if he still has horses. He has two, one good little mare and one colt that will be 3 years old. I think that half of the time he does not work anything. I don't think that he has earned anything this winter. They go out for visiting and he gets a cold again and croaks around.

Further, this winter we have had very cold weather, but not much snow yet. There were several times that sledding went well. Then it began to rain and turned into ice so that it was

almost impossible to go away.

Tobias is again working at the Bredis for 12 dollars a month. He worked for three weeks, then he got the measles. Now he has worked for a week again.

Also Joel Schlabach has married again, down by the river, to a Mennonite girl. Her name was Kate Schumacher. Yesterday he was put out of the church. Church was at our house. I have been working on this letter for 8 days. Since the third of November the road was good for sledding, but today it is raining again.

I will now let off my humble writing. Remember us in your prayers. So much from me, your well-wisher,

Christian Petersheim

The following letter was sent to Peter while he was still in Aurora, and is from his father-in-law John P. Miller. He echoes the above letters by saying that the times were hard. This could be why many people were moving to Iowa from the Glades, as he mentions.

March 16, 1864

To Peter Schrack, Esq. A friendly greeting to you and your wife and all good friends in the name of our Lord. Further, I let you know that grandma is on a good way to recovery again, if things do not turn around as they already did once. Today she is carding wool to make a comfort for Anna. Anna will be well again soon and the others are still healthy as far as I know.

Today it is quite cold and it is snowing, often times heavily. Rudy is hauling manure with the sled. I am working at my occupation, which is doing nothing. We made sugar [maple syrup] this spring already like wild. We have 340 lbs. of sweet maple syrup. We will make more if we get more [sugar] water.

The grasshoppers were really bad in the lawn, and for as far as I could hear. Hay costs from 25 to 30 dollars per ton. Straw has sold for 7 and 8 dollars for a sled load. Already much livestock has starved to death. We lost a calf. The blue lice ate it up. If it stays with this, we want to call it good. For this year, we still have a lot of straw, but not much hay. The oats are barely enough. I have enough wheat for us. The grain in the ground (seed) seems very bad now, yet we must wait for a harvest in hope, and thank God for what he allows us to harvest. We would love to hear from you if possible.

On Green (!) Thursday I want to go to the Bauman's auction. They sold to William Dihewen for 5000 dollars and will move to Indiana. On the 26th the Benj. Hochstetlers have auction. On Easter Monday the Highs in Salisbury have

auction in the store. Tuesdays after Easter Monday, the "Red" Samuel Beachys have auction. John Miller has auction the last day of March. All these want to move to Iowa. Abraham is moving to old Jacob Millers to farm on shares. Tobias Yoder has left and John Peck has also gone. Anna also wants to go along if she gets well enough.

Now I think it is time to come to a close. My best regards to you all in the name of God.

John P. Miller

This letter is from Peter's niece Judith Yoder from Iowa. She was working for a Shelter family at the time. She writes of a near fatal accident.

Johnson Co., Iowa Sept. 15, 1866

First a heartfelt greeting of Love and Peace to you, Uncle Peter and your wife and children, wishing you everything good to soul and body in this time and much more, in eternity. I let you know that God be praised, we are healthy.

Today three weeks ago I was at home. They were all healthy, except Gideon was not quite. On Saturdays Daudy went to the city with several neighbors to fetch lumber. They want to build another house. Gideon was along. On the way home he was sitting on Daudy's wagon. They do not know how it happened, but he fell off and the rear wheel went over his shoulder and head. The first Daudy knew, he was standing behind the wagon. Those who saw it are surprised that he was not killed. Last Sunday Ananias and the girls and Barbara Schrock were here. They said he (Gideon) is quite well again.

Today they all went to church, but little Peter and I are at home. I thought I would write you a few lines. Ten [youth] are taking instruction classes this summer, 4 boys and 6 girls. Old Joseph Gasho has died in Indiana. He always wanted to come out here to Iowa, but never got that far. I like it well here at Shetlers. I have enough work, but do not have to work too hard.

About the weather, it was quite dry, but now we have enough rain. Uncle, I want to relate something. You may think I only want to brag, but I do not want to. We are on our second barrel of butter. Here the people have huge butter barrels. And the butter is just as good in Iowa as in there.

