

Nothing to Fear

The Story of Seventh-day Adventism in the
Dakotas

By
Bob Dupey

HASTENING THE COMING OF THE LORD

Heinrich Loeb sack, the first Russian citizen ever to be ordained a Seventh-day Adventist minister read the telegram with an amazement bordering on disbelief. General Conference Foreign Mission Secretary W.A. Spicer, took the telegram from Loeb sack's extended hand and read, "Over a hundred keeping the Sabbath. Eighty ready for baptism. Send a minister."

The remarkable communication had been sent by Theophil A. Babienco from a place called Herusy, beyond the Caucasus Mountains at the end of the stage coach route near Mount Ararat, where Babienco had been exiled a few years earlier for teaching the Seventh-day Adventist message to his fellow Russians.¹

It was not the first time that an exile had been transformed into a missionary journey by the irrepressible Babienco.

Almost twenty years earlier his interest in the Bible had been aroused while assisting in the service of the Orthodox Church by reading the Psalms. Obtaining permission to take the Bible home, Babienco gathered his neighbors together and read to them. Through these readings he concluded that many doctrines believed and taught by his church were not scriptural.

When he told the priest about his discoveries, he was warned that he was in danger of deranging his mind through too much reading of the Bible, and was asked to return his borrowed copy.

Later at Kiev, he bought a copy of his own. Several others obtained Bibles and began to share Babienco's views.

In 1877 Babienco and a number of followers left the Orthodox Church and organized themselves as "a community of brethren, believers of the Bible" in Tarashcha. The views of the "brethren" soon spread to other towns and villages in the Ukraine.

About 1883 Babienco traveled to Kiev to obtain permission from the governor to build a church for the believers in Tarashcha. Babienco did not return; he was arrested and exiled to Stavropol, in the northern Caucasus.

While in exile he secured a Bible and after two years of study, according to his son's account, began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath and to expect the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, although he as yet had no knowledge of Seventh-day Adventists. Babienco wrote to the "brethren" in Tarashcha, and as a result some of them were led to share his new faith.

While Babienco was at Stavropol, his German Baptist employer was visited by Conrad Laubham, a German from Lehigh, Kansas, who had returned in the spring of 1886 to Tscherbakovka, on the Volga, to bring the Seventh-day Adventist message to his relatives and friends.

From Laubham, Babienco learned of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Five of his local followers were baptized in 1887 and eight more in 1888. The first Russian Seventh-day Adventist group in the Soviet Union was established in Stavropol (and organized in 1890 with Babienco as elder). Soon there were also groups in Michailovka and Palageyevka, both some distance away.

Back in Babienco's Ukrainian homeland a Jew named Koblanov had some years previously become convinced from reading the Scriptures that the Messiah had already come, and that Jesus was the Messiah.

Desiring to be an evangelical Christian, he traveled in the dead of winter to a Lutheran church in Kharkov, some 330 miles away; here he was told that since he could not speak German he could not be legally accepted into membership.

Obtaining a German New Testament, Koblanov learned German from the school children and was taken into the Lutheran church in Kharkov in 1858. However, he felt uneasy about Sunday observance.

In 1873, he and his wife, convinced that the Bible taught baptism by immersion, were baptized by the Baptists. Koblanov became active in lay missionary work. Later, one of his converts emigrated to America, became a Seventh-day Adventist, and began to send Adventist publications back to Koblanov.

Reading them, he and his wife became convinced that they should take one more step. Soon they met other Baptist families who had begun

keeping the seventh-day Sabbath -- each group thinking that they were the only ones doing so in the vicinity.

In 1887 Laubham visited these converts and organized the first church of which we have record in the Ukraine, consisting of seventeen members. By 1890 there were 30 Seventh-day Adventists in that area with Koblanov serving as elder.²

In the meantime, the work among the German-Russians was growing rapidly through the labors of ministers and of laymen returning to the area from America to evangelize their homeland.

In November, 1890, the first general meeting of Seventh-day Adventists was held at Eigenheim in the Caucasus, attended by more than 100 of the 356 members then recorded in Russia.

Among those attending were a number of Russian Adventists from the Stavropol area who came with Babienco, their leader, and his sister. The group was happy to see them, yet apprehensive at having native Russians in the Protestant meeting (it was illegal to proselytize Russians). At this meeting Babienco became the first Russian Seventh-day Adventist to be ordained a church elder.

