

Karolswalde church book notes
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Over the last few years, several persons have engaged in a more intensive search for the church record book of the Karolswalde congregation—families of Low German background who migrated from Volhynia to South Dakota in the 1870s. The late Verney Unruh, Ed Schmidt from Waldheim SK; and Rich Preheim are among those who have made efforts to follow up with the family of Eldon E. Smith to track down the book.

I've tried to gather all the available evidence about the book and draw a conclusion, which is outlined below.

Evidence:

1. In Abe Unruh, *The Helpless Poles* (N.p., 1973), p. 60, he quotes the title page and first page of the Karolswalde book, indicating a date of 7 Dec 1830 on the title page, and the first page with a brief text indicating that Mennonites had migrated to the vicinity of Ostrog, Volhynia, in 1802 and afterwards. Unruh footnotes this quotation, saying "Information furnished by E. E. Smith."
2. In a May 18, 1965, letter to John F. Schmidt at the MLA, E. E. Smith asks some genealogical questions about the Jantz family and says "This Heinrich Jantz and his twin brother Tobias Jantz and their older brother Peter Jantz are listed in the Karolswalde Church Record." It's odd that he uses the present tense here, but significant that he mentions only the Jantz family.
3. In *Schartner Family Reunion Records* (Freeman, SD: n.p., 1970), Smith says on p. 12: "Karolswalde was settled in the year 1802, according to the flyleaf of the old Karolswalde Church Record Book that has since been lost."
4. In *A Tale of Three Cities* (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1979), p. 112, in an article on the Marion, South Dakota, Karolswalde church, Smith says "Very little information is available about this congregation because the first church book was lost in a fire. This fact was established by Mrs. Fred Dirks who was the daughter of Reverend Peter P. Becker."
5. John F. Schmidt, the former archivist at the MLA from the 1950s to the 1970s, always maintained that the Karolswalde book had been lost in a house fire.
6. A couple of years ago we got a photocopy of a long Jantz genealogical compilation from John B. Toews in British Columbia (SA.II.1467 in the MLA). We had had an incomplete copy of this Jantz document for many years, and no one knew where the original was. Toews also did not know the location of the original, but had a complete photocopy in his possession and made a copy of the copy for the MLA.

You can see the first two pages of this Jantz document at <http://mla.bethelks.edu/temp/jantz01.jpg> and at <http://mla.bethelks.edu/temp/jantz02.jpg>

This Jantz document contains EXACTLY the text about the Karolswalde church book that Abe Unruh quoted in *The Helpless Poles*, describing the cover as red with gold lettering and giving the text on the cover, plus the short narrative on the first page describing the migration of 1802.

My conclusion:

The Karolswalde book no longer exists. It was lost in a house fire, as E. E. Smith says, sometime in the several decades after the migration.

The book that Smith actually had, and from which he got his information about the Karolswalde record book, was the original of the Jantz genealogical document (which is at least 120 pages and measures around 7x9 inches). This would also probably be the book which Ed Schmidt saw in the bank vault with E. E. Smith in the 1960s.

It may be that the Smith family still has the Jantz document, which would be worth recovering. But it won't provide us with new information at this point, since we have a copy that is complete (as far as I can tell from reading through it).

Mar. 22, 2011 update:

An obituary in the *Christlicher Bundesbote*, Oct. 5, 1905, p. 6, for a widow Tobias Dirks says "Weil durch den Abbrand das Familienverzeichnis verloren gegangen ist, konnte kein Familienbericht gegeben werden." "Since the family listing was lost in a fire, no report on her family could be given." It seems to me that this is probably the Karolswalde record book that is meant here, which would mean the fire happened before fall 1905. The person is probably #230511 in GRANDMA, a Helena Unruh born 16 Apr 1821, although GRANDMA erroneously gives her death date and place as 1885 in Russia.