

It was customary for men who intended to marry to prepare for their family's future before actually marrying. Jewish tradition decreed that a man should first educate himself, then provide himself with a livelihood, and finally build a house for his future family. Thus MENAKHEM-MENDEL at the age of eighteen, built his own house in readiness for his impending marriage (38). He was very adept with his hands and was able to build all the furniture for the home. It was situated on the Grafskoy-Myadla road, next to his father's house.

The house was rectangular and was divided into three sections. In the front was the living area. This was partitioned into two bedrooms, each measuring about fourteen by fifteen feet; a main living room, measuring about fourteen feet long and running right across the width of the house; and a washroom leading off the main room (39). As the family enlarged all three rooms were used as bedrooms, the beds being cleared out of the main room during the day. In the centre of the living section of the house there was a large oven which was used to heat the entire house during winter. There was another oven in a corner of the main room which was used for cooking.

The second section of the house was the Shtal, situated behind the living area. This was used to house the livestock. The third section, behind the Shtal, was the Saray (barn). The house like most houses on the kolonya had a gabled roof which was tiled. The timbered walls were plastered over and whitewashed. At the side of the house was a brunim, a well, which provided drinking water for the houses on the Komisaruk block, which included that of Rabbi PINKHAS and his brother VELVEL. Rabbi PINKHAS's house ran across the front of the block, close to the street, whilst the houses of MENAKHEM-MENDEL and VELVEL were set back from the road and at rightangles to that of Rabbi PINKHAS (see map). At the far end of the block flowed the creek which separated the village from the fields.

MENAKHEM-MENDEL was very tall, over six feet, and walked with a limp. He worked very hard to make a living out of his land. For most of the year he awoke at sunrise, worked hard throughout the day, and returned home at sunset exhausted. But he was content with his life because he knew that unlike the vast majority of Jews he was priveleged in owning a section, however small, of Russian soil. His land was divided into two sections. One section was located near the cemetary on the Grafskoy-Engels road. The other section was located near his house on the opposite side of the creek. All farms in Grafskoy were likewise divided into sections because rotation farming was practised. Due to the lack of chemical fertilisers, the land had to remain fallow periodically in order to retain its fertility. Thus MENAKHEM-MENDEL would farm one section of his land for a period, leaving the other fallow, and then alternate. There were no fences around each farmer's land; the division of the plots was marked by small heaps of stones at the corners of each boundary.

Agriculture in Grafskoy was extremely varied. In the immediate vicinity of the house. MENAKHEM-MENDEL grew some potatoes and other vegetables, as well as keeping his seventy to a hundred fowls. In the fields he grew wheat, sunflower, corn, cucumbers, melons, oats, tomatoes, and other crops. After the wheat was harvested it was taken to a nearby mill to be crushed into flour. Since money was rarely used on the kolonya, payment was made in kind. The mill-keeper would take a proportion of the grain in return for crushing it. Sunflower seeds were crushed to make oil which was used mainly for cooking, although prior to the introduction of kerosene it was used in oil burners for lighting. In addition the seeds or Semachka were eaten as a delicacy (similar to 'garinim' in Israel). Corn and oats were used as feed for the livestock. Another source of feed was made by mixing straw from wheat with pollard (dried wheat husks). This mixture was also used as fuel for heating and cooking. Cucumbers, tomatoes and melons (dinya) were grown mainly for pickling. MENAKHEM-MENDEL had a huge barrel in the cellar, over seven feet high, which he used for pickling at the appropriate seasons of the year.

(38) TESSIE Freedman, as heard from her father SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komesaroff of Melbourne.

(39) Descriptions of MENAKHEM-MENDEL's house and farming activities: his son KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komesaroff of Melbourne.

Most of the produce was kept for household use and the surplus was sold. After each harvest, twelve month's supply for the family was stored in the Saray and the rest was taken to the nearby town of Rozovka. This was one of the highlights of the year. Everyone, young and old, lent a hand to harvest the crops then store them carefully to avoid spoilage during the long months ahead. Once this was done they would set off for Rozovka where a market was held periodically for the farmers to sell their produce. Here again money was rarely used and the farmers would obtain clothing, household goods, farm implements and other necessities in exchange for their produce. This time of the year was a critical one for if the weather changed unexpectedly or other unforeseen events interfered with the harvest, thousands of people would have to exist on the bare minimum until the next season.

