

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ERNST BENJAMIN SCHNEIDER
-translated from the German

I, Ernst Benjamin Schneider, was born 13 July, 1862 in (the city of)* Tauern, Germany. My father's name was Andreas Schneider and my mother's name was Maria Schneider. They both were therefore Schneiders by birth. The name of (my) grandfather on my father's side was Johann Schneider. The name of (my) grandfather on my mother's side was Andreas Schneider. (My) grandfather on Mother's side died one year before we emigrated to America. He became ill one Sunday morning when he prepared himself to go to church and to participate at the holy Last Lord's Supper and was dead a few hours later.

In the village where we were living, almost everything was Wendish (or Wendic). My parents sent us children to the German school in Kliten, which was approximately one hour away from our village, where we enjoyed instructions only in the German language. (He obviously means that only German was spoken at the school.)

In all, we were six brothers and sisters. They had the following names: Maria, Johann, Terese, Ernst, Gustav, Lena and were born in Germany. Maria died when she was eight years old. Three of us went to school in Kliten. It was a school that had several classes (grades). Two teachers were employed, who taught us. Every teacher had two classes (grades), (and) the teachers were very strict. We had to obey every single word closely; otherwise there was a considerable amount of paddling. Since my parents and grandparents were Christians, much emphasis was

* Words in parentheses have been added by the translator.

placed that everybody went to church on Sundays, we children included.

As much as I can remember, our church did not belong to the Landes-Kirche (State- or Nationwide church). The pastors received their pay from the members who belonged to their congregations. And they were not being paid by the government. Prayer services were conducted twice per week in the village. My father had an uncle in America, Carl Teinert at Serbin, Texas, from whom we oftentimes received letters; everytime a letter arrived from America, then the neighbors were all invited everytime and then the letter was read aloud. The letter sounded everytime very good (describing) how it looked in Serbin at the Wendish colony, where they all were much more content (happier) than (they were) in Germany. I can still remember the last letter from Carl Teinert was very praising. He wrote that they were building a new church, 1868, and had a wonderful site where the new church was being constructed. The church steeple points straight to heaven and the beautiful oak trees stand all around the church.

Since my father, Andreas Schneider, had many friends and relatives in the Wendish colony, (and) he had also known pastor Johann Kilian already in Germany, he decided to emigrate to America with his family and a neighbor, whose name was Andreas Medaek. It was in the year 1869, in July. Everything was sold, land, and everything that we did not want to take with us. The rest was immediately packed into crates and trunks and then we took off for America. In the next town, everything was loaded on the railroad and then we took off for Bremerhafen,

where, when we arrived, our sail ship was all set to take us aboard immediately. Right away all crates and trunks were loaded aboard. We children were always told in Germany that, when we would be walking across the plank, from the pier to the ship, someone would blindfold us and cover our eyes, but all that was not true and we were overjoyed. That same night the ship sailed with full sails towards America. But when, on the second day, we were about 500 (German nautical) miles away from Bremerhafen, a tremendous storm broke out. We all thought the ship was going to sink with all of us, but the dear Lord has held his protecting hand over us so that nobody lost his life. The storm had pushed us almost back to Bremerhafen and so, the ship turned around again and the trip (journey) started once again anew. Later on, we had several more storms, but we made it alright through all of them. When we saw land again, after three months and 12 days, we all were overjoyed. Since it was an old sailing vessel, the trip was a little longer (than normal), many things became scarce (on board), for example, the drinking water became very scarce. We were nine persons (and) we received about one gallon drinking water per day. After three months and 12 days we landed in November 1869 in Galveston. There the entire mess, crates and trunks were unloaded and everything piled on a heap. The unloading dock was in Galveston, where nowadays the bathing beach is located. We spent one night in Galveston. The next day, everything and the family was loaded on the railroad, and the trip began to Houston. When we arrived in the city of Houston, everything was unloaded

again and the entire mess was again loaded on a big wagon. Then four yoke-oxen were tied in front of it and we took off for Serbin, Lee County, Texas. The man, who was taking us to Serbin, his name was Andreas Kieschnick from Serbin.