Soon after the meeting Babienco secretly visited the "brethren" in Tarashcha. Finding seven persons ready for church membership, he organized them into a church. At another place he found eight people "rejoicing in the truth." One of them, a bank clerk who had a good education in Russian and Polish, soon helped in the preparation of tracts in Polish.

Less than a year after his ordination, because of his evangelistic work among the Russians, Babienco and seven members of his church at Stavropol were sentenced to exile at Herusy, the terminus of the 200 mile stage coach route.

Persecution only served to multiply the work. The German members who had met with the Russians were sent under arrest to their home colonies on the Volga where they continued to do missionary work.

Babienco's sister continued the work in Stavropol until she was also exiled. But the church remained strong and leaders were developed who carried the gospel to other places.

Babienco himself, enroute to Herusy, talked to the Russian Protestant coachmen; soon an interest was kindled and within three years, more than 200 persons in that area began to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

Babienco was threatened with another exile, even farther from Russian centers, but the amnesty proclaimed on the accession of Czar Nicholas II prevented this. Nevertheless, his five year term was increased by another eight years. Separation from his family and continued harassment by the political administration turned his mind to emigration. With the help of English Protestants he went to Romania in 1896, where his family joined him.

In 1903 the family emigrated to Canada, and settled on a farm in Saskatchewan.

Sharing his father's evangelistic fervor, Babienco's son, Theophil T., became a Seventh-day Adventist minister and began to preach among the large numbers of Russians then immigrating to the United States and Canada.³

In the meantime, Juda A. Litwinenco, a Ukranian farmer who had settled at Herried (Campbell County), South Dakota, had become a Seventh-day Adventist about the turn of the century. Acquainted with the large Russian Stundist settlements in the McLean-McHenry-Ward county area of North Dakota, Litwinenco desired to share his new-found faith with his fellow countrymen.⁴

In the summer of 1906, Babienco and Litwinenco worked together among the Russians south of Balfour in McHenry County, holding evangelistic meetings and giving Bible studies resulting in the organization of a church of 28 members, the first Russian Adventist church in North America.⁵

The initial interest among the Russians in the area can possibly be traced to a tract on the Sabbath question that was sent from Hamburg, Germany to a Fred Postovit, who lived eight miles northeast of Dogden (later called Butte, in McLean County on the McHenry County border) in the approximate area of the soon-to-be-established Balfour church.

Impressed by the content of the tract, Postovit shared it with two lay leaders of the Baptist Church, John Oleineick and Alex Sitch, who likewise came to believe its message to be true.⁶ Perhaps, it was these men who invited Babienco and Litwinenco to North Dakota in 1906. In addition it appears that there were already some Seventh-day Adventists living in the area at this time, since only 21 of the 28 charter members

are attributed to the work of Babienco and Litwinenco. ⁷ The recollections of a later Russian worker who was a native of this area, J.C. Michalenko of Napa, California, indicate that the first Seventh-day Adventist in the area and later the first local elder of the Balfour church, was Aniskey Sepchenko, who joined the Adventist Church before 1906, and that the first contact the Russians had with Adventism was through Russian-speaking laymen, German farmers from McClusky (possibly including Carl Schwartz) and Denhoff.⁸

In any event, English-speaking Conference President John Walker, knew little of the entire matter until he visited with Litwinenco on his farm at Herried in Mid-August.

“I was pleased to learn something about these people and of the condition of the church,” reported Walker, “We are glad to see the truth taking hold of people of different tongues. It will hasten the coming of the Lord.”⁹ Maybe, looking at his polyglot constituency, Walker was reflecting the thoughts of *Review and Herald* editor Uriah Smith, when he editorialized in 1859 that “perhaps” the church's commission to prophesy to every nation, kindred, tongue and people could be fulfilled without leaving North America!” ¹⁰

Babienco visited the June 24-July1, 1907 camp meeting at Velva, speaking to and translating for the fifty Russians in attendance, some of whom were Baptists interested in learning more of the Adventist message.