The climate of the kolonya region was one of short mild summers and long severe winters. When snow fell the houses of the kolonya were often completely buried. For this reason each household kept a spade just inside their front door which was used to dig their way out of the house after a snowfall. Winter usually lasted for eight to nine months during which the livestock could not be left in the open. During this entire period MENAKHEM-MENDEL's three horses, three cows, and his fowls were locked up in the Shtal. Throughout the winter he had to handfeed the animals. Because of this it was vital that sufficient grain was produced during the short summer to support the animals as well as the family. Every few days the Shtal had to be cleaned out. The manure and straw were taken outside and piled up. During the summer it was spread out to dry in the sun. A heavy stone was dragged across this mixture to flatten it and then blocks were cut and stacked into heaps ready to burn as fuel.

The difficulties which beset the farmers were numerous. They never knew from one year to the next if their families were going to spend a well fed year or whether they were going to starve. It only needed a sudden change in the weather or the destruction of the crops during a pogrom for an entire kolonya to nearly starve. It was difficult to obtain livestock, so if an animal died the farmer had to do without it until another was born. Life was on the surface dreary and uninteresting. For three months of the year they worked unrelentlessly in preparation for the long winter. Then they spent nine months mostly confined to their houses. But despite these conditions the farmers managed to brighten their lives with simple pleasures. Whenever the occasion presented itself, whether it was a birth, a wedding or other family celebrations, the whole kolonya participated in celebrating the event. During the long hours of winter families would get together and amuse themselves as best they could. This period provided an ideal opportunity for the men to utilise the time for study. This was one of the reasons for the high level of scholarship which prevailed.

Despite the difficulties, the Jewish farmers gained a reputation for the successes they achieved. In 1892 a survey was conducted of the kolonyas in Yekaterinoslav and Inspector Clauss reported:

'The Jewish colonists give a picture of true peasant life, and many of them are in comparative easy circumstances compared with other Russian colonists' (40).

He stated that the Jewish colonists were far better furnished with tools than the Christian peasants - 'who did not always possess a good plough. In comparing the Jewish colonies with the most prosperous Christian villages in the district, the evidence is decidedly in favour of the good farming of the Jewish colonists. If we consider all the difficulties and the distress which have handicapped our first colonists we can affirm that they have solved in a most satisfactory manner the question as to the aptitude of the Jews for agriculture. In a Jewish population of more than 5000 souls of which the colonies at Yekaterinoslav are composed, we find no foreign elements and the work is accomplished exclusively by Jewish colonists.'

Chart No.4: Population of the kolonyas in the government of Yekaterinoslav based on the census of 1890. (41)

<u>KOLONIYA</u>	<u>AREA</u> (desyatins)	<u>MEN</u>	<u>HIRED HELP</u>
Bogodarovka	1050	288	4
Gorkaya	780	252	16
Grafskaya	910	181	3
Khlyebodarovka	570	81	1
Krasnoselka	1260	319	3
Mezhirech	1110	290	24
Nadezhnaya	1230	351	12
Nechayevka	630	206	5
Novozlatopol	1860	458	20
Priyutnaya	870	169	5
Roskoshnaya	780	178	-
Rovnopol	1190	219	4
Sladkovodnaya	840	193	2
Trudolyubovka	960	292	11
Veselaya	810	244	7
Zatishye	1600	233	-
Zelionoepole	1170	370	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17620</b>	<b>4310</b>	<b>121</b>

A quantitative picture of life on the kolonyas can be obtained from statistical charts provided in two surveys carried out on the region. The earlier of the two was published as:

'Pobzdka ve Yuzhno-Russkiya Yevreyskiya Kolonii' - An Excursion in the southern Russian Jewish colonies, written by L.M. Bramson and published (in Russian) in St.Petersburg in 1894 (42). The author describes his journey through the kolonyas briefly noting the character of several of them and the conditions of farming. A large part of his work is taken up with the following statistical charts:

Chart No 5: Population according to the census of January 1.1894

<u>KOLONIYA</u>	<u>REGISTERED FAMILIES</u>	<u>MEN</u>	<u>WOMEN</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>JEWISH HOUSES</u>
1.Novozlatopol	62	411	367	778	90
2.Veselaya	27	215	184	399	47
3.Krasnoselka	42	306	283	589	71
4.Mezhiretz	37	257	258	515	62
5.Trudoliubovka	32	249	236	485	75
6.Nechayevka	21	179	174	353	58
7.Grafskoy	26	174	172	346	46
8.Zelienoepole	39	351	361	712	88
9.Nadezhnaya	40	332	319	651	93
10.Sladkovodnaya	28	168	167	335	46
11.Priyutnaya	29	143	131	274	32
12.Roskoshnaya	26	152	140	292	44
13.Bogodarevka	35	260	251	511	72
14.Gorkaya	26	210	193	403	53
15.Zatishe	40	298	235	533	73
16.Rovnopol	42	240	235	475	70
17.KhLebodarovka	19	100	98	198	39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>4045</b>	<b>3804</b>	<b>7849</b>	<b>1059</b>

(41)'The Jewish Encyclopaedia' - Funk and Wagnal.

