

## THE TRAGEDY AT KISIWA CREEK:

(THE STORY OF THE JOSEPH AND SUSANNA (WALTNER) FLICKNER FAMILY):

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Joseph Flickner and Susanna Waltner were married in Russia, 5 Feb 1861 [1]. This was about the time that the Russian Government issued the Emancipation Reform of 19 Feb 1861 which ended serfdom in part, allowing some peasants the right to own their own land and businesses [2]. As a consequence of the reform a number of Swiss Volhynian families, mostly from the Eduardsdorf area, were able to purchase a tract of land, likely from the heirs of General Mikhail Kutusov, and establish the settlement of Kutusovka in late 1861 or early 1862 [3], [13].

It is probable that the Flickner family lived and farmed in the Kutusovka area until 1874 when they, along with six children, came to America with the greater part, nearly the whole, of the Kutusovka Congregation.

Following is a transcription from the Manifest of the steamship, S.S. City of Richmond, which arrived at the Port of New York 08/31/1874 via Liverpool and Queenstown [4] and which provides us with a profile of the family at the time of immigration:

214	Joseph	Fleckner	31	M	Farmer	Russia	U.S.	Steerage
215	Susanne	"	34	F	Wife	"	"	"
216	Benj	"	9	M	Child	"	"	"
218	Johan	"	6	"	"	"	"	"
218	Cath	"	4	F	"	"	"	"
219	Marie	"	3	"	"	"	"	"
220	Anna	"	1	"	"	"	"	"
221	Jacob	"	11	M	"	"	"	"

There were eight children born to them in Russia and two of these died young, Johann in 1863 and Anna in 1871 [1]. Then not long after arrival in America, the second Anna (passenger #220) also passed away, sometime in 1874 [1], [4]. This child was not alone, as an unusually large number of Swiss Volhynian children died in late 1874 at or about the time of immigration and it is possible that the illness that took their lives, and maybe the life of young Anna Flickner, was carried from the Russian settlements to America ? [5].

Early on the family settled in Indiana and lived there for a few years, where their youngest child, Caroline, was born in 1877 [1]. Then in the late spring of 1878 they acted on a decision to move to Kansas, hoping to rejoin relatives and friends from the old Kutusovka Colony who were then pioneering what would later become known to us as the Moundridge area but was then known as Christian, Kansas.

The farmers were in the fields, racing the rain, bringing in the Turkey Red as hard as they could, some with harvesters, some with cradles [10]. This was the setting when the Flickner family arrived in the vicinity of Halstead, presumably on Tuesday, 18 Jun 1878. It was that same day when the tragedy at Kisiwa Creek is thought to have occurred [12].

There had been unusually heavy rain, causing considerable crop damage and swelling the streams of the Little Arkansas River valley beyond the banks, almost to the extent of flooding the city of Halstead. And the water was still rising when for one reason or another the oldest son, Jacob, yet a teenager, entered the high water of Kisiwa Creek.

We are able to review two newspaper articles which shed light on the story through the eyes of the English. First a brief published in the Newton Kansan, Thursday - June 20, 1878, under the heading: "Halstead Items" which is reproduced as follows [10]:

A Russian boy was drowned in Kissaway Creek, about three and a half miles south of town, on Tuesday evening, and his father, who came to his rescue, lost his life while endeavoring to save his son, and left his wife in frantic agonies, on the shore, at the loss of both. A party of citizens of town started down to drag the stream in search of the bodies, but were unable to find them.

The river is still rising, and the water is backed up Main street nearly to the postoffice. No fears are entertained of the town being flooded, as all indications are that it won't get much higher, but will soon recede.

Another article, published the same day, in the Harvey County News, also under the heading: "Halstead Items" gives us a little more information [11]:

Mr. J. L. Williamson who lives three miles south of town came riding in on Tuesday evening with news of the drowning of a Russian man and boy in the Kissaway creek near his house. It seems that a family of immigrants, consisting of a man, his wife and son, on their way to relatives north of Halstead camped on the banks of the Kissaway for the night and the boy thought he must have a swim in the stream, which was greatly swollen by the heavy rains. He took off his clothes and lunged in. He soon found himself overpowered by the rapid waters and cried for help, when his father who was standing near sprang to rescue and sunk to rise no more. John Dobbys an expert

diver was brought to the scene and made several unsuccessful attempts to recover the bodies when Mr. Williams came to town for help and several wagon loads of men went out to drag the stream but at this time have met with no success. The poor woman was almost frantic in witnessing the taking of all that was dear on earth to her, even before her very eyes, and yet beyond any aid she could give, and rent the air with groans and cries that would melt a heart of stone. She could not speak a word of English and no particulars could be ascertained.