Work among the Russians apparently continued during 1907, and the membership of the Balfour church more than doubled to 57 members by October of 1907.¹²

These events were apparently the beginning of a great awakening among the Russians during which almost two hundred people began observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, swelling the ranks of the Balfour church and leading to the organization of the Dogden Russian church, probably early in 1908.¹³

Deprived of ministerial help in their own (and only) tongue, with virtually no Adventist literature in Russian and a high rate of illiteracy due to limited educational opportunities in Russia (where they had often suffered persecution for their religious convictions), the new believers were often easy prey for unscrupulous leaders who arose and divided the churches into factions.¹⁴

External forces may have also played a role in the difficulties of these first two Russian churches. A group known as the Malenkie Subotniki (little Sabbath-keepers) differing from Seventh-day Adventists on the matters of tithing and spiritual gifts apparently troubled the new believers, seeking to draw away a following. As a result of these interacting forces, the Balfour and Dogden churches by 1909 had separated themselves from the body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and partially organized themselves independently.¹⁵

Across the language barrier stepped German minister, George Wagner. With McClusky layman, Carl Schwartz acting as interpreter, Wagner worked among those who had remained loyal to the Adventist church from the two congregations and succeeded in reorganizing both of them in early 1909.¹⁶

Immediately, the congregation at Dogden launched a project to build the first church structure among the Russian Adventists in North Dakota. The church was apparently occupied by the close of the year.¹⁷

Late in 1908, A.E. Christian was sent to the Williston area (Williams County) to locate and organize the few scattered believers in the area. To his surprise and by a remarkable coincidence he discovered a group of Russian Sabbath-keepers northwest of Williston near Squires.

While in a local store, Christian heard some local residents talking about a group of people living out in the country who insisted on using “cottolene” (a vegetable shortening consisting of cottonseed oil), instead of lard. Later, noticing a man coming out of the store with a pail of cottolene, Christian talked to him, “found him to be a brother”, and made arrangements to meet with the group over the weekend.

“There were about thirty persons present at our Sabbath meeting,” explained Christian. “After they had carried on the meeting for about two hours, they asked me to speak. When I sat down the interpreter was requested to ask me to what church I belonged. I said, ‘I am a Seventh-day Adventist.’ ‘Yes,’ the interpreter said, ‘We know that; but to which of the Seventh-day Adventists? Do you belong to the same church as Mrs. E.G. White and L.R. Conradi?’ I told them I did . . . We spent three days and nights together in Bible study.”

One member of this Russian group had been a member of an Adventist Church in Russia, the rest had been members of the Orthodox Church until this one began to teach them Adventist doctrine.

With help from George Wagner and Carl Schwartz, Christian organized a church of fourteen from among the members of this Russian colony, early in 1909.

The center of population of this church apparently continued to move west until about half of the congregation lived across the state line in Montana. The church building by 1923 was located just two miles from the Montana border.¹⁸

With three Russian churches now in the fold, the conference administration, having learned a difficult lesson from the experience of Balfour and Dogden, began looking the same year for a minister to work exclusively for the Russians.¹⁹

Unable to secure such help immediately, Conference President Kunkle sent German minister Carl Leer to visit the Russian groups periodically. Leer reported that the people were so interested that they would listen to one sermon, take a few minutes intermission, "then sit up with their faces toward the visiting ministers ready for another lesson."²⁰

In early summer of 1909, Elder F.G. Specht, the head of Sheyenne River Academy's German Department organized a Russian company of sixteen members at Benedict in McLean County. According to one account, the interest in Benedict had been stimulated by a debate between Babienco and a Baptist minister named Nizdoly, specially imported for the purpose of silencing the emerging Seventh-day Adventist movement in the area. Babienco's success in the debate with Nizdoly apparently made a deep impression on the Russian colony.²¹ About a year later, J.A. Litwinenco, George Wagner, and S.G. Burley worked in the Benedict area, where the company had grown to 29; soon an additional 21 members were ready to be added to the group. On July 24, 1910, the Benedict church was organized with a membership of 50. In 1912 the name of the church was changed to Max.²²

After the church organization the ordinances of humility (foot washing) and Lord's Supper were celebrated by the new church, followed by a "praise meeting" which lasted more than eight hours: "All responded by rising to their feet at once and testifying of the rich blessings and joy this message has brought to their hearts and homes ... The Spirit of God began to move upon hearts and a revival service began. The dawn of the morning was seen as we went to bed."²³

The almost intemperate love of the Russians for public worship has become legendary. Their all-day Sabbath schedule was quite similar to that of the Germans, described in an earlier chapter. Evening meetings

could easily run all or most of the night. The author has sat on a pew from one of those early Russian churches and marveled at the spiritual fervor of the people, not to mention their physical endurance.

A unique feature of the worship of the Russians was the singing of psalms and hymns. A carry-over from their days in the Orthodox Church, the melodious singing of the words of Scripture was a deeply moving experience for the people and would often go on for hours at a time.

Leaving Benedict the workers then went on to Dogden where T.T. Babienco had made several recent visits, resulting in substantial growth and considerable interest in the community.²⁴ On this visit, seven families of Dogden members living about "eight miles from the church" were organized into a Sabbath School. It is possible that this group was eventually organized as the second church at Dogden, later named Butte. The two churches separated in July, 1911 and were named Dogden No. 1 and Dogden No. 2, probably located respectively, eight miles south of Dogden and two miles west of the village where concentrations of the members lived. Dogden No. 1, was renamed Butte (sometimes called Dogden Butte, and later Butte Country) in 1912, the other church retained the name Dogden until changed to Butte Village some years later in 1926. The present Butte church is the result of a later merger of these two churches.²⁵

During their 1910 visit to Dogden, the workers discussed organizing a church at Kief (McHenry County), where a substantial number of members lived. Although not done at this time, the organization apparently took place within a few months at Most.²⁶

Virtually all later records cite Kief as the first Russian church in North Dakota and in North America, leading to the speculation that these people who became the core of the Kief church in 1910 may have been remnants of the church organized "South of Balfour" in 1906. (Balfour is six miles due north of Kief).

It is possible that (as J.C. Michaelenko suggests) the Balfour church was simply renamed Kief, the town of Kief having been founded subsequent to the organization of the original Balfour church - the use of the term organize here being less strict than its narrower, legal meaning - or that the two groups "gathered out" by Wagner early in 1909 became effectively one congregation until this later, official reorganization occurred. The Kief church was admitted to the North Dakota Conference at its eighth annual conference session on June 26, 1911.²⁷

Also, during the summer of 1910, Burley and Litwinenco visited Greatstone Township, South of Benedict (McLean County). There was not a single Adventist believer there when they arrived, but in a short time they organized a company of seventeen. About a year later they returned and organized the Greatstone church with a charter membership of 20, on July 12, 1911. In 1940 the church was renamed Benedict, but had no church home of its own from 1911 to 1945, when the Turtle Lake Methodist Church was purchased and moved into the country. In 1963-64 a new church was built in town and the church took its present name, Turtle Lake.²⁸

The long awaited ministerial help, Burley and Litwinenco, (apparently Litwinenco retained his South Dakota farm and did not work full time in North Dakota) having finally arrived, the Russian people, seeing their numbers growing ever larger, turned their attention to an area which they had learned by hard experience was one of desperate need.

At a general meeting of the Russian churches at Dogden, October 27-31, 1910, a major topic of discussion was the need for a school for the Russian youth. The Russians had learned the bitter lesson that education, or the lack of it, could be a decisive factor in discerning truth from error, and they were determined to give their children the chance they had been denied.

It was decided that the best way to provide for the education of the Russian youth was to establish a Russian Department at Sheyenne River Academy, the first such department in an Adventist educational institution. Chosen to head up the new department was the energetic young evangelist Sergius P. Burley.²⁹

Burley was born in Boguslav, in the Russian Ukraine. In his youth he served as an altar boy, planning to become a priest. Searching the Bible for himself led him to join the Baptist Church, and eventually, in 1903, to become a Seventh-day Adventist. Because of persecution from his relatives and friends he emigrated to Canada and attended Portage Plains Academy in Manitoba and later Union College.³⁰

The decision to add another language department could scarcely have come at a less convenient time. A severe drought had raised serious questions in many minds whether there would even be school at the academy that year. Determined to go ahead, the school board had instituted belt-tightening measures including the elimination of the business manager and farm manager as well as all hired hands, turning these responsibilities over to the students.³¹

And the Russians seemed the least likely to be able to send students to Sheyenne River Academy. Not only had the drought been so severe that the farmers hadn't even gotten their seed back that year, but the year before a devastating hail storm had wiped out their 1909 crop also.³²

Education, however, was more precious than gold to the Russians, and twenty-seven students enrolled in the inaugural year of the Russian Department, giving the academy the largest enrollment in its history to that time, 83 students. Apparently some Russian students had to be turned away for lack of room.³³

The second year of the Russian Department the enrollment was down to seventeen, due to a third year of almost total crop failure, but that year also witnessed the first graduating class in the history of Sheyenne River Academy, consisting of a single student, Miss Regina Litwinenco, the daughter of the Russian minister, J.A. Litwinenco. During her final year at Sheyenne River Academy, Miss Litwinenco also served as the Sabbath School secretary of the North Dakota Conference.³⁴ In later years, the department rallied and grew to forty students in 1916.³⁵

The Russian Department of Sheyenne River Academy continued under Burley's direction through the 1917-1918 school year, and through 1940 under the direction of Alex Yakavenko (1918-1919). N.J. Michalenko (1919-1922), S.M. Harkov (1922-1923), J.N. Nahorney (1923-1928) and J.C. Michalenko (1928-1940).

As North Dakotans became more "Americanized" there was less need for a unique Russian Department. Over the years of its existence it declined from a peak during the Burley years where a full curriculum (including the last two years of elementary school) in which math, history, literature, Bible, language, music, vocational courses, and even English was taught in Russian, to language and Bible classes only (the two Bible classes taught in alternate years) in the mid 1920's, to the point (about 1934) where even these courses would only be offered if there was sufficient demand. Finally, in 1936, only two Russian language courses were offered under the Modern Language Department. When J.C. Michalenko left North Dakota in 1940, the Russian Department ceased altogether.³⁶ In the meantime two other Russian schools had been established at Battleford Academy, Saskatchewan, Canada, and at Broadview College and Theological Seminary at La Grange, Illinois, but were subsequently closed leaving Sheyenne River Academy as the North American Division's only Russian training school for many years. A number of graduates from the Russian Department over the years were called to labor as ministers, teachers, literature evangelists, and publishing house workers for their fellow countrymen.³⁷

Partially as an outgrowth of the Russians' thirst for education, an evangelistic approach was developed about 1917 and continued through the 1920's, that has, in only slightly different form become an effective evangelistic tool of the Adventist Church in the Far East and elsewhere. Throughout the Russian settlements, brief summer schools were conducted, usually by students of Sheyenne River Academy's Russian Department, in which were taught Bible and the basics of reading and writing the Russian language.

The summer schools were also a haven for the children of Russian Adventists who had often suffered ridicule from other children at public schools, who would mock them for their Sabbath-keeping and try to force them to eat pieces of ham. Here they learned Bible stories from Christian teachers who taught them in their native tongue.

In 1924, Conference President Henry Meyer credited the Russian summer schools with a major role in the conversion and baptism of about thirty-five Russian young people.³⁸

During summer vacations and weekends, S.G. Burley worked with J.A. Litwinenco, visiting and strengthening the existing churches and doing evangelistic work in new areas. In the summer of 1911 they traveled west of the Missouri to work among the members of a Russian settlement, probably at Fayette, (Dunn County) where a Russian Sabbath School was established by the end of the year.³⁹

With good pastoral care from both Russian and German ministers the six Russian churches (Dogden, Williston, Max, Butte, Kief, and Greatstone) became strong and stable, and increased steadily in numbers year by year.⁴⁰

Recognizing the growing impact of the Russian work, the conference purchased a new tent in 1911 to be used as the Russian assembly tent at camp meetings.⁴¹

At the 1913 camp meeting at Bismarck, Litwinenco and Burley were ordained to the gospel ministry.⁴²

During the next year, further work was done at Fayette, and Burley began to work at Makoti, (southwestern Ward County) when he received an urgent call to come to Yale, Virginia.⁴³

A year earlier, according to Louis Halswick's account, two Adventist families had moved from North Dakota to Yale, (M.S. Krietzky recollects

that they were the John Oleinicks and the Mina Panasuks) to bring the Adventist message to this new Russian Baptist settlement. Together with the Delenko family who had already begun Sabbath-keeping, these families organized a small church of eight members that met in the Delenko home.

The new church requested the services of S.G. Burley to hold an evangelistic series in a tent pitched in an oak grove. At first only a few attended, but soon the interest grew until the whole Baptist church membership was attending every night.

When unique Adventist doctrines were presented, many were convinced that they were true. At a Sunday service at the Baptist church the entire congregation decided to accept the teachings and to go to the tent that night to make their decision known. When Burley asked, at the close of his sermon how many would plan to unite with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the whole congregation stood up.⁴⁴

The ownership of the church building was transferred and the church became a Seventh-day Adventist church. Since there were a large number of children in the church, a school was established and in 1916, the first North Dakotan to graduate from the Russian Department at Sheyenne River Academy, M.S. Kreitzky, was called to be its teacher.⁴⁵

The work at Makoti, which had been interrupted by Burley's visit to Yale, was continued by his assistant in the Russian Department, N.J. Michalenko, and by S.M. Harkov in 1915, with help at the start from Burley. The outcome of these evangelistic meetings is not known but by the following year we have a reference to a "little group" organized by Burley at Makoti, consisting of former members of the Max church.

Occasionally Makoti is referred to as a church in the records of the time, but the weight of evidence seems to suggest that it was only a company at best, perhaps, only a Sabbath School.⁴⁶

Burley's evangelistic style was anything but low key. During an effort at Max in 1916, he scheduled three meetings daily, at two, four and eight p.m. When conference president, S.E. Jackson, suggested that the evangelists were "perhaps overfeeding their congregation," Burley assured him that "the Russian brethren are not like the American brethren." Noted Jackson, "This may be so and yet it was a little difficult to convince the writer."⁴⁷

In response to the phenomenal growth of the Russian work in North Dakota, the International Branch of the Pacific Press Publishing

Association in College View, Nebraska, (moved to Brookfield, Illinois in 1916 after it was destroyed by fire) published the first issue of the Russian language version of the *Review and Herald*, late in 1915.

Burley, in his spare time from evangelism and teaching did editorial work for the new publication. A North Dakotan, Alex Yakavenko, a graduate of the Russian Department at Sheyenne River Academy worked at Brookfield in 1917 setting type and taking care of correspondence and other editorial work.⁴⁸

Although evangelistic work was done at Bergen (McHenry County), apparently at Ruso (McLean County) and north of Belfield (Stark County),⁴⁹ the next Russian speaking church to be established in North Dakota was in Dunn County, twenty miles west of Killdeer.

During the winter of 1917-1918, Nicetas J. Michalenko and his bride moved to Killdeer, the end of the Northern Pacific Railroad spur line into Dunn County. Michalenko did personal evangelistic work from home to home among the Ukrainian farmers between Killdeer and Grassy Butte, some twenty-five miles west (in McKenzie County).

The dominant religions in the settlement were Baptist and a branch of the Dogden group, the *Malenkie Subotniki*: Michalenko found interested persons in both groups, including the pastor of the Baptist church, Steve Sabarowsky.

After a visit by conference president, S.E. Jackson, who apparently spoke in the Baptist church, Sabarowsky and his congregation had a special prayer service, "thanking God for the truth that was preached to them."

By spring, Michalenko had several people ready for baptism but when he returned from camp meeting he learned that the *Malenkie Subotniki* had discouraged about half of his potential converts from joining the Adventist church. Heart broken, Michalenko attended the baptism and watched the almost-fruits of his labors as they were baptized by the *Malenkie Subotniki*.

Resuming his work, Michalenko, with Mina Panasuk and with his brother-in-law, J.C. Michalenko, (who had been working in this area as a literature evangelist), pitched a tent in Sabarowsky's pasture, 15 miles southwest of Killdeer and began meetings. On August 3, 1918, eighteen people including Sabarowsky and his oldest daughter, Mary, were baptized and organized into a company. Two weeks later, the Killdeer Russian church was organized with about twenty-one members.

Sabarowsky's wife and other children remained members of the Baptist church and he was forbidden to speak in his former church. Perhaps these pressures were some of the problems that caused Sabarowsky later to deny his new faith and leave its membership.

This left the Killdeer church without a local elder and by the time J.C. Michalenko arrived as pastor of the church about 1923, the church was in desperate need of direction. Michalenko reorganized the church with Mike Tkachenko as elder. Tkachenko donated two acres of land for a church building and worked with Michalenko to gather the funds necessary to build. The new church was built in the summer of 1926 by members of the Killdeer church.⁵⁰ This church was renamed Grassy Butte, when another church, consisting largely of Russians, was established in 1943, in the town of Killdeer.

In July of 1942, M.F. Grau and Paul Kemper held a series of meetings in the vacant Congregational church in Killdeer. Two persons were baptized during this series; they and other Seventh-day Adventist families, members of the Killdeer Russian church, living in the area continued to hold Sabbath services in the building which they purchased from the Congregationalists late in 1943.