(42)Tel Aviv University Central Library, catalogue No 933.5 (4771) BRA 26504

Chart No.6: Wheat -land area sown (in desyatins), 1893

KOLONYA	SOWN		HARVESTED *		SOWN -Winter bread crop 1894
	WINTER	SPRING	WINTER	SPRING	
1. Novozlatopol	22	1468	40	5517	27
2. Veselaya	13	580 $\frac{3}{4}$	11	2433	86
3. Krasnoselka	7	1085 $\frac{1}{4}$	20	3890	66
4. Mezhioretz	8	999 $\frac{1}{4}$	23	4035	38
5. Trudoliubovka	28	881 $\frac{3}{4}$	84	4836	43
6. Nechayevka	49	780 $\frac{1}{2}$	196	4367	34
7. Grafskoy	32 $\frac{1}{2}$	691 $\frac{1}{4}$	80	3245	79
8. Zelenoepole	15	985 $\frac{1}{2}$	45	5455	145
9. Nadezhnaya	42 $\frac{1}{2}$	979	110	5635	57
10. Sladkovodnaya	22	784	65	3958	51
11. Priyutnaya	12	710	36	430	75
12. Roskoshnaya	10	645	35	3730	40
13. Bogodarevka	40	1220	169	6680	176
14. Gorkaya	20	1000	70	5600	90
15. Zatishe.	60	880	219	3545	62
16. Rovnopol	55	652	366	3307	82
17. Khlebodarovka	37	499	86	1373	50
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>14841</b>	<b>1646</b>	<b>71936</b>	<b>1201</b>

\*unit of weight uncertain

Chart No.7: Other crops -land area sown (in desyatins), 1894

KOLONYA *	TOTAL AREA	RYE	WINTER MILLET	SPRING MILLET	BARLEY	OATS	MILLET	CORN	POTATO
1.	1570	8 $\frac{3}{4}$	8 $\frac{1}{8}$	506	288	19	$\frac{1}{8}$	$\frac{1}{8}$	190
2.	745 $\frac{1}{2}$	41 $\frac{1}{4}$	12 $\frac{3}{8}$	226	105 $\frac{3}{4}$	11	-	-	102 $\frac{5}{8}$
3.	1155 $\frac{1}{2}$	27 $\frac{1}{2}$	13 $\frac{3}{4}$	354	210 $\frac{3}{4}$	-	-	-	152 $\frac{5}{8}$
4.	996 $\frac{1}{4}$	20 $\frac{1}{2}$	3 $\frac{3}{8}$	308	178 $\frac{1}{4}$	25	$\frac{1}{8}$	-	97 $\frac{5}{8}$
5.	778 $\frac{1}{2}$	27 $\frac{1}{2}$	6 $\frac{1}{4}$	253 $\frac{3}{4}$	203 $\frac{1}{4}$	-	-	3 $\frac{1}{4}$	132
6.	722 $\frac{1}{4}$	27 $\frac{1}{2}$	-	178	136	15	$\frac{1}{8}$	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	72
7.	777 $\frac{1}{4}$	37	13 $\frac{1}{8}$	168	169 $\frac{1}{5}$	10	$\frac{1}{4}$	2 $\frac{1}{4}$	108
8.	933	58 $\frac{3}{4}$	37 $\frac{1}{8}$	214	226 $\frac{1}{2}$	12	-	$\frac{1}{2}$	154 $\frac{1}{2}$
9.	1017 $\frac{1}{2}$	29	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	300 $\frac{1}{8}$	160	36 $\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{8}$	1	183
10.	763 $\frac{1}{2}$	23 $\frac{3}{4}$	8 $\frac{1}{4}$	225 $\frac{1}{2}$	157 $\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	-	111
11.	732	27	20	200	150	25	2	-	160
12.	723	15	10	220	157	10	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	-	130
13.	1426	50	60	420	240	40	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	-	260
14.	1010	45	11	280	210	50	2	-	200
15.	1200	64	7	481	464	26	-	15 $\frac{1}{2}$	23 $\frac{3}{4}$
16.	920	102 $\frac{1}{2}$	45	419	364 $\frac{1}{2}$	7	-	2	26 $\frac{1}{4}$
17.	750	27	23	281	202	28 $\frac{1}{2}$	-	6	7 $\frac{3}{4}$
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16220<math>\frac{1}{4}</math></b>	<b>631</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>5035<math>\frac{3}{4}</math></b>	<b>3623</b>	<b>315</b>	<b>8<math>\frac{1}{4}</math></b>	<b>35<math>\frac{1}{4}</math></b>	<b>2112</b>

\* Koloniyas numbered as above Chart 6.

