

FAMILY HISTORY  
OF  
REV. JOHN TSCHETTER (1861-1951)  
AND  
SUSANNA MENDEL TSCHETTER (1863-1961)



Our grandfather, John S. Tschetter, son of Jacob Tschetter and Barbara Kleinsasser, and our grandmother, Susanna Mendel, daughter of Jacob Mendel and Anna Hofer, both were born in the village of Hutterthal in South Russia. Grandpa was born October 24, 1861, and grandma on May 8, 1863. Both families were a part of the Mennonite dispersion which began in Germany as thousands of devout Christians fled religious persecution by the established church - making their way for 450 years through Hungary, Romania, the Soviet Union, and finally to the United States of America.

In 1875, grandpa's family came to America and homesteaded on the prairies of South Dakota, ten miles southwest of Bridgewater in Hutchinson County. He was 14 years old at that time.

Grandma's father died in Russia when she was nine years old and the family continued to live there until 1875 when they left the old homestead and immigrated to the United States. Grandma, at the age of 13, her mother, and her seven brothers and sisters boarded ship in the Bremen harbor, Germany for their new life overseas. On the first of September they arrived safely in Yankton, South Dakota, on the James River, where they farmed and raised livestock.

Our grandparents were married on November 13, 1881, and lived on the homestead of grandpa's parents. Grandpa was 20 and grandma 18 years old. During this period, grandpa continued to grow in his Christian faith. The Hutterish people thought that all that was necessary to please God was to live a good clean life. To become a new creature in Christ Jesus, to be born into God's family, to have peace with God, and to have sins forgiven was something altogether unknown. After a personal experience and struggle Grandpa accepted this new faith of forgiveness, love and service, and was baptized. He soon felt the call to the ministry and began to preach the Gospel of Christ to the small local congregation, and witnessed to the faith where ever he could. In 1889 he was ordained as a minister of the Gospel and continued to assist the congregation which grew until it was necessary to build a larger place of worship. His contribution to their growth helped bring into existence the Salem Church built at Wolf Creek near Bridgewater.

In 1908, the 12th of September, our grandparents, and their younger children moved to Beadle County to join their older children who had married and bought land and lived there. A farm seventeen miles north of Huron was purchased, and they farmed there with their children for almost forty years. There, they attended Bethel Church, and in 1910 grandpa became the pastor when the present pastor left. For over 50 years he served his Lord in the Christian ministry wherever he was needed.

By his 86th birthday, grandpa's health began to fail, so in February, 1948, they moved to Huron. However health problems continued, and he died November 28, 1951. Only a month before his death his 90th birthday was celebrated and their 70th wedding anniversary was observed two weeks before he died.

Grandma continued to live in the family home in Huron with her daughter Elizabeth, remaining very active until 1960 when her eyesight failed. From then on her health declined until her death on September 20, 1961. She had reached the age of 98 years, 4 months, and 12 days.

Our grandparents were blessed with 5 sons and 6 daughters. They were:

Anna (Mrs. Jacob T. Hofer)  
Jacob A. Tschetter  
Susanna (Mrs. Ludwig Hohm)  
Dr. John Tschetter  
Mary (Mrs. John J. Wollman)  
Barbara (Mrs. Albert Hohm)  
David S. Tschetter  
Margaretha - who died at the age of 9 years  
Dr. Joseph S. Tschetter  
Elizabeth Tschetter  
Dr. Paul S. Tschetter

Our grandpa was commonly and affectionately known by people outside of his family as Johann vetter, which translates to Uncle John. Physically our grandfather was a small, somewhat stooped man, but spiritually he was a giant. He was an individualist who wore his hair longer than was acceptable at the time. He always wore a full beard, and this was long before that was fashionable. He looked very much like the hippies of our day. Sometimes grandchildren thought that grandpa was rather old fashioned and were sometimes embarrassed by his broken English and his unsophisticated ways. As we became older we learned to appreciate him for what and who he was.

Memories that many of us have of grandpa concern his prayer life. He would tell how as a young man he went to the cellar alone and fell on his knees in an attempt to find his Saviour, and he would say the dark cellar literally became illuminated with light of the Lord himself, and he found his Lord, and he spent a good share of his life after that on his knees. When grandpa disappeared from time to time he had gone to one of his secret places of prayer where he would spend many hours on his knees. When he wouldn't join us at the dinner table, grandmother would explain that he was fasting, which he did regularly. We have often heard about the times when some of the grandchildren followed grandpa around the farm and found themselves with him in the hayloft which was one of his favorite prayer spots. When grandpa prayed it took him a long time to praise God and express his great love for his Saviour. The grandchildren knew that it was proper to kneel also but soon tired and were in a dilemma as to how to escape. Those are precious moments that had a deep and lasting influence on the lives touched by them.