In the summer of 1943, Elder Grau again held meetings in Killdeer, assisted by B.J. Liebelt. On November 13, six new converts and the existing members were organized into a new church with seventeen charter members. One of the charter members of the church was a hired hand on Steven Alexenko's farm. At first he studied the Sabbath school lesson with his employers, then began to read the books in the case close to his bed. After attending Grau's second series, Morton Juberg became a charter member of the Killdeer church. Later Juberg became a Seventh Day Adventist minister and is, at this writing, Director of Communication for the North Pacific Union Conference.⁵¹

Unlike the Germans, the Russians never became as dominant a nationality in North Dakota, but throughout the years, they have maintained a cohesiveness that goes beyond even their ethnic ties. Their bonds to one another are even more spiritual than national, they are the bonds of suffering, the bonds of a faith dearer than life itself. These spiritual bonds were manifested in a series of independent Russian camp meetings spanning more than two decades from the 1930's till the early 1950's.⁵²

These bonds are still evident today, a living memorial to one of the most colorful chapters in the history of the North Dakota Conference.

References

Chapter 9, Hastening the Coming of the Lord

1. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 30, 1942, 10.
2. The nationality of these church members is not known, but it seems likely that both Germans and native Ukrainians were represented.
3. "Theophil A. Babienco"; "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, op cit., 94, 1347-1351.
4. Louis Martin Halswick, *op. cit.*, 91.
5. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 28, 1906, 2, 3. Halswick, (*op. cit.*, 92) says that a Russian church was organized at Beaver Creek, Saskatchewan in 1905. In the *Review and Herald* of November 20, 1941, 20, however, T.T. Babienco, who worked at Beaver Creek about 1919, reporting on the dedication of the new church in Beaver Creek, says that the church was "organized in 1916." Numerous factual errors in Halswick's work suggest that it was prepared on the basis of recollections of individuals rather than documentary evidence.
6. This account is based on the recollections of M.S. Krietzky of Munsing, Michigan, who was raised in the Russian settlement in the area, and who worked among the Russians in North Dakota and elsewhere for many years. Krietzky considers this account the origin of the Dogden church, the earliest one he remembers. The location of the Postovit farm, plus the mention of Alex Sitch (misspelled Stich) in the minutes of the 1907 conference session (*North Dakota Conference Session Record Book*, op. cit., I, 79) as a delegate from Balfour, however, tends to place its application to an earlier event. A study of the subsequent history of Balfour and Dogden illustrates how the mistake may have come about.
7. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 7, 1906, 8.
8. Letters from J.C. Michalenko of Napa, California, May 10, 1976, June 4, 1978.
9. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 28, 1906, 2, 3.
10. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 3, 1859, 87.
11. *Northern Union Reaper*, July 16, 1907, 4, 5.
12. *Ibid.*, October 15, 1907, 6.
13. *Ibid.*, October 5, 1909, 3. A delegate from Dogden first appears in the minutes of the conference session in December of 1908 (*North Dakota Conference Session Record Book*, op. cit., I, 87), but there is no record of its acceptance into the sisterhood of churches.
14. *Northern Union Reaper*, loc cit.
15. *Ibid.*, February 23, 1909, 4. Recollections of the *Malenki Subotniki* are those of older members of the Max and Butte churches.
16. *Northern Union Reaper*, October 5, 1909,3.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, January 12, 1909, 4, 5; February 16, 1909, 5; February 23, 1909, 4; January 16, 1923, 3.
19. *Ibid.*, October 5, 1909, 3.
20. *Ibid.*, March 8, 1910, 8.
21. Based on an account by early Max member, Sam Scheresky.
22. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 16, 1910, 4; July 2, 1912, 5.
23. *Ibid.*, August 16, 1910, 4