The authors of these articles do not express the fact that this wife and mother, Susanna, was left on the shore of Kisiwa Creek, suddenly alone, with five young children, one of which was an infant. She must have wondered, "What now?"

Nor could anyone have foreseen, that the surviving children would be further traumatized the following winter, in early 1879, when their mother, Susanna, also died. We don't know her cause of death but one wonders if it might have had something to do with a broken heart? The five children, approximate ages 13 months to 14 years, were then orphans. [1]

It is not known here who cared for these children, but it is likely that they were raised in the Christian-Moundridge area. James W. Krehbiel (2002) gives us a little bit of history regarding one of the children, Katherina, paraphrased as follows:

*"Katharina came to America in 1874 and lived with her parents in Indiana for about 3 years before settling in Kansas. On the trip to Kansas her father and brother were drowned. Her mother died c.6 months later and Katharina was raised by relatives and friends. She was a member of the Salem-Zion Mennonite Church, Freeman, South Dakota until 1916 when she transferred to the Bethany Mennonite Church, Freeman, SD."* [14]

One of the sons, Benjamin J. Flickner, joined the First Mennonite Church at Pretty Prairie, KS, between 1885 to 1887 [15]. He was thought to be a blacksmith [13]. His brother, John B. also moved to the Pretty Prairie area, later relocating to the Alameda vicinity in Kingman County, possibly about 1906 [13]. This is where they lived their lives, Benjamin being buried at the First Mennonite Cemetery, Pretty Prairie, KS and John B. at the Bethany Mennonite Cemetery, Kingman, KS. Some of the Flickner descendents of John B. still live and farm in the Kingman area.

Little is known here of the younger sisters, Maria and Carolina. It is believed that both of them grew to adulthood. Maria is thought to have married and at some point gone to live at the Swiss Volhynian settlements near Monroe, Washington. [1].

The homestead of J. L. Williamson which approximates the location of the Flickner's campsite was located 3 miles due south of Halstead (center) and along the north bank of Kisiwa Creek (N/2,SE/4,Sec 14,T24S,R2W) [16].

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 REFERENCES, FOOTNOTES AND COMMENTS:

[1]: The Swiss Volhynian Database, Betty (Graber) Hartzler, Updated: 2009-12-23; (SMCHA Genealogy Links), <http://www.swissmennonite.org/index.html>

[1a]: (Fr2.53) Joseph Flickner was grandson to (Fr0) Andreas Flickinger (Flickner) (1784-1828) and (Md1.2) Anna Mundelheim (1785-1829) who it can be said were the progenitors of all Swiss Volhynian Flickner (Flickinger) decedents. (wa2.28) Susanna Waltner was granddaughter to (wa0) Andreas Waldner (1777-1817) and (Sg1.6) Katharina Schrag (1781-1839) who were the progenitors of all Swiss Volhynian Waltner decedents.

[2]: The Emancipation Reform of 1861; Wikipedia;  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation\\_reform\\_of\\_1861](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_reform_of_1861)

[3]: Schrag, Martin H.; Neumannovka and Kutuzovka (Volhynia, Zhytomyr Oblast, Ukraine); Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. 1957. Web. 05 October 2010. <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/N48710.html>.

[4]: Manifest of the S.S. City of Richmond, NY 08/31/1874, Bethel College Mennonite Library & Archives, 300 East 27th Street, North Newton, KS 67118, Microforms Area, Record Group 36, Microfilm, 35 mm., Reel 393.

14	Joseph Flickner	31	5	Harman	
15	Susanna	34	5	Wife	
16	Benj.	9	5	Child	
17	John	6	5		
18	Catha	4	5		
19	Marie	3	5		
20	Anna	1	5		
1	Jacob	11	5		

[4a]: Here one may compare the ages given on the ship's manifest with those determined from the various genealogical data, summarized in the Swiss Volhynian database [1] and Krehbiel (1995) [13]. Conflicts are not unusual but there is no particular reason to believe that the information specified in the Manifest is any more accurate than that which is recorded in the various genealogical documents. Following are the reported year of birth and age as of 1874 for each:

(Fr2.53) Joseph Flickner (1841, 33), his wife (wa2.28) Susanna Waltner (1839, 35), their children: (Fr3.533) Benjamin J (1864, 10), (Fr3.534) John B (1865, 9), (Fr3.535) Katherina (1867, 7), (Fr3.536) Maria (1869, 5), (Fr3.538) Anna (1872, 2) and (Fr3.531) Jacob (1861, 13).