The trip lasted more days because it rained and the roads were very bad. We had most of the time to walk on foot behind the wagon. The man received \$20 for the trip to Serbin. Because we were usually every evening soaked from the rain, a big fire was built in the forest so that we could dry ourselves again. Wood for the fire was everywhere in abundance, there was no scarcity of it. When we finally arrived at Andreas Kieschnick's place everything was unloaded again outside under the open sky, because they had no large house themselves, and had only little space. Because we were now in America, where we had to find shelter, father went out to look for a place for the whole family to stay. At first, he went to his uncle Carl Teinert; there was also nothing available. Most of the farmers had themselves not much in the line of living quarters. The houses were at that time (made) mostly all out of wooden logs that were cut in the forest. There was neither a floor nor a ceiling inside. The roof was covered with shingles that were split from tree logs, and the fireplaces were mostly built from split wood covered with loam (clay). Cooking stoves were not generally known and most people cooked in the fireplace.

Since my father was still looking for a house we all could move into, finally he found a (piece of) house owned by a woman who was a widow, whose name was

Krause. Then the things were loaded again and were taken there. But now the trouble was not over yet. For the next coming year, 1870, a place had to be found where we could farm to raise cotton and corn, and a few cows had to be bought and a team of oxen with which the land could be (plowed) worked.

From the wind one cannot live here in American either of course. Finally, at last my father found a lease place with land to work owned by a man whose name was Andreas Falke, not far from Serbin; but there was no house there. The man had to build a house for us first, but when we arrived there, the man let us live in an old shed, which was probably used once as a horse barn. Not even a floor was inside, (and) a bed to sleep on was built by father inside. Posts were dug into the ground and then several wooden poles were brought up and nailed onto them and so the bed was completed. Some of us children, and grandfather and grandmother, slept at Mr. Falke's house on the floor; he let us have a room. (In this manner) so we had to be content until he had built the house for us. Since Mr. Falke had an old building not far from our house, which was a store in earlier times, he decided to tear down the building and to build a house for us out of it. So the building was being torn down, because it was made out of lumber, and put up again $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from his house. And our living-house was ready. The house consisted of two rooms, but there was no chimney (fireplace) in the house. Mother had to bake and cook meals outside because we had no cooking stove. When it was very cold, then father brought the iron wash-pot into the house and made a fire inside (of) it so that we

could warm ourselves. The house was of course usually full of smoke but it was still a little warm; and the smoke could of course go through the roof to the outside because we had of course no ceiling in the house. Christmas went by, but without a Christmas tree; we children had none. In Germany we had every Christmas a Christmas tree.

So, the year 1870 came and we had to farm and the land had to be plowed. And so a team of oxen had to be bought. One day my father and grandfather and I went out to buy the oxen. We heard that a certain (Mr.) Nowack had several oxen for sale. So we went there (and) my father had soon closed the deal with the man for a team of oxen. What the price was I do not know anymore. I am a little forgetful when I am writing all this; I am 77 years old. But what (little) did we know about American Longhorn steers (oxen) (!). I believe these had never had a yoke around the neck. They were so wild that we all three had our hands full to drive the oxen towards home. Now the farming was supposed to start. A 10-inch hand plow was bought (a mold board type plow with a 10-inch bottom). The tree (handles) on the plow was (made) out of wood and the mold board (blade) and the tip were (made) out of cast iron. When everything was set, the oxen were supposed to be hitched up (to it) but, oh woe! --the critters were so wild that it took every time three men to plow. One held the plow and one had to hold the yoke and the third went in front with a stick. And still sometimes they ran away with the whole crew, but later on the oxen became very tame. The milk cows with calves were also bought both for

\$15. So, (in this manner) cotton and corn was planted. We harvested six bales of cotton.