Chart No.8: Livestock and Equipment , January 1st. 1894.

<u>KOLONYA</u>	<u>HORSES</u>	<u>OXEN</u>	<u>MILK COWS</u>	<u>CALVES</u>	<u>HINNY</u>	<u>PLOUGHS</u>	<u>HARROWS</u>	<u>CARTS</u>
1. Novozlatopol	198	-	225	118	55	69	60	77
2. Veselaya	145	-	130	68	34	54	54	42
3. Krasnoselka	174	-	150	97	35	64	66	71
4. Mezhiretz	165	-	133	51	48	50	35	58
5. Trudoliubovka	130	-	130	75	22	41	35	60
6. Nechayevka	144	-	123	61	34	41	35	50
7. Grafskoy	99	-	86	45	39	31	23	41
8. Zelenoepole	196	-	207	78	14	62	53	83
9. Nadezhnaya	215	-	198	101	62	72	67	86
10. Sladkovodnaya	116	6	105	84	23	44	40	46
11. Priyutnaya	100	4	83	60	25	45	40	32
12. Roskoshnaya	110	-	90	65	36	33	30	36
13. Bogodarevka	170	-	156	85	35	61	60	65
14. Gorkaya	140	4	110	76	27	50	45	60
15. Zatishe	122	-	108	72	24	46	43	49
16. Rovnopol	106	-	101	51	9	32	24	36
17. Khlebedarovka	70	-	48	44	28	22	27	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2400</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2183</b>	<b>1237</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>817</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>912</b>

Chart No.9: Mills Land on lease (desyatins), 1894

<u>KOLONYA</u>		
1. Novozlatopol	3	-
2. Veselaya	-	450
3. Krasnoselka	-	-
4. Mezhiretz	3	390
5. Trudoliubovka	3	805
6. Nechayevka	1	654
7. Grafskoy	1	385
8. Zelenoepole	2	637
9. Nadezhnaya	2	980
10. Sladkovodnaya	-	964
11. Priyutnaya	2	476
12. Roskoshnaya	-	1954
13. Bogodarevka	-	661
14. Gorkaya	-	501
15. Zatishe	1	480
16. Rovnopol	2	-
17. Khlebedarovka	1	730
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>10070</b>

of which 19 windmills, 2 water mills

Since the majority of the Komisaruk family lived in Grafskoy, the figures appertaining to that kolonya alone have been abstracted as follows:

1. POPULATION: 1894

Registered families	26
Total families (Jewish houses)	46
Men	174
Women	172
Total Population	346

2. LAND AREA SOWN (WHEAT): 1893 ( desyatins)

Sown - winter	32 $\frac{1}{2}$	
spring	691 $\frac{1}{4}$	
Harvested -winter	80	(weight unit)
spring	4836	

Sown 1894 winter bread 79

3. OTHER CROPS: land area sown (desyatins), 1894

Total land area	777 $\frac{1}{4}$
Rye	37
Winter millet	13 $\frac{1}{2}$
Spring millet	168
Barley	169 $\frac{1}{4}$
Oats	10
Millet	$\frac{1}{2}$
Corn	2 $\frac{1}{4}$
Potatoe	108 $\frac{1}{2}$

4. LIVESTOCK AND EQUIPMENT: January 1st. 1894

Horses	99
Milk cows	86
Calves	45
Hinny	39
Ploughs	31
Harrows	23
Carts	41

5. MILLS: One

6. LAND ON LEASE: 385 desyatins

By 1898/99 the area of cultivated land over all the kolonyas had risen to 17660 desyatins and the population was recorded as 8597 (43)

A second source of statistics appertaining to the kolonyas is 'Yevreyskiya Zemledelcheskiya Poseleniya Yekaterinoslavskoy Gubernii' - Jewish Agricultural Settlements in the Yekaterinoslav Government, published by B.D. Brutskus in 1913 (44). The author presents extensive charts detailing all aspects of agricultural and social activities. The following figures were extracted from these charts as they relate to Grafskoy alone. Figures relating to Grafskoy as shown in the charts above for 1893 and 1894 are reproduced here for comparative purposes (where available)

Chart No.10: Population (Grafskoy)

	1913	1894
Jewish houses (families)	52	46
Registered families	?	26
Men	160	174
Women	171	172
Total Population	331	346

plus 16 non-colonist families - 74 persons

(43) 'The Jewish Encyclopaedia' Funk and Wagnalls.

(44) Tel Aviv University Central Library

Chart No.11: Age Distribution (Grafskoy), 1913.