[4b]: Both (Fr3.533) Benjamin J. and (Fr3.534) John B. are indicated as born in the year 1864 on their cemetery monuments. At the same time birth dates from the Eduardsdorf-Kutusovka church book are 26 Apr 1864 for Benjamin J. and 22 Dec 1865 for John B. [13]. It is suspected here that the birthdates from the church books are the most reliable.

[4c]: (Fr3.538) Child Anna's listing in the manifest is suggestive that her date of death could be bracketed after 31 Aug 1874, the date of arrival of the City of Richmond at New York.

[5]: From study of the genealogical database [1] and from the various ship's Manifests, it appears that there could have been as many as 70 Swiss Volhynian children who died in the early days in America. This history is well known for the Kutusovka group at Peabody and at Halstead, Kansas [6], [7]. But a careful look at the historical data allows us to speculate that many children also died in the Dakota Territory and possibly also in the states of Illinois and Indiana. And further we find reasons to believe that there were, although a small number, a few who died while our people were still passing through New York City and in route to points of initial settlement [7]. And further still, we know from the Manifest of the S.S. City of Chester that docked in New York, 24 Aug 1874, that at least one of the children, Anna Schrag (sg4.7433), passed away while crossing the Atlantic Ocean [8]. And finally there were a considerable number who were thought to have died in Russia, as many as 9 or 10, while preparations for emmigration were in progress in early 1874. So it is reasonable to wonder if the illness, possibly measles [9], which claimed these lives was carried to America from Europe?

[6]: P. P. Wedel, A short history of the Swiss Mennonites: who migrated from Wolhynien, Russia to America and settled in Kansas in 1874, trans. Mr. and Mrs. Benj. B. J. Goering (North Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, Inc., 1960; Original German, 1929). Excerpts: [www.dgatx.com/family...pubs/1960/SM/hs.html](http://www.dgatx.com/family...pubs/1960/SM/hs.html) (2009 Dec 12).

[6a]: P. P. Wedel, Kurze Geschichte der aus Wolhynien, Russland nach Kansas ausgewanderten Schweizer-Mennoniten (Moundridge, KS: Wedel, 1929; English trans., 1960).

[7]: Krehbiel, James W., 2001, Hoffnungsfeld Mennonite Church Cemetery, Moundridge, Kansas; Hopefield Mennonite Cemetery; August 2001; Provided for the Swiss Mennonite Cultural and Historical Association (SMCHA); 29 p.

[8]: Manifest of the S.S. City of Chester, NY 08/24/1874, Bethel College Mennonite Library & Archives, 300 East 27th Street, North Newton, KS 67118, Microforms Area, Record Group 36, Microfilm, 35 mm., Reel 393.

[9]: Good, Richard; 2010; "Measles among Mennonite families in Peabody"; Marion County Record (Marion, KS: 1874 Oct 3). Also [www.dgatx.com](http://www.dgatx.com), From the newspaper archive at Kansas State Historical Society.

[10]: The Newton Kansan, H.C. Ashbaugh, 1872-1894, Newton, KS, Microfilm, Ablah Library, Wichita State University, Microforms Area, 22 Aug 1872 to 26 Dec 1878, Microfilm 157.

[11]: The Harvey County News, Newton, Kan., Moore & Duncan, 1875-1879, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, KS, (microform), MLA per Mfilm.

[12]: According to Krehbiel (2001, p. 24) [7] the date of death, for (Fr2.53) Joseph and (Fr3.531) Jacob, is recorded in the Eduardsdorf-Kutusovka-Hoffnungsfeld churchbook (p. 37) as 11 Jun 1878 (which was a Tuesday). The newspaper articles regarding the story were published 20 Jun 1878 and appear to refer to the previous Tuesday, 18 Jun 1878, as being the date of the drownings?

June 1878						
S	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	18	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

[13]: Krehbiel, James W., 1995, Swiss Russian Mennonite Families Before 1874, from the Michelsdorf, Michalin, Eduardsdorf, Horodyszczce, Waldheim, Zahoriz and Kutusovka Congregations; Olde Springfield Shoppe, Elverson, PA 19530-0181; 332 p., (hardback available via the SMCHA, <http://www.swissmennonite.org/index.html> ).

