

TOIL AND PEACEFUL LIFE - HISTORY OF THE DOUKHOBORS UNMASKED

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Translated from the Russian language into the English language, and typed, by the joint effort of John D. Buhr and Isaak A. Dyck

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Correspondence was carried on with agents in B.C., Oregon and California. California offered land in large complexes at \$11 per acre. This included many orchards, of various fruits, and sheep. In Oregon land prices were higher, and in B.C. land costs ranged from \$50 per acre and up. In B.C. Peter was to look at some land, and had agreed to meet the agents from Winnipeg in Nelson. The delegates were Peter, N. Zibarow and I, as their interpreter. The agent was a German, by the name of Maurer from the firm, "Willoughby and Maurer". The land lay at the confluence of the mighty river, the Kootenay and the Columbia. The valley was covered with huge primeval forests, like the Siberian "tajga". At first we looked at these woods from the railroad bed. Peter sat down on the rail and said, jokingly, "Well Nikola, if we should really buy this jungle, what would the Doukhobors say? They have sent us to buy orchards". While we were waiting for the train to take us back to Nelson, the agent persuaded Peter to cross the river and have dinner with a German, Lendis, who was making telephone poles in the forest, and look at his land. Peter agreed. We crawled down a steep precipice to the river bank. Maurer called a boat and we were taken across. The river was still low, because the snow had not yet melted.

This is a dangerous river when the water from melting snows fills it. After dinner the agent asked us to look at the valley, and we followed him through the woods. As though he was hypnotizing Peter, he assured him that the soil was good. All day till dark we scrambled through the deep snow and the dense forest, crawling over fallen trees and other obstacles. The soil, was nothing but pure, washed out sand, remaining moist only because the forest trees prevented the sun's rays from reaching it. This was toward the end of April, and we were still walking through snow that came up to our belts. Because this was supposed to be warm country, we sent a telegram to Potapow in Verigino to find out what the conditions were there.

He answered that they had began seeding. There was, therefore no snow in Saskatchewan, and we here had to walk in deep snow and listen to the agent praising the land. The agent, seeing he had success with Peter, left us with Lendis, and drove to Nelson, where he gathered some Germans, endeavouring to make complete fools of us. On the third day he came back, accompanied by some 50 people and when we again went out, they all followed, and pointed out certain pieces of land, asking the agent to sell them this piece of 100 acres, or that. Then the agent walked up to Peter and said, "Well, Mr. Verigin, make your decision whether or not you want to buy my land. You see how many buyers are just waiting for your decision. If you not buy all my land now, I shall subdivide, and sell it to these people at high prices, but you can have the whole piece at \$50 per acre". And Peter decided to buy. Maurer almost jumped, and motioning to the others, announced, "The land is gold". None of the buyers expressed regret, and talking happily and laughing went back to Nelson. Peter said to Zibarow, "There are people who go into the forest, and instead of cutting down the first tree they see, they walk on further, and when they come back, they see the tree has been cut down by someone else. So it is with land buying. We came into this hole having not even looked at other lands, even here in B.C., like the Okanagan Valley, not to mention Oregon and California.

I could see, that in his soul, Zibarow was against the purchase of this land, but he did not dare to offend Peter, and tell him the truth about this land. It was decided to sign the contract. We hired the lawyer, Johnson, when we came to Nelson, and the agent also hired a lawyer, because it was a big deal. The banker and several other people were invited as witnesses, among whom was a brave woman, Mrs. Harris, with whom Peter became good friends at first, but later he had to fight her in court. We all sat

around a round table in the office of our lawyer. Before signing Peter turned to Zibarow and asked, "Well, what do you think of this deal?" He answered with a laugh, "I depend on you Peter". Then he asked me, "And what do you think, Syema?" I answered as felt in my heart, "Peter, I do not understand much about the land itself, but this place is not to my liking; there are such big forests, and we were sent to buy fruit orchards". Without saying a word, Peter got up and walked out of the office. All these present were in a good, holiday mood. Seeing Peter go out saying anything, they were perplexed; what could happen? Nikola and I followed him. The others remained seated.

Peter walked along the street uphill in the direction of the railway station. We followed him. Everything was quiet. After a short rest, he said, "Nikola, the Lord God has preserved this land, exclusively for the Doukhobors, and I had already decided on the name of this place; "The Valley of Consolation, the jewel of Clear Water," but Simeon has destroyed God's plan". He spoke for a long time against what I had said. I did not want to be responsible for spoiling God's plan and did my best to bring the deal to a conclusion. When the contract had been signed, I breathed easier and thought, "Now, let the Doukhobors rejoice about this God's plan, and receive consolation from these aged forest giants and the enormous river which they will have to cross when it is at its height". This was the first purchase.

(More land purchases in the Kootenay Valley were conducted by Peter V. Verigin himself, he did not take S. Reibin anymore with him as translator. These other purchases are described in detail in the Manuscript of the Fisher Makaroff Correspondence 1955-56 by Claude Laing Fisher "The Real Story of the Doukhobors" presented to the U.B.C. Library, Humanities Division by Dorothy Ritzen (nee Fisher) on April 19, 1971. J.D. BUHR.)