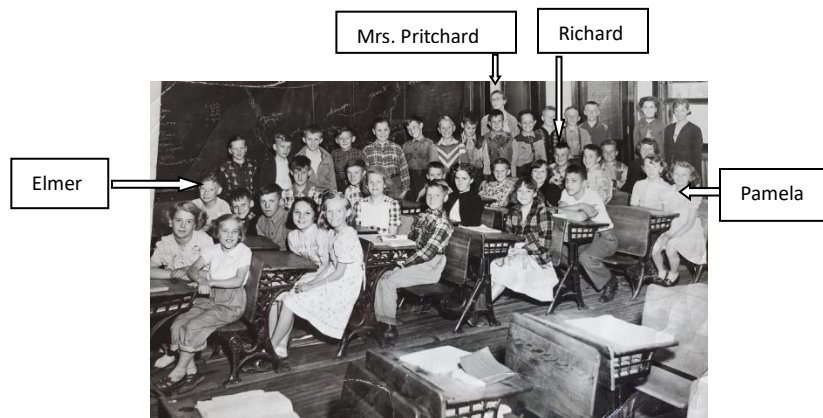


THE TOLSTOY STORY

Pamela (nee Dundas) Koschinsky Guest Blog Entry to Elmer Verigin Blog

In August, of this year 2023, I was on Facebook with my school friend Pamela (nee Dundas) Koschinsky about a recent trip, Marilyn and I just completed to the Prairies. Pamela was born and raised in Pelly, and I attended Pelly School with her older brother Richard. “Dick” was my classmate and Pamela was two (2) years younger.

Here is the classroom at the Pelly School with grades 4 through 6 inclusive with Hattie (nee MacKenzie) Pritchard teaching and classmates Elmer Verigin, Pamela and Richard Dundas as students, all identified in class photo taken in 1953.



I mentioned having coffee at the Happy Hearts (a senior’s center) with a group of Pelly residents. Pamela advised me that MacKenzie Park upon which the Seniors Center was constructed, was donated by the MacKenzie family (originally owned by Ebenezer and Harriet Mackenzie).

This carried on to the fact that the two elder MacKenzies, daughter Hattie (nee MacKenzie) Pritchard, had taught us when Pamela was in Grade 4 and I was in grade 6. Hattie was a great Aunt to Richard and Pamela.

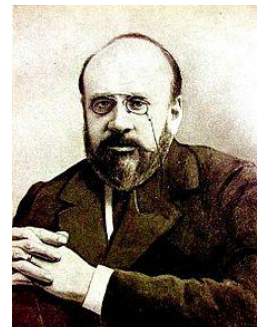
Pamela was in possession of the Ebenezer and Harriet MacKenzie written family history. Part of that history included “THE TOLSTOY STORY” and the association of Sergi Tolstoy and Leopold Sulerzhitsky during 1899 and their assistance to the migration of 7,500 Doukhobors from Georgia (Russia at that time) to the Northwest Territories (later the Province of Saskatchewan). These two (2) Russian gentlemen stayed at their home in Fort Pelly.

The quotation from that family history is quoted later in this blog entry, but here are the characters and places associated with “THE TOLSTOY STORY”:

1. Sergei Tolstoy

He was the eldest son of [Leo Tolstoy](#). As a child, he studied music with his mother [Sophia](#). He also studied composition with [Sergei Taneyev](#). From 1881 to 1886, he was enrolled in the "Department of Natural Sciences, Physics and Mathematics" at [Moscow University](#), while attending classes at the [Moscow Conservatory](#) taught by [Nikolay Kashkin](#).^[1]

After graduating, he worked in the [Tula](#) branch of the [Peasants' Land Bank](#) and later became a manager at the Saint Petersburg branch. In 1890, he became head of the [zemstvo](#) for [Chernsky District](#), near the family estate.^[1] Over the next ten years, he came to the defense of many [Tolstoyans](#) who were being suppressed for anti-government activities; notably [Leopold Sulerzhitsky](#). **From 1898 to 1899, he helped to organize the**



Doukhobor community for resettlement in Western Canada and accompanied them to [Lawlor Island](#) in Nova Scotia. He was married in 1895, but his wife died of tuberculosis five years later after a separation of two years. He remarried in 1906.^[1]

2. Leopold Sulerzhitsky

Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky (b at Zhitomir 1872; d at Moscow 17 December 1916), a theatre personality in Russia, participated in the settlement of Western Canada by taking charge of the 1898-99 emigration of **DOUKHOBORS**, in place of the imprisoned leader Peter Vasilevich **VERIGIN**. Sulerzhitsky, who had studied at the Moscow School of Art and Sculpture with Count Leo Tolstoy's daughter, Tatiana, was chosen by Tolstoy for this work. **He left for Canada on 10 December 1898 on a freighter, the Lake Huron, with 2140 emigrants. He supervised the transportation and settlement of 7400**



Doukhobors from Halifax to Winnipeg and thence to many rural townships in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

He returned to Russia in 1900 and became active in theatre work. He was the assistant private secretary of Konstantin S. Stanislavsky, who founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898, helping him to write down his system of acting in 1909. In 1905 he assisted Vsevolod E. Meyerhold when young revolutionaries closed the Theatre-Studio and subsequently helped students to join the Art Theatre.

3. Fort Pelly

The first Fort Pelly, at [51°46'42"N 102°00'19"W](#), was constructed by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1824, in the northeast corner of the elbow of the [Assiniboine River](#). It was situated at a convenient [portage](#) point between the Assiniboine and [Swan](#) Rivers. Since the upper Assiniboine is shallow and crooked the area was most easily reached from the Swan River. The route was Lake Winnipegosis - Swan River - Snake Creek - Miry Creek - portage to the Assiniboine River.^[3] It was the administrative centre of the Hudson's Bay Company's [Swan River District](#).^{[4][5]}



Fort Pelly consisted of a dwelling house, and Indian house, several staff houses, a store, and stables, all enclