

“Diary of John J. Stucky 1898-1928”
Presentation of Great Granddaughter Marlene Krehbiel to the
Swiss Mennonite Cultural and Historical Association Annual Meeting on March 10, 2013

I MUST explain that I have never seen great grandpa John J. Stucky. I do have one picture of him and great grandma, Anna. He did not allow anyone to take pictures of him. This picture was taken when he was older and perhaps lost his position on the subject. This diary that he kept is not very detailed as one would hope for it to be; but it reveals a profound personality of someone who cared deeply for his personal family and his church family. His work shows the desire to be committed to following the Lord Jesus Christ, obeying God’s Word in life, and seeking the good of the brotherhood.

John J. Stucky was born in Russia Jan. 26, 1858. He traveled with the congregation to America leaving in April 1872 and arriving in August 1874 in New York. From there they boarded a train to Peabody, KS. The men took off from there - walking and looking for land that resembled the land they left in Russia. When speaking of the beautiful land they had to leave, Great Grandma always wiped tears. The history we know says they came to this area in 1874. I found no record of when John J. Stucky began preaching but I do know he was a nephew of Elder Jacob Stucky.

I have no idea his stature but in the diary he talks frequently of magaweh (stomach ache), arthritis, sore throat, and other ailments. At one point in his ministry he traveled to California and spent some time there. I read this diary some years ago well (do not have access to it) but remember how often he was unable to attend the meetings due to health issues. The pastor who traveled with him gave up on him and attended the conference alone while great grandpa stayed in bed. In that diary he wrote what he ate daily. Two times a day he had butter bread and coffee. Sometimes an orange.

In this diary we get a daily report:

Montag: Heute war es Kuhl.

Dienstag: Heute hat es geregnet.

Mittwoch: Heute war alles nass, aber es regnet nicht.

Donnerstag: Schon warm, die Sonne scheint.

Freitag: Heute nicht warm, nicht kalt.

Samstag: Heute wieder kalt und treep.

Sonntag: Heute furhen wir zur Kirch. N.R. Kaufman predigt.

I was amazed how often they did not have church services. It seemed great grandpa did not attend quite often because of illness but usually the family went without him. Of course rain or snow made the roads impossible for anyone to attend. Also interesting is the number of ministers in the area. Some of the names mentioned are Galle (referred to as Galle’s church), Kaufman, Voran, Flickinger, Jacob Goering, Joshua Stucky, Peter Krehbiel, Frank Anhauser, Stellare Ratzlaff, other visiting ministers. Interestingly, the churches shared ministers. A pastor might preach in one church in the morning and another church in the evening. For those interested, the Eden Church was frequently mentioned in this exchange. N.R. Kaufman and John J. visited each other often and took turns preaching at Hoffnungsfeld. Kaufman took charge of the Sunday School when it began.

Pastors in those days were not salaried so they had to be able to make a living for their families. Of course if you lived in the country, farming was the livelihood you pursued. These dealings are written in the diary. He did rent out some acres for a third and two-thirds. This was primarily wheat, corn, and hay. As a family they also planted potatoes, cucumbers, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and sold them for cash. Sometimes

they raised turkeys and chickens for eggs and meat to eat and sell excess. Prices are interesting: wheat - \$.15/bushel; oats \$.24, eggs \$.09 per dozen, potatoes \$.04-\$.11 a bushel; turkey \$.05/lb to name a few.

One family trip they took to Colorado cost \$4.50.

Another interesting trait of the time was the borrowing of money from each other when they were short of cash. This was not only true of family but the brethren of the church as well. Money needed for fencing, tools, repairs, machinery or land, horses, hogs, cattle - but it seems it was always paid back.