The first year in Texas we had saved \$100, so my father decided to buy a farm on Raps creek, not far from the town Warda now. I believe it was 160 acres and (he) paid down \$100; that was in the year 1871. Then we moved onto the place. The place was very well equipped (and furnished); a very good house was on it. The cropland was very fertile; it was so-called bottom land, but when we had high water it became flooded. That year we had on the place a very good crop. (The) corn turned out very good and was also good in the price: one dollar per bushel. But we could not harvest much of it because everybody in the family was sick. So, other people's straying pigs had eaten most of the corn because at that time very many pigs did run around out there. The cotton crop was also very good, but with the cotton it was just like with the corn; the stock had ruined everything. At that time all of the post oak (forest) was full of stock which would invade the fields at night and ruined the entire crop except we could get one bale. The price for the cotton was 14¢ per pound. Field hands were not available and our entire family was sick; we could not work. Since my grandfather, who was my father's father, was very sick, he died in that (same) year and was buried in Kilian's community at Serbin; since we thought that this place was very unhealthy, we left this place and moved 10 miles to the north from Giddings and rented ourselves a place from a man, Andreas Melde. That was 1872 and (we) lived there one year. That year my father was very sick again; we all thought he could

not get better again and would die. But the dear Lord kept him alive for us. Since we did not quite like the place and it was very far to the church, and we children had to have also some schooling--none of us had been to school since we left Germany--everything was loaded up again and we headed out again. That was in the year 1873. From there we moved to Fedor. There was a church and a school. A place not far from the church was rented from a man with the name of Andreas Pulnick. That year we had a fairly good harvest, but my mother did not like this area. She was homesick for Serbin. But she never went back (there); she died here at Fedor. Now we six children had no mother anymore. That was by far the worst (that could have happened) for us children. The only good thing was that my grandmother was still alive. She was a very pious mother; she raised us children and taught us much about God's word. My mother was buried then here by Fedor in the community-churchyard.

Since several Lutherans from the Missouri Synod had decided to build a new church between Serbin and Warda, the name of the church was die Kreuzgemeinde (or in English: the Cross community). This church was later moved to Warda. Since my father's uncle, Carl Teinart, was one of the men who helped build the church, he came to Fedor to my father and suggested to my father they had to have somebody who was not supposed to live far from the church so that the pastor would have a close neighbor, so my father decided to move there with us children. So, a piece of land not far from the new church was leased for five years and made into cropland. It belonged to a widow whose name

was Kubitz. She did build us a house on it. And so we began to make fence posts and fence in the land and turned it into cropland. Our house stood about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile away from the new Kreutz Kirche (Cross Church). Since this newly founded community could not receive a pastor from the Missouri Synod, the members of the community decided to invite a pastor from the Texas Synod. It did not take long either and the parish received a young and single pastor with the name of Zapf. For a short (time) he served the community with God's word and sacrament. He also conducted school but the dear Lord had other plans for him; he was not destined (to remain) pastor of this community. When he one day in the summer after school made a trip to the city of Giddings, he became ill in a few days and never did recover from it. He died and was buried as the first person in the new churchyard. Since he had not yet been married and (since) he had a fiance in Germany, his bride was notified immediately about his death. Now since the pastor had died, the community decided to invite again a pastor. But it was decided first to construct a house for the pastor. When the house was finished another invitation was sent out. The people turned again to the Missouri Synod and got a young pastor whose name was Timotius Stiemke. The community had made a good choice when they received this man. Faithfully he administered his office. He had to conduct school five days per week and on Sundays after the service he had to hold Christian-Lehre (Christian instruction class). He also practiced mission in Winchester (and) Swiss Alp. He worked several years in the Kreutz-community with blessings when he after a few years accepted an invitation to

Houston. So the community invited Pastor Buchschaucher. He served the community until his death.