24. *Ibid.*, June 21, 1910, 4, 5.
25. *Ibid.*, August 1, 1911, 3. The original Dogden church building was located about nine miles south of the village (*Northern Union Reaper*, October 5, 1909, 3; Butte church history, prepared March 8, 1976 by Butte pastor Charles Hinckley) where the abandoned building still stands. The new church was organized as Dogden No.2 and admitted to the conference on June 18, 1912. *North Dakota Conference Session Record Book, op. cit.*, I, 149). Therefore, the original church south of town must have been Dogden No. I. Its name was changed to Butte in 1912 (*Northern Union Reaper* July 2, 1912, 5.) It apparently became known as Dogden Butte (possibly because of it's location near the Dog Den Buttes) and later as Butte Country, or simply Butte. In the meantime, Dogden No. 2, located near the village, became simply Dogden and later in 1926. Butte Village. (J.C Michalenko letters, *op. cit.*) The two churches apparently merged in 1940 to form the present Butte church located in town. Butte church history, *op. cit.*)
26. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 16, 1910, 4. We have a reference to the Kief church just a few months later in the *Northern Union Reaper*, May 23, 1911, 5.
27. *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 4, 1917, 17; "North Dakota Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, op. cit.*, 879, 880; Halswick *op. cit.*, 91; J.C. Michalenko letters, *op. cit.*, *North Dakota Conference Session Record Book, (op. cit.*, I, 145. At the 1906 session, Balfour is represented; at the 1907 session; no Russian delegates are recorded; at the 1908 session, (December , 1908) Balfour and Dogden are represented, at the 1910 Session (June, 1910) it is Dogden only and at the 1910 session, Dogden and Kief are joined by Benedict. *Ibid.* 69, 87, 106, 126, 127.
28. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 1, 1911, 3; History of Turtle Lake church, dated February 20, 1976.
29. *Northern Union Reaper*, November 8, 1910, 1, 2.
30. "Sergius Gregory Burley," *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, op. cit.*, 176.
31. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 16, 1910, 4; August 30, 1910, 5; November 8, 1910, 1, 2.
32. *Northern Union Reaper*, October 5, 1909, 3; November 8, 1910, 1, 2.
33. *Northern Union Reaper*, November 22, 1910, 5; December 13, 1920, 4; *North Dakota Conference Session Record Book, op. cit.*, I, 130.
34. *Northern Union Reaper*, July 16, 1912, 5; lists of graduates in early annual academy bulletins; *North Dakota Conference Session Record Book, op. cit.*, I, 136.
35. *Northern Union Reaper*, March 7, 1916, 6. History of Sheyenne River Academy, prepared by Clara McClellan, c. 1916.
36. Determined by examining annual academy bulletins from 1916-1941; also *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, op. cit.*
37. "Battleford Academy"; "Broadview Academy", *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, op. cit.*, 114, 169-170; Sheyenne River Academy Calendar 1935-36, 24; *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, February 7, 1918, 17.
37. *Northern Union Reaper*, July 24, 1917, 1; August 6, 1918, 2; July 17, 1923, 2; September 9, 1924, 4.
39. *Northern Union Reaper*, July 18, 1911, 4; July 9, 1912, 4.5.
40. *Northern Union Reaper*, volumes 6-13, (April 1911-March 1919), *passim*.
41. *Northern Union Reaper*, May 23, 1911, 5.
42. *Northern Union Reaper*, July 22, 1913, 3.
43. *Northern Union Reaper*, September 15, 1914, 5.
44. Louis Martin Halswick, *op. cit.*, 91, 92.
45. *Ibid.*; *Northern Union Reaper*, December 19, 1916, 5.
46. *Northern Union Reaper*, July 6, 1915, 4; April 11, 1916, 4.

47. *Northern Union Reaper*, August 15, 1916, 5.
48. *Northern Union Reaper*, February 15, 1916, 9; April 11, 1916, 3; May 29, 1917, 7. The 1911 conference session had taken preliminary steps to establish a Russian publication at the conference level (*North Dakota Conference Session Record Book, op cit.*, I, 142, 143).
49. *Northern Union Reaper*, July 10, 1917, 3; November 16, 1920, 7; May 26, 1925, 6-7; April 19, 1927, 12.
50. *Northern Union Reaper*, December 18, 1917, 7-8; August 13, 1918, 8; August 20, 1918, 7; August 27, 1918, 6, 7; September 21, 1926, 6; Histories of the Grassy Butte (formerly Killdeer) church submitted in 1976 by Matt Alexenko and Olga Tachenko of Killdeer; telephone conversation with J.C Michalenko of Napa, California, May, 1978.
51. *Northern Union Outlook*, August 18, 1942, 6; December 15, 1942, 5; September 28, 1943, 3; November 2, 1943, 7; November 31, 1943, 9; History of present Killdeer church, 1976.
52. Based on a survey of the *Northern Union Reapers and Outlooks of the 30 's, 40.s and 50's*.