As I read this I could not help but wonder if this policy might not have contributed to a policy the Bruderschaft made concerning paying "your fair share in the church." The policy was practiced that whenever a church needed to be built or repaired, the cost amount was added up and divided among the brethren to be paid. If someone did not or perhaps could not pay, the policy said no one could get out of paying by attending one of the other congregations (in other words, change churches). This action would result in excommunication. After this policy came into effect, one of the members wanted to pay for someone else, but the men in charge would not accept this - said everyone had to pay his own. Was this a part, or the beginning of the problems that took place? We will never know.

Soon after this, grandpa's diary entries become less and less - nothing from December 19, 1911 to April 16, 1912. Five entries in 1912; two entries in 1913; then nothing until February 1918, when he returned to almost daily entries until the end of the year. No entries in 1919 or 1920. In 1921 he wrote two pages limited to personal financial information.

On the inside of the back cover is a recipe for sick horses.

So now we ask ourselves, "Why did he stop writing during the years that were so troubled? Was he ill or so torn by the unrest that existed in the community, the community of people that he loved and prayed for daily? It has always been indicated to me by his daughter Katie, my grandma, and his grandchildren who remembered him that he was a gentle, caring, and loving man. How could one such as he put such sorrow into words?

In closing, I want to read excerpts from the ViewPoint published in the Mennonite Weekly Review, article 2-1983, written and submitted by Peter J.P. Schrag.

Peter J.P. Schrag, McPherson, Kansas claims conference history not accurate in *Mennonite Weekly Review* 2-19-1983.

"These comments are in regard to the review of David Haury's book Prairie People, a history of the Western District Conference, authorized by the Historical Committee of that conference ("On My Desk," July 8, 1982).

Since 1912 I have been a member of the Hopefield Mennonite Church, near Moundridge, Kansas, which was organized as the Hoffnungsfeld Church. Elder Jacob Stucky, who migrated with his congregation from Russia to America in 1874, was my grandfather. He died in 1893. Elder N.R. Kaufman and Rev. John J. Stucky were serving the church until 1918. John J. Schrag was my father. He married Elizabeth Stucky, a daughter of Elder Stucky.

I became involved in church affairs in my teens and was an active member in the issues and controversies of the church through my teen years. These included the matters of proposal for merger of both churches—Eden and Hopefield; and also, the injunction to not destroy the (Hoffnungsfeld) Hopefield church, but to

retain the building of the church and the cemetery, to remain as a church for which it was established and dedicated.

If anyone wanted to build another church, they were free to do so. There was no injunction against building another church. There were two suits in which I was involved. I do not need an outsider to tell why there were lawsuits, the intent of the same, nor what the outcome was and the results were.

We had our differences and we, both parties to the disputes, settled our differences and agreed to furthermore settle our disputes in accordance and in harmony with the constitution of the church and God's Word, and to forgive and be forgiven for whatever had happened heretofore. Many marriages have been established since all these controversies and disputes among those opposing each other before. There is and has been no problem from the people who settled their differences and signed to settle all their disputes.

But there seems to be a segment of conspirators who are trying to create discord and bitterness among those who made peace and settled their disagreements, taking slogans and excerpts out of disputed writings and pamphlets which were voided in the signed agreement of the parties concerned. This signed agreement was formulated and decreed forever settled by the arbitration board consisting of Rev. H.P. Krehbiel, Rev. P.H. Richert, and Rev. John C. Goering. These arbitration board members were elected by the parties concerned in accordance and in harmony with the constitution of the church and God's Word. These settlements mentioned were not formulated by the conference, but were a product decreed and voted on by the parties involved.

The reasons which caused the settlements and the agreements are not made a part of this intrusion into the church affairs. Why were they omitted? Their inclusion would have answered many biased remarks as to what happened and was settled. It is very unfortunate and regretted that in the book, *Prairie People*, there are misquotations of facts, misinterpretations of intent and distortion.

It is very sad, unfortunate and regretful when the truth is misquoted by mouth. It will finally cease when people die. But when it is put in writing, it remains as long as the book is circulated and exists and is an offence to many people because it is misquoting facts and so becomes a curse and liability instead of a blessing.

Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for what a man soweth, that shall he also reap."