Transformation on the Southern Ukrainian Steppe: Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies Volume 1: 1812-1835

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This is the first of a projected three-volume collection of selected correspondence and papers associated with the noted Russian Mennonite leader Johann Cornies (1789-1848). It is based on the extensive collection of Cornies and Wiebe family papers located in the Ukrainian State Archives of the Odessa region. These papers, which became muddled with a collection of archives of the Molochna Colony hidden with the Cornies material after the Russian Revolution, were seized by the Soviets in the 1920s and presumed lost. However, they had, in fact, been carefully preserved and catalogued by archivists in Odessa and, having survived the Nazi occupation during World War II, were relocated by Mennonite scholars in the 1990s. Subsequently, Harvey L. Dyck arranged to have the entire archive microfilmed and, peculiarly, renamed the Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive. Copies were deposited in a number of Mennonite library and archive collections. For the purposes of this volume, however, the letters and related documents are identified as belonging to their original source and given the call marks first assigned by Ukrainian archivists.

The editors present the letters in date order and include a number of appendixes, the most significant of which are what the editors refer to as Cornies' ethnographic writings on his non-Mennonite Molochna neighbors, including other foreign colonists, Nogai Tatars, Doukhobors, and Molokans. The editors chose the items on a number of grounds. These include the manner in which the sources reflect Cornies' administrative role and policies, such as his connections with government officials and organizations; Cornies' links with Mennonites and non-Mennonites relating to religious topics; Cornies'...