

The Family of Alexander Schardt

Helene Dauenhauer Schmitz

Translated by Jo Ann Kuhr

The little village of Leimersheim in a bend of the as yet unrestrained Rhine River was already more than 1000 years old when the twenty-one-year-old farmer Johannes Schardt left it with his wife, Maria Katharina Hammer (about the same age), in order to move with more than fifty relatives, friends, and neighbors into an uncertain future, to settle and cultivate a newly conquered land in the south of the tsar's empire. The Schardt family was among the long-time inhabitants of Leimersheim. A [village] map indicates one corner in the village was an old possession of the family; according to a property document, Johannes' great-grandfather lived there in 1731. In addition to the economically dim future which Johannes saw before him, being drafted into Napoleon's Army was one of the main reasons why he and hundreds of young men left Leimersheim and the surrounding area in order to seek their fortune in Russia and America. Homeland, parents, relatives, and friends had to be given up; one could not think of seeing them ever again. They were moving into the wide world, to unknown lands and places, to find a new homeland in the distance, to develop their own property, and to found a new home. The circumstances of the times and the tsar's enticing offer caused all reconsideration and objections to disappear. The young adults married so that they could be considered as established families. One day before their departure, my great-great-grandparents were married. On 9 May 1809 they set out for the colony of Karlsruhe in the Odessa District.

In 1793 there was a bloody battle in Leimersheim between the Germans and the French. At this time about 300 Republicans [French] were killed. In the following years France was granted the territory of the left bank of the Rhine. Leimersheim again suffered from the burden of the war, from the frequent billeting of French troops, from demands of money and goods. Many young people had to go to war for Napoleon under the flag of France. At least eight men of Leimersheim lost their lives in this way. In 1801 a customs station was established at the ferry crossing in Leimersheim, The Rhine was at that time Germany's border and customs boundary. Soon the local citizens who were well acquainted with the surrounding country and knew the backwaters of the river quite well, began a lively smuggling trade. The smuggling must have flourished; the mayor of that time, Horn, requested that the populace stop the illegal trade which had been going on for years. Yet even the pleading of the local clergyman, Pastor Bolz, could not stop the smugglers. The smuggling was generally limited to wine, tobacco, oil, and madder [roots used for a red dye] as well as iron wares. It was a lucrative business even if dangerous. The customs patrol, strengthened by French soldiers in 1810, sought to put an end to the smuggling. Yet again and again the smugglers returned to their village with their skins intact and good profits, until one day a larger venture went awry. Caught in the act of smuggling a rather large quantity of linseed, the armed smugglers exchanged fire with the border guards. In the course of the firing, a customs guard was shot. Yet once again the smugglers succeeded in escaping without being identified.

A report from 1810 relates the following story. The twelve smugglers who had engaged in the

hail of bullets with the customs guards agreed to stop the dangerous enterprise. As atonement for the shooting of the guard and in gratitude that they had not been recognized, they wanted to have a cross erected in the cemetery [anonymously]. Yet the carrying out of this pledge was to be their doom. One smuggler told his girlfriend about the gift. Later, when the girl was deceived by her lover, she told the secret to the French. The twelve men were arrested and taken to Strassburg, where they had to endure hardships. Johann Schardt, a relative of the Johannes Schardt who had gone to Russia, died in the prison on 18 January 1812 as a result of torture. Johannes Ziemer wanted to take the main guilt on himself in order to spare his comrades. He was sentenced to death and died at the guillotine in Strassburg on 20 October 1812. The rest of the men were sentenced to several years in chains. When the German troops marched into Strassburg in 1814, the prisoners were freed and returned home. A cross in the cemetery of Leimersheim today still tells of the tragedy on the "smugglers' cross," which bears the names of the twelve smugglers and the date 1811. [This information was added at a later date.]

By that time, my great-great-grandfather, Johannes Schardt, had moved into his crown house and was farming the 60 dessiatines of land allotted to him. My great-great-grandparents had five sons: Phillip, Michael, Johannes, Peter (my great-grandfather), and Andreas. My great-grandfather, Peter Schardt, born 1829, and his wife, Magdalena Geiss, born 1833, lived on the estate Larievka. They had one daughter and seven sons: Euphenia, Alexander (my grandfather), Phillip, Michael, Peter, Johannes, Rochus, and Nikodemus. Grandfather Alexander, born 1852, was the oldest of the sons. After his marriage in 1872 with Margarethe Dukart, born 1853, he inherited 900 dessiatines of land with a house in Larievka. Their three sons and eight daughters were born: Margarethe, Michael, Florentina, Euphenia, Alexander, Theophila, Johann, Wilhelmine (my mother), Helene, Elisabeth, and Magdalena. Grandfather and the oldest children worked the land with his hired hands. He mainly raised grain and breed sheep. He built a new house for the oldest son Michael and his family.

Grandmother's ancestor, Anton Dukart, emigrated from Hayna, Rhine Palatinate, in 1809 and settled in the colony of Landau, Odessa Region. As the first physician in the newly founded colony of Landau, he was kept very busy in the colony and soon in the entire Berezan' area. He had a lot to do during the colonization. Often he was on horseback for days. His son, Michael Dukart, who had come to Landau as an eight-year-old boy, studied medicine in Vienna and was well known in the entire Berezan' region, especially by the royalty, as a famous physician and surgeon. His son, Johann Dukart, attended the church school in Landau and was one of the most capable and industrious scholars. Soon he came to Nikolayev as an apprentice in the pharmacy. He finished his medical studies and conducted a medical practice in Landau on the main street. Great-grandfather Dukart acquired great wealth tending to the welfare of the German colonists. He was one of the first in the Berezan' to acquire an estate. Great-grandfather was the epitome of a Christian father who kept strict order. Grandmother Margarethe was the oldest of his ten children. When her father had to make sick calls, she had to get the horses ready to travel.

In 1897 Grandfather Schardt bought a new estate comprising 2,157 dessiatines of land in the vicinity of the Russian village Kovalevka in the Yelizavetgrad Region (now Kirovograd District), 35 kilometers from the railroad station Dolinskaya. My mother Wilhelmine was seven years old when the family moved to the new estate. The large house had nine rooms, a kitchen, and a wash room where one could take a bath. One room of the house was furnished as a small chapel with an altar. The children in the Schardt household were all raised to be strict Catholics. They had their own house of worship. A priest came regularly and conducted services. In front of the large house was a garden with various flower beds, including roses. Behind the house was a large terrace with two stone stairways leading to the large garden, which was nine hectares in size. It began with a few flower beds, then came fruit trees and wine grapes. At the entrance to the garden stood a nut tree with three massive branches in which one could put a pillow and sit reading a book. The youngest daughter, Magda, liked to do that. A large vegetable garden with various types of vegetables for daily use extended to the end of the garden. On the left side, several poplar trees made a circle. In this circle were a table and benches which had been made by the man from whom Grandfather had bought the estate. A gate with a mulberry hedge formed the border of the garden. Behind the gate, on one side of the estate, lay the Russian village Kovalevka in the vicinity of the Berezovka River; on the other side was the Jewish colony Israilevka with small shops. On weekends, young people we knew often came through the gate for a walk in the large estate garden.

The post office, where letters written during vacation were mailed, was 5 kilometers from the estate. The estate had telephone connections with relatives in nearby estates. The administrator lived with his family in a small house. His wife was the housekeeper of the estate. They had eight children.

There were large horse stalls, pig stalls, and cow stalls on the estate. Every year the grandparents went to the spa in Bad Kissingen, Germany. Once they brought two cows and a bull of a specific breed back with them. After a few years there was a herd of twenty cows of this breed. Every week Grandfather took the butter made from their milk production to sell in the city. Grandmother prepared various types of cheese. *Brinsa* was made from sheep milk and put in kegs for winter use. Grandmother's specialty was a cheese made from sheep and cow milk with the addition of a special powder. It was a very tasty cheese. The butter produced in May was melted and taken to the city for the family's own use in the winter.

In 1904 Grandfather bought the three-storied house in Nikolayev on Bolshaya Morskaya Street #47. At that time it was one of only two three-storied-houses in the city. It contained ten apartments, each with eight rooms with every comfort. The family lived in the second floor with comfortably furnished rooms. The other apartments were rented out. Food from the estate was stored in the basement for the winter. If something fresh was needed, such as meat, sausage, or fish, then Grandfather went shopping in the bazaar with the servant Petro. For breakfast or supper there were often red or black caviar, various sardines, smoked fish, Dutch and Swiss cheeses. There were Moscow sausage, Krakow sausage, and tea sausages. In the fruit stores, Grandfather bought baskets of wine grapes, oranges, mandarin oranges, and apples,

sweets, and various confections — chocolates with nuts and tins of *Hlalva*. He spoiled his children. Late in the evening when they were lying in bed, the door would open, and Grandfather would come in and give them all fruit and sweets.