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	%
0 - 7	40	39	79	24
7 - 14	41	39	80	24
14 - 18	16	19	35	10
18 - 60	58	63	121	37
60+	5	11	16	5
TOTAL	160	171	331	100

Chart No.12: Literacy Rate (Grafskoy), 1913. (45)

	RUSSIAN			YIDDISH		
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Read and write	85	46	131	97	53	150
Read	4	3	7	10	9	19
Illiterate	31(25%)	83	114(45%)	13(11%)	70	83 (33%)
TOTAL	120	132	252	120	132	252

Chart No.13: Buildings (Grafskoy), 1913.

Houses	48
Rooms	177
Stables	40
Cellars	37
Wells	39
Mudhuts	6
Other structures	12
Leased buildings	4
Insured farmhouses	42
Value of insured farmhouses	13695 roubles (46)

A further aspect of agricultural activity on the colonies was the cultivation of trees. The following is a free translation of Bramson's description of this project:

"The planting of trees on the Jewish agricultural estates was started in the spring of 1892 under the instruction of the trustee for all the 17 colonies. 35,577 single trees were planted. In the spring of 1893 a second planting of 35,137 trees took place under the direction of the hired horticulturist Brushkin who had served for 12 years in the village of Belmanki cultivating the forests of the noblewoman Sviyagina. At that time, with the assistance of the noblewomen Sviyagina, nurseries were set up in the colonies Nadezhnaya and Grafskoy. From these nurseries an allotment of  $\frac{1}{4}$  desyatina was assigned to the manager.

"The nursery on the colony of Grafskoy was founded in the autumn of 1892 on an area of 9 desyatins on the site of the old nursery which had been founded in 1862 and which had perished on account of insufficient attention. The nursery, or Plantation, as it was called, served eight districts.

(45) The figures have obviously taken into account children below the age of literacy.

(46) The average value of each insured farmhouse was therefore 326 roubles.

"Varieties of tree included: apple, pear, plum, apricot, peach cherry, fir, acacia, birch, grapevines.

"Further plantations were developed as follows: Nadezhnaya 10 desyatins, Novozlatopol 15 desyatins, Zatishe 10 desyatins.

"In November 1893 a total of 75096 trees produced 21,118 saplings."

Chart No.14: Trees (November 1893)

Novozlatopol	9075
Krasnoselka	5464
Bogodarevka	5260
Mezhiretz	5192
Gorkaya	4944
Zatishe	4882
Trudoliubovka	4651
Veselaya	4572
Zelenoepole	4360
Sladkovodnaya	4311
Nadezhnaya	3942
Roskosnaya	3760
Priyutnaya	3529
Rovnopol	3436
Grafskoy	2606
Khlebedarovka	2582
Nechayevka	2530
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>75096</u>

Intensity of family life characterised the kolonyas. MENAKHEM-MENDEL was strict with his children, particularly YAAKOV-LEIB who was the scapegoat of the family, particularly YAAKOV-LEIB and blamed for all the mishaps. MENAKHEM-MENDEL demanded absolute cleanliness in the house and when he returned from the fields at night he would take out a knife and run the sharp blade along the cracks in the table in order to clean out any dirt which may have collected (47). Because his wife was frequently indisposed due to pregnancy, MENAKHEM-MENDEL was often obliged to prepare the meals when he came home late in the day, resulting in his becoming a skilled cook. Although he was tired from farmwork during the day he still found time to study. After the evening meal he would get out his books, light a candle, and sit long into the night pouring over the intricacies of the Talmud. Nevertheless he was still able to get up early in the morning, ready to cope with another day's work.

MENAKHEM-MENDEL was no fanatic in religious matters; he believed in religious adherence not only to the letter of the law, but also in accordance with the sincerity of its spirit. One of his aversions in this respect was the custom of auctioning various honours in the Shule. It was traditional for the honour of being called to the reading of the Torah being auctioned amongst the worshippers. In addition on Simchat Torah other sections of the service were put up to the highest bidder. This custom was abhorred by MENAKHEM-MENDEL (48). Whenever it took place he would sit silently taking no part in the bidding. However, one year on Simchat Torah he surprised the congregation. The section being auctioned was that preceeding the Hakafot beginning with the words 'Ata horeyta ladaat ...' - it was taught to you that you might know. The bidding began with the usual low bids: "I'll give three kopeks to say Ata Horayta." "I'll give four kopeks." So it went on and one, each bid barely higher than that preceeding it. As time passed it seemed that there would be no settlement. As the bidding reached fever pitch, MENAKHEM-MENDEL, who could control his famous Komisaruk temper no longer, jumped up from his seat, slammed his fist down on the bench and shouted: "I'll give three roubles not to say Ata Horayta !"