No one had a greater love for the Bible than grandpa did. He would say that when he walked by the dining room table and saw the Bible lying there, he would have the impulse to pick it up and kiss it.

Grandpa had no ambition to amass a large earthly fortune, but he freely shared what he had with others. Whenever there was sickness or a need in the community, grandma would pack a box of food and they would go minister both physically and spiritually.

When grandpa died at the age of 90, he fulfilled his lifelong longing to be in the very presence of his Lord whom he had loved and served during his long life. For him it was a long awaited reunion. If man indeed is put on earth to glorify his Maker, grandpa had achieved that goal and his reason for existence on this planet earth.

As the years have passed many of us here have realized that this unassuming man, our grandpa, was in fact most uncommon.

Our grandma and grandpa shared many joys and sorrows together for many years. As a minister's wife, grandma was a great help to him, taking a major responsibility with the farm and in the home while grandpa was away on evangelistic meetings, sometimes as long as six weeks. Grandma would manage the farm and on one occasion she asked for permission to build a granary while he was preaching in Canada. When he returned several weeks later the granary was ready for use. Did she actually do the work? No, but she knew how to oversee the job and get it done.

At 97 years of age grandma still washed dishes and did mending and sewing. She loved to work in the garden and hoed many a mile. When they were available she would get the grandchildren to help. This love to work with the soil stemmed from her active life on the farm when she worked in the field with grandpa. She loved to work from early morning to late at night as long as she was able.

Many of us remember the wonderful rye bread grandma made. There was none like it. The grandchildren loved to visit grandma because she always had cookies for us. Many remember the lovely voice grandma had, how she would sing those hymns so much of the time, especially first thing in the morning when she was preparing breakfast.

Grandma spent much of her time reading her German Bible printed in heavy black type. By her 97th birthday she had read the Bible six times from cover to cover and used glasses for reading only.

Grandma told us, that as a young girl, how cold she was when riding in a wagon with her brother for two days when they hauled grain 50 miles to Yankton.

On Mother's day in 1960, on grandma's 97th birthday, grandma, a wiry little woman dressed in black satin with black head shawl, attended services at the Bethesda Mennonite Church as she did every Sunday and every Mother's Day with daughter Elizabeth with whom she lived in Huron.

One unforgettable experience for grandma in her life as told in her own words was this:

"I was so very sick when my youngest child Paul was only 8 days old. I had a very high fever and became blue in my face and it seemed that the end was near. The Lord led it that a beloved brother, who was a man of prayer, visited at our house. I said to my husband (our grandpa) and my brother, 'If there is anything that can help, it is prayer.' So they knelt down beside my bed and prayed earnestly. The Lord heard this prayer and at once I got better so that I could take care of my dear son Paul"

Another incident in grandma's life as she told it was as follows:

"We were happy with our children but I often felt sick and had a great pain. We committed it to the Lord in prayer and it was decided to go to Rochester, Minnesota, to get medical help. I said, 'The Lord's will shall be done.' In such hours it is precious to have a Saviour who comforts us. A great comfort to me was the verse, 'If a mother should forget her child, I will not forget thee'. In 1912 I submitted to an appendix operation at the Mayo Clinic and was very sick. Death was near but I could feel that my beloved Saviour with His Spirit was near me. A whispering voice said to me, 'Thou wilt not die but live and make known the works of the Lord', I became well and in 3 weeks I could come home. My beloved husband was with me in Rochester and it was a happy occasion to again be with my beloved children and grandchildren who came out to meet me".

All of us here today from near and far, whether we belong to the family of grandma and grandpa Tschetter by birth or by marriage, are now and have been in the past influenced by the lives of two humble, peasant people who came to this country from a foreign land. They left us a legacy of hard work, family values, integrity, love of God with all its meaning in the fullest, honesty, love of neighbor and all those attributes that give meaning to our fragile earthly life. So let us not forget in our times of much prosperity and luxury those timeless, eternal values exemplified for us by our grandparents and our parents.

Cover Picture:

Back row left standing: Susanna (Hohm), Mary (Wollman), Elizabeth, Jake, Joe, Paul, David, Barbara (Hohm)  
Front row sitting left: Anna (Hofer), Susanna Tschetter (mother)  
John Tschetter (father), John.