Since my father had married again, a widow with the name Prachwitz, and our five-year lease had expired, my father decided to leave Lee County and to move farther north into Williamson County. That was in the year 1878. One day father saddled his horse in order to ride to Williamson county and find a rent place for us. When he on the same day arrived 9 miles to the south of Taylor at a Peter Zisching ('s place) to spend the night, Mr. Zisching asked my father where he was heading, and my father said he was looking for a rent place; (then) Mr. Zisching said he had a place that he would rent to him. Since they both came to terms my father accepted the place. When he came back everything was prepared for moving there to Williamson County, 8 miles south of Taylor. The moving was at that time not so easy. Two wagons were prepared. In front of one, two oxen were hitched, the other with horses. The one wagon was loaded with various junk and the other load consisted of chicken and pigs. In this fashion the trip began. But on the first day we did not get far, about five miles north of Giddings. Since it already started to get dark, we all stopped, unhitched (and prepared) to spend the night there. Since it already started to get cold during the night, we (only) stayed until 4 o'clock in the morning. So, we hitched up again and so the trip went on again. But it was no pleasure to ride; it became colder all the time and the oxen refused to go on. It started to snow. So we (only) made it the second day to the Williamson County line. It became evening, so we spent the night there. Since

it was very cold and everything was covered by snow, we made a big fire and there was plenty of wood everywhere in the post oak (forest). So we were able to protect ourselves from the cold. On the next morning again we hitched up (the teams) and we continued. On the afternoon of that day, we arrived at Mr. Zisching ('s place). But it was very cold. So everything was unloaded and we rested for a day. Then we went back with one wagon to pick up more things. Since we had received help, the next time, four wagons were loaded and that time we made the trip in one day. Since it made my (passage not translated) We started the next day but we did not get very far to Mr. Melde at the Jeva. There we spent the night. On the next morning we went on driving (the stock) and so we arrived on the same day in the evening. It was not easy to drive the stock through the post oak since at that time not many roads were there. But we made it alright. That was in the year 1873.

Right after we had finished moving we made preparations to plow the land. Even though we all had worked hard all year, nothing wanted to grow because it was very dry. We only had about one good rain all spring. So the harvest was very small: 3 bales of cotton and 25 bushels of corn in all. I was sent again to Winchester to pick cotton there. I found work there with Ferdinand Betke. So I spent the entire fall there. When I was down there my sister Terese became ill. She was married to August Mischke. When she did not get well again she died and was buried in Serbín at pastor Kilian's parish. Since I was finished again with picking cotton down there, I went home again to the parents. Since all of us did not quite like the area at Taylor and also no Germans were living here--only two families--my father said maybe we wanted

to move somewhere where more Germans were. At that time, there was not much hope that ever many Germans would come here, when one day a man visited us with the name Wilkenik from Burton, Washington County, Texas. There my father said to him: "Where do you come from?" Then he said he came from Georgetown, (where) he had visited his relatives. He said there were quite many Germans living there about 8 miles east of Georgetown. Then my father said he wanted to have a look at this country (area), maybe we would also move there. Then Mr. Wilkenik said he could point out right away a place that was for rent. A man with the name Homyer wanted to build a house and turn land into cropland. He could probably get the place. Mr. Homyer lived in Washington county not far from Burton. He said when he returned home he would tell Mr. Homyer about it, that we might probably rent the place. So my father went there right away and had a look at the place and wrote immediately to Homyer. He then let him have the place. So we made preparations to move there. I and my brother Gustav went there right away to plow up the land. The place bordered on the town that is called today Walburg. My father and (step-) mother, they came later and joined us. Then the living house was finished. That was in the year 1879. The first crop was not very good because the land that we farmed was all new land. Since there were no churches there, my father arranged to have services in our home, and a person was confirmed in our home. Her name was Henrietta Westermann.

The family lived at Walburg several years before they finally had a pastor. The new pastor's name was Kaspar. In 1880 a new church was organized at Walburg.

NOTE: Ernst Benjamin Schneider married Henrietta Westermann, and they had nine children in 62 years of marriage: Betty (married Andres), Oscar, Selma (married Jentho), Frieda (married Beckman), Alfred, Ernest, Herbert, Teresa, and Walter. Ernst Benjamin Schneider died January 12, 1945 at Copperas Cove, Texas, at the age of 82. Henrietta Schneider also died in 1945 at Copperas Cove, and they are buried in the church cemetery at Walburg, Texas.