For a moment there was silence. Then turmoil broke loose as the amazed men asked him: "What do you mean Reb Mendel ? Surely you



mean that you will give three roubles to say Ata Horayta." "I mean what I said," replied MENAKHEM-MENDEL adamantly. The stunned congregation did not know what to do as MENAKHEM-MENDEL sat down and refused to discuss the matter further. The service could not proceed since he had in affect acquired possession of 'Ata Horayta' being the highest bidder. Eventually when the commotion died down, he gave the honour of saying the section to the rabbi (his father's successor since Rabbi PINKHAS was already dead at the time). From that time onwards the bidding for honours no longer occupied the prominence it had done in Graftskoy. In the true sense of the words MENAKHEM-MENDEL had indeed 'taught them that they might know'.

Religion played a vital part in the daily life on the kolonyas. Not just on Shabbat and YomTov, but every day of the year religious practices dictated the daily program. Early in the morning the entire male population of the kolonya would gather in the Shule for Shacharit. Then they would return home to snatch a bite to eat before setting off for the day's work. Late in the afternoon they would assemble once again for Mincha and Maariv. On Shabbat and Yom-Tov the women joined the service. In Graftskoy the service was presided over by Rabbi PINKHAS who occupied the most honoured position in the Shule: on the 'Mizrach' eastern side in the front of the Shule, surrounded by his sons, brothers and relatives. MENAKHEM-MENDEL and his sons occupied seats diagonally opposite Rabbi PINKHAS on the opposite side of the Bima.

The women's section was situated such that it was difficult to hear the service properly. Therefore they brought Yiddish books written for women. They would spend the time reading and discussing the contents of these books. After the midday meal, the rest of the day was spent in rest. The men would gather together to study in groups, or to hear a shiur from Rabbi PINKHAS, or they would study with their families. The women also would get together with their Yiddish books. For the very young children the afternoon was spent in play. As the day concluded the colonists would gather outside the Shule and watch for the stars signifying the close of the day. Shabbat and Yom Tov were highlights in the colonists lives. These days of devotion and rest provided a welcome change in the endless routine of kolonya life, which provided the strength to cope with the weekday toil.

One thing dampened their enthusiasm during prayer: the everpresent knowledge that their Christian neighbours might arrive in the kolonya to shower curses and abuse upon them whilst they were at prayer. For this reason, particularly on Simchat Torah when the sound of their rejoicing filled the air attracting any moujiki who might be about, a man was placed in the doorway of the Shule to warn them to lower their voices if he saw strangers entering the kolonya.

Rabbi PINKHAS's third son MEIR married his second-cousin TYBEL, the daughter of KOPPEL Zhmood from Andreyevka. They settled in the village of Andreyevka where their eldest daughter KHANA-REIZEL was born in 1887. She was followed by a daughter who died shortly after her birth. Because of the poor standard of medical attention, the infant mortality rate was very high. The next child was TSIPORA (CILYA) born in c.1890. She was followed by twins, a boy and a girl, who both died soon after their birth. The next child, born in 1896 was SHLOMO-ZALMEN. He was called ALTER meaning 'the old one' since it was the custom in families where several children had died to name the succeeding child 'Alter' supposedly to confuse the 'Angel of Death', who was said to prefer taking young children, into thinking that this child was old and therefore not worth taking.

- (47) TESSIE Freedman as related by her father SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komesaroff of Melbourne.
- (48) KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) son of MENAKHEM-MENDEL, who related numerous incidents of his childhood in Graftskoy and vivid descriptions of life on the kolonyas.

Alter was followed by PINKHAS in 1899, YEHUDA-LEIB (LOUIS) in 1901 and KHAYA-SARAH (KHAYALAH) in 1906. MEIR went into partnership as a butcher with his brothers-in-law (and cousins) MOSHE and MANYIK Zhmood. He loved horses and travelled a lot around the nearby villages to visit the shops operated by the partners. On his travels he would pick up passengers who were destined for the same village as he. In this way he met a number of Russian Orthodox priests and made friends with them. This was unusual considering the animosity which existed between Jews and the Church at the time. However MEIR was a very tolerant man and respected other people's beliefs. He used to say: "I would rather travel with a Christian who keeps his religion than with a Jew if he does not." On these journeys MEIR was in danger from certain moujiki who often waylaid and robbed defenceless Jews travelling alone in the countryside. Thus he preferred to have company with him. He would say: "I feel safer in the company of a Galuch (priest) than in the company of a Meshumad (Jewish convert to Christianity). Although MEIR was a butcher, amongst his pet food dislikes were livers and kidneys. He said: "If you were to see them in the condition I see them you would never eat them." (49)

MEIR's children received a traditional Jewish education. Unlike most parents, he believed in education for girls. Therefore he sent his daughters to a Cheder for girls, together with their Zhmood cousins in Andreyevka. TSVI and DAVID (sons of MOSHE Zhmood) were very fond of their cousin KHANA-REIZEL and fought with each other to be able to do her favour. On the way to Cheder the children had to cross a river which was frozen in winter. Every day there would be an argument between TSVI and DAVID over which of them would help KHANA-REIZEL to skate across the ice.

KHANA-REIZEL's ability at her studies was such that her teacher tried to encourage her to seek a higher education and perhaps take up teaching as a career. Her parents attempted to have her admitted into a secular high school. This was difficult as strict quotas restricted Jewish entrants to Russian schools. The assistance was enlisted of TYBEL's sister-in-law ESTHER Zhmood who was a teacher in Mariupol. Through her intercession with the necessary officials she had KHANA-REIZEL admitted to a Gymnasium in Mariupol. Furthermore she offered to provide board for her niece during the school term in Mariupol. So KHANA-REIZEL went to live with her aunt ESTHER and uncle MANYIK Zhmood. The years which she spent with their family were very happy ones and provided her with some of her fondest childhood memories. Her aunt and uncle treated her as their own daughter. KHANA-REIZEL's outlook on life was broadened by the secular Russian education she was fortunate to receive, unlike most of her brothers, sister and cousins. Most Jews from villages only learnt to write in Russian when they needed to for business purposes. This was the case with KHANA-REIZEL's cousin SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komesaroff from Grafskoy whom she later married. Amongst her teachers was the later renowned Zionist leader Mossensohn. Her uncle and aunt, whilst strictly orthodox Jews, enjoyed the finer points of Russian culture such as music and literature. This love of Russian culture, despite the excesses of antisemitism, was passed on to KHANA-REIZEL and remained with her throughout her life.

As Rabbi PINKHAS's daughters grew up, they exhibited the same concern for the welfare of others as did their father. The Jews of the Kolonyas received little or no assistance from the government in caring for widows, orphans, the sick and the poor. They had to rely on their own limited resources to help the afflicted of their community. The three Komisaruk sisters, ESTER, DINA and REIZEL were always ready to help those in need (49). Whenever they heard of a woman who had been widowed or a family which had been orphaned, the three sisters would waste no time in collecting food and clothing to help them. If they heard of somebody who was lying ill with nobody to nurse them, the three sisters would volunteer their services to nurse the person back to health. No matter where the unfortunates lived, ESTER, DINA and REIZEL would not hesitate in riding off to help them. These 'angels of mercy' earned a reputation for themselves and a warm place in the hearts of the Jews of the Kolonyas.

ESTER, Rabbi PINKHAS's fourth child, or ETL as she was known, married KHAIM-MOSHE Luban. KHAIM-MOSHE came from a family of wealthy and devout Chassidim who lived in the town of Mikhailovka. There his father Aharon Luban appears to have settled after the family's migration from the town of Luban in Lithuania (hence the origin of their surname). The Lubans, who were leather merchants lived at various times both in Mikhailovka and nearby Melitopol. In the latter place KHAIM-MOSHE's brother occupied the position as rabbi of the town.

The marriage of a Chassid with a daughter of the Komisaruk family was a landmark in the history of that family. It was in fact the first such marriage since the time of the bitter feud between the Misnagdim and Chassidim in the days of the Vilna Gaon. Despite a long tradition of non-association with Chassidim, Rabbi PINKHAS welcomed his son-in-law into the family. It appears that an attachment of mutual respect developed between them as evidenced in a dedication inscribed in a book presented by Rabbi PINKHAS to his son-in-law. This dedication refers to him not only in familial terms but also makes note of what must have been his scholastic achievement in referring to him as 'Morenu ha Rav', our teacher the rabbi (50).

ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE Luban had twin daughters in c.1886 who died shortly after birth. They were followed by a son YOSEF-DOV (latter called ALTER) in 1892. YOSEF-DOV was given this name in memory of the famous scholar Rabbi Yosef-Dov Saloveitchik, the news of whose death reached the family just before the child was born (51). The Lubans' fourth child, a son died soon after birth in c.1894. At this time medical knowledge was very limited and rarely available to Jews. If anyone became seriously ill there was little chance for recovery. ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE lived in fear, following the death of three of their children, that their only remaining child YOSEF-DOV might be taken from them. For this reason they began to call him ALTER for the same reasons as those explained regarding his uncle MEIR's son ALTER.

ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE badly wanted another child. But fate had decreed otherwise, ESTER was unable to bear any further children. When she was told this she said: "I would gladly give up all my money and become a pauper, if only I could have another child". (52) In desperation she took the only step open to her. She decided to consult a 'Gooter Yid'. This was a Chassidic Rebbe who was revered by his followers as a miracle-worker. Such superstitions were not accepted by the Misnagdim. Nevertheless ESTER was desperate. She was prepared to use any means to have a child. She went to the local 'Gooter Yid' and he pronounced certain prescribed formulas over her and presented her with amulets which were supposed to have divine power. But all his efforts were of no avail. As time went by ESTER gave up all hope of having another child.