Further, I do not know much to write for this time. So much from your friend and well-wisher,

Judith Yoder

You said the postmaster said there is no post office in Iowa. There is: Amish Post Office, Johnson County, Iowa. Address your letter this way and I am sure to get it. Write again soon.

At the time of these letters things slowed down quite a bit in the winter. People had time to write letters and to relax, as the next several letters show. The following letter was from a friend in Somerset County, Benedict Hochstetler. It was written in English and we print part of it here in its original spellings.

January 2, 1864

Dear Brother-in-law Peter Schrock and your wife and children,

Now I will let you no what we intend to do till spring, go to the state of Iowa if we stay well that long. And Anne will go along with us to the state of Iowa. Now I wish you would sell your farm and go long with us to the state of Iowa.

Now I will let you no about war. They was two trafts maid here in our state of Pa. and the third trafted (draft) is near at hand, they say till the fifth of January. Mebby they will put that traft of till after. While I was so lucky yet, it didn't hit me, but the next time it might hid me to. But I hope they will let me clear.

Now I will let you no what Miss Anne is dong at this present moment, laying on the coal box and rest herself. And Elizabeth is setting on a chair and rest her hands and feet, and Jeremiah is setting behind the stove and eat chestnuts.

Benedict A. Hochstetler

Elklick Township, Somerset Co. Pa.

In this letter, Peter's brother Moses writes of a health problem he is having. He also writes what the family was doing on a snowy winter day.

German Settlement

Feb. 9, 1873

First a greeting to you, Peter, and also your children. Further, we are quite healthy except for a bad cold. The people are mostly in good health, as far as I know.

For about two months I am so that I cannot work well. It appears that something is out of joint. It came suddenly, and I could not walk anymore. It still goes out of joint.

We have a very persistant winter. It started early and snowed a lot. It snowed for eight days and the snow was quite deep. The snow was almost gone, now today it is "plucking geese" again and "chases the feathers about very wildly."

We have good hopes for a railroad. The Pennsylvania Company bought 3000 wooded acres three miles from here toward Oakland.

We have 9 horses, and old Mary we killed. Del is getting a colt again. She has her colt every year. Sally also will have a colt. She is 4

years old. The horses were almost all sick around here. Ours were too, but four of the colts did not get it, and also not the mares. Last Monday we had to drag out the best and choicest cow around here. She fell on ice.

[The following section was written in English by Moses' oldest son Manasseh.]

Further I will let you know that Anty Schrack came in here this winter and now he is working at Joel Benders. Now if you write again we would like if you would tell us whether you are acquainted with him.

We received your letter the 7th of February. I caught a catamount (wildcat) this winter. If you want to see it, go to Christian Brenneman in Ohio. He wanted it for a shop show and then Daniel Brenneman bought it and sent it to him.

Perhaps we would come out there too but I have to run the sawmill. I was working at the mill nearly all the week.

Now it is Tuesday about 9 o'clock. Manas is in the basement making shingles, so I have to write myself. Joni is lying on the woodbox. Daniel and Christian and Sarah are in their beds and Benjamin sits on mother's lap and nurses. It is now raining and is warm weather. We are sawing a little, so I don't have time to write much. I must quit. So much from us,

Mosi and Catharine Schrack.

This letter by Christian Petersheim was written soon after Peter moved to Ohio. He also wanted to move, but couldn't sell his farm. He writes of not attending church for some time. This may not have all been due to the weather, as he wishes he could be in church with Peter.

German Settlement Post

May 30, 1868

First a hearty greeting to you, Peter Schrack and to your wife and children, wishing you all good to soul and body in this time and eternity.

I got the letter you wrote the 3rd and we were happy to hear from you again. I would have written earlier but I thought I would wait until I knew whether old Cal would take that piece of land. But I still don't know.

Joels moved onto the old Bitschi place. Old Dan's Del died a long time ago. Now John Henry Stembel lent him a horse until this summer.

Today, the 31st, the church is at John Schlabachs. None of us was in church since last winter, when it was at Bitschis. Today Tobias and Lovina went. I wish I could be with you in church today. Until now we had very wet and cold weather. We did not have much warm weather. So much from me,

Christian Petersheim