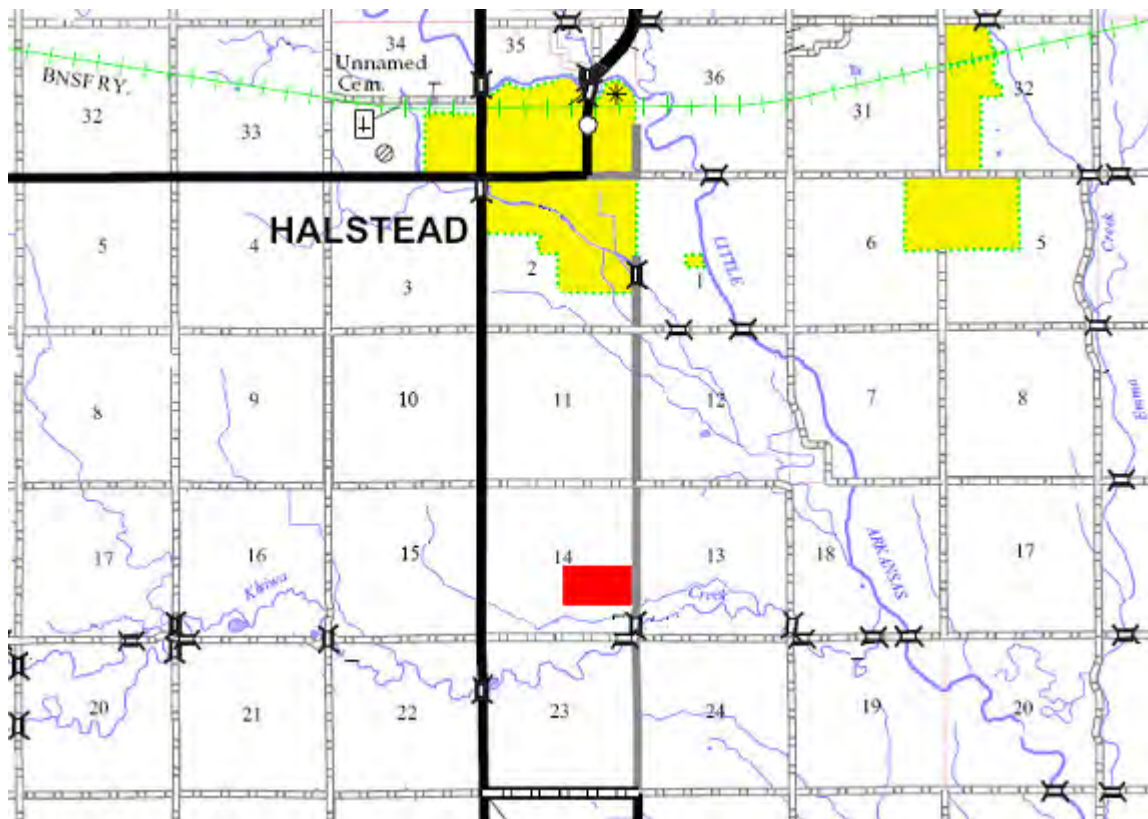
[13a]: The codes (e.g. Fr2.53) which identify individuals uniquely are maintained in this writing the same as they were assigned by Krehbiel (1995).

[14]: Krehbiel, James W., 2002, Pioneer Days in Dakota and Kansas: A Difference, Swiss Mennonite Cultural and Historical Association, SMCHA, Monthly Feature, <http://www.swissmennonite.org/index.html> p. 10a.

[15]: A History of the First Mennonite Church, Pretty Prairie, Kansas; (1983); Prairie Publications, Pretty Prairie, KS 67570; Mennonite Press, Inc., North Newton, KS 67118.

[15a]: A Benj. Flickinger (Flickner) is listed (#55, p. 15) as becoming a member of the First Mennonite Church at Pretty Prairie, KS during the period 1885 to 1887.

[16]: Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT), County Maps, 2008, <http://www.ksdot.org/burtransplan/maps/Mapscounties.asp>



[16]: Register of Deeds, Harvey County, Kansas; Margaret Hermstein, Deeds p. 201, 205, Warranty Deed p. 346;

[16a]: The eighty acre homestead of James Livingston Williamson (1845-1918) and his wife Chrissie H (Groome) Williamson (1851-1915) was located at the N/2 of the SE/4 section 14, township 24s, range 2w as indicated. [17]

[17]: Genealogy of James Livingston Williamson; by Karin (Shriver) Gallagher, 08 Apr 2010, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=50837132>

[18]: The Homesteader, Newsletter of the Harvey County Genealogical Society, Volume 3, Issue 1, February 2007, "Old Halstead Cemetery" p.4; <http://www.hcgsks.org/Homesteader/Homesteader10.pdf> also photographs & transcriptions 19 Oct 2008, <http://www.hcgsks.org/Cemeteries/OldHalstead/OldHalstead.htm>

[18a]: The Old Halstead Cemetery, marked unnamed, located about 1 mile west of Halstead is the location where at least one of the children who died in late 1874 is interned (John Schrag, sg4.7542, died 9 Oct 1874). There are also several unmarked graves which, although not proven, may mark the resting place of other Swiss volhynian children ? [16].

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