When the whole family went out to the estate in the summer, Petro would remain in the house. He was an old man of Polish origin. Grandfather had taken him in when he was ill, and he remained with the family forever. Thankful, loyal, and dependable, he took care of the house during summer vacation. A mechanic by trade, he made himself useful repairing various farm equipment. Petro slept in the living room on the sofa and ate with the family at the same table. He went to the bazaar with Grandfather and in winter kept the stoves burning. On the estate Larievka he took care of the smaller children when the parents worked in the fields with the grown children.

In 1909 Grandfather bought a mausoleum with eight compartments. There was a good place for it at the entrance of the main cemetery of the city.

Through industriousness, frugality, a wealth of children, and a knowledge of agriculture, an enormous prosperity developed in the colonized areas. The idea of the Russian tsar to settle and make productive the enormous expanse of land in the south of the gigantic empire, land which had been acquired by the successful war against the Turks, had an even more far-reaching (political) purpose. He hoped that the zeal and the knowledge [of the German colonists] would transfer to the Russian farmers and thus be effective for the good of the state. The result proved him right. Great advances could be seen and a corresponding revolution in the entire area of agriculture. For more than 100 years this rising development lasted and did not come to a halt until the unhappy end of the Russo-Japanese War and the co-called “small revolution of 1905.”

When the Schardt daughters married, they were provided with a large dowry. Each received furnishings in a modern style for a three-room apartment. Grandmother bought for the daughters lingerie of batiste and the finest quality linen with white embroidery and lace, bed linens, and expensive silk Atlas bed covers. A woman who did embroidery sat for months and identified the linens with monograms. Clothing and coat material was ordered and a seamstress came to the house. Expensive furs were bought.

In November 1911 there was a double wedding in the Schardt house in Nikolayev. My parents were married and so was mother's sister Helene. Two marriages were celebrated in the festively decorated Catholic church. Afterwards the guests were invited to a wedding celebration held in the city community hall. Grandfather rented it for the entire night. In the large room behind where the bridal couple sat, electric lights on the walls covered with flowers formed the letters P-W and G-H. Wedding guests were served the best beverages at a festively decorated table. The dance began after the meal. Favorite dances were requested by the guests who danced the whole night through until early morning. At midnight a supper of cold cuts, sweets, and fruit was served. All the Dauenhauer siblings came to the wedding of their brother. The double wedding cost the father of the brides 3000 rubles, and each groom had to

pay an additional 1500 rubles.

There were many valuable gifts; it was a rich wedding in keeping with the status of the family. Both couples were very young and good looking. My parents were fantastically beautiful. Wilhelmine personified a fine, delicate, little being. At the time my father owned an estate which he had received from his grandfather in 1910 near Kazanka in the vicinity of the Russian village Boykovo.

The first World War broke out. Alexander Schardt's son Johann finished his medical studies in Munich, Germany, and received a diploma of excellence. After he returned to Nikolayev, he had to go to the military and soon was sent to the front in Galicia. He had to render first aid to the wounded. The climate there was damp and it rained a great deal. His army cloths were saturated, his boots let in water, and vermin plagued him. Grandfather Alexander sent his son boots with waterproof soles and silk underclothing (against the vermin). When the wounded were brought from the front to the hospital, they asked, "Give us the physician in the uniform. He should bind our wounds!"

The chief physician liked to drink. Once a wounded soldier was brought in with a bullet in his throat and had to be operated on immediately. The chief physician was again drunk and wanted to operate without washing his hands. Johann saw that, led him away, and began the operation himself. He removed the bullet. Because the clothing of the wounded man was soaked, Johann took the silk underwear out of his suitcase and put it on the wounded man. The soldier recovered, received furlough, and went home in the vicinity of Nikolayev. Johann gave him a letter to his parents. The soldier delivered it and told how beloved their son was among the wounded. "He removed the bullet from my throat, saved my life, and put his last underwear on me! I thank you for that. There are few such people [like he]!" Johann dealt as his father did, who always said, "Where there is need, we must help."