- (49) TESSIE Freedman as related by her parents.  
 (50) The book was in the possession of RAKHEL Luban in Israel.  
 (51) MOSHE Luban as related by his father YOSEF-DOV. This may add weight to the claim of a familial relationship.  
 (52) This episode related by ESTER's nephew KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komesaroff.

But ESTER was bothered by one thing. Due to her upbringing her conscience was troubling her that she had, in a moment of weakness, consulted a 'Gooter Yid'. To relieve this feeling of guilt she went to see her father. She told him of her troubles and said: "Father, I went to see a Gooter Yid," (literally, a good Jew). Rabbi PINKHAS, realising the torment his daughter was enduring, answered in his characteristically tolerant manner: "Mein kind, yeder yid iz goot", (My child, every Jew is good). One could also interpret this to mean that he did not recognise the uniqueness of the 'Gooter yid'.

Rabbi PINKHAS's fifth child SIMKHA married KHAHA-ROKHA and their children were KHAY-GITTEL (TATIANA), BEILA, and PINKHAS. SIMKHA initially lived with his father until he built his own house on the Marenfeld-Grafskoy road, soon after it entered the Kolonya. He farmed a section of the family's land. His wife KHAHA-ROKHA was a well-known character on the Kolonya as both midwife and hairdresser.

Rabbi PINKHAS's sixth child DINA married AVROM-HILLEL Namakshtansky and they settled on the nearby Kolonya Engels ( Trudoljubovka in Russian). There AVROM-HILLEL was occupied in farming. Their children were KHAIM, SHMILIK, ROKHEL, twins PINKHAS and VELVEL, YOKHVED (EVA), ZALMEN (SAM), and LEIBL (LOUIS).

Rabbi PINKHAS's youngest daughter REIZEL was very attached to her father, being the only child of his wife BASSIE. Also being the youngest, she was the last of their children to be left living with her parents. She married KOPPEL Kogan and they settled on Kolonya Bakhers. Their children were YOKHVED (EVA), BASSIE, LEAH, MOSHE, PASHA, PINKHAS and RAFAEL.

By 1896, with the growth of MENAKHEM-MENDEL's family, it became increasingly difficult to accomodate all the children in his small house. For this reason he decided that one of them would leave home for a short period. The one chosen was SHLOMO-ZALMEN. MENAKHEM-MENDEL decided that this was an opportunity of furthuring his son's education and so decided to send him to his brother Rabbi ZALMEN (53). Although grieved at having to part with her son, BEILA-REEVA prepared him for the long journey to Vasilkovka where his uncle lived. Then his father took him to a nearby town where a coach which passed through Vasilkovka periodically stopped. MENAKHEM-MENDEL put SHLOMO-ZALMEN aboard the coach, wrapped him warmly in thick blankets, gave him a parcel of food, then blessed him before bidding him farewell. SHLOMO-ZALMEN was terrified after the coach set off. He looked around but could find no familiar face. He was freezing from the cold and was being shaken violently as the coach passed over rough, unsurfaced roads. Throughout the journey he remained motionless in his corner, beneath his pile of blankets, afraid to speak to anyone. He felt as if he was travelling to the ends of the earth as the coach travelled on through unfamiliar country. Eventually it pulled into a small town and as the door opened, SHLOMO-ZALMEN was relieved to see the familiar long-bearded figure of his uncle Rabbi ZALMEN who had been waiting to collect him.

SHLOMO-ZALMEN soon recovered from his harrowing journey and settled into his uncle's household. During the period which he spent in Vasilkovka he acquired much of his religious knowledge through the guidance of his uncle. Rabbi ZALMEN, like his father, was a devout Misnagid and saw to it that his nephew attended to his studies diligently. However life was not all work. ZALMEN had plenty of time to enjoy himself with his seven cousins whom he had previously seen rarely. Rabbi ZALMEN's eldest son KHAIM-SHOLEM followed in his father's and grandfather's scholastic footsteps. To furthur his education he was sent to one of the prominent Yeshivot in Lithuania to study and qualify as a rabbi. There he remained, married and had a family. Contact with Rabbi KHAIM-SHOLEM was lost during the Russian Revolution and his fate is not known. It is possible that a Komesaroff family living in Vilna during the Second World War was his family(54)

After spending twelve months in Vasilkovka, SHLOMO-ZALMEN returned to his parents in Grafskoy.

(53) Related by SHLOMO-ZALMEN to his son PINKHAS (PETER Kaye) of Melbourne.

(54) RAKHEL Luban.