Son Alexander had also been called to the army. As an engineer he built bridges for the military. Grandfather was very concerned about his sons, and his worrying had a bad effect on his health. Because of the war, he could not go to Bad Kissingen where he usually went every year. He had heart attacks which became more and more frequent. The doctor had to be called often. On 12 June 1916 Grandfather died of a heart attack on his estate at an age of 64 years. A few days before, it was on a Sunday, he had ordered the carriage be hitched, and expressed a desire to ride through the estate with his wife and youngest daughter Magda to smell the fragrance of the field flowers. His body was laid out in the guest room, where relatives living nearby and neighbors took departure from him. On the next day the coffin was taken to the train station Dolinskaya and to Nikolayev by train. Grandmother, Magda, and Alexander's wife accompanied it. On the way it was learned that the Alexander Jr. was in the same train. He had been given furlough for his father's funeral. Once again Grandfather was laid out in the guest room. It was here that the relatives and acquaintances bade him farewell. He was laid to rest in the large Schardt mausoleum.

During the Civil War of 1918-1920, chaos reigned in the country under the auspices of the

caprice of the various political parties. The rebel leaders, such as Makhno, Grigoriev and others, broke into the cities and burdened the citizens— beginning with the business people—with unbearable “contributions,” which resulted in many arrests when they could not agree on the amounts to be paid—which were really too large. Thank goodness Grandfather did not have to experience this!

His son Alexander became a victim of this despotism. The estate had long since been abandoned; the family was living in the house in Nikolayev. A group of Chekists was housed in one apartment in the Schardt House. (The Cheka were the Bolshevik political police.) Bandits under Grigoriev were attacking the city. Many shots came from the Schardt house, and one of the Grigoriev band was killed. That must have been done by the Chekists in order to turn attention away from them. A sailor armed with grenades came to the Schardt apartment and demanded to see the owner. Alexander had to go with them to the apartment occupied by the Chekists. Mother, his wife, and Magda cried, but Alexander comforted them, saying, “Why are you crying? I have not done anything wrong to anyone. I fought the entire war and came home unharmed. Nothing will happen to me.” But he didn’t return. As a property owner he became a victim of the Revolution.

Later eyewitnesses (the renters) told what happened. “He was shot three times. The first bullet hit his hand. He was forced to dance to the music “Yablochka” (“Little apple”), a Russian folk dance. During the dance the second bullet hit him in the chest, and he collapsed. The third bullet went into the abdomen; it was the most dangerous one. Because Alexander had eaten dinner shortly before, the bullet went into the full stomach, disappeared from sight, and could not be removed. Alexander bled to death. At this time Johann was in the city with a well-known doctor. There he learned what had happened to his brother. He hurried into the Chekists’ apartment, placed his brother on a stretcher, and took him to the hospital. Despite all efforts to remove the bullets, only two were removed; the third bullet could not be found. Alexander died on the operating table. The following morning the Chekists left the city by ship. Fearing they would be discovered as murderers, they went to Voznesensk.

The family cried a great deal over what had happened. Alexander had to be buried secretly. They remained at home, but the atmosphere was terrible. One day an armed sailor came to the house again and demanded to see Johann. Fortunately he was again with a well-known physician and was warned there not to come home.

Soon the Schardt family left the house for good and found refuge with a well-known physician, Dr. Goncharov, who had treated the entire family earlier. His widow now took in the Schardt family and placed three rooms and a kitchen at their disposal. On 4 September 1931, Grandmother Margarethe died.

With the outbreak of World War II, Dr. Johann Schardt also became a victim of despotism. When news came over the radio on 22 June 1941 about Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union, Dr. Johann Schardt suspected something bad. Nervously he paced back and forth in the room. In the evening he went to the night shift in the Children’s Hospital, and early in the morning the

NKVD (secret police) arrested him there. He was taken to his apartment in Naberezhnaya Street #3, and the apartment was searched. Nothing was found. He was taken away and never came back. When his relatives inquired with the NKVD about him, they received only the answer, "He died of tuberculosis in Omsk."

Various rumors grew in Nikolayev. Supposedly he had been branded with a swastika on the forehead and then shot. A friend of Johann's brother-in-law Peter, who was married to Magda, accidentally came past the NKVD building. A hole had been dug in the street. Women standing around the hole were crying and said, "Here, in this hole, is Dr. Schardt, who has been shot."

The Schardt descendants left their homes and are now scattered over the entire world. The fate of this family, which had accomplished much over generations, took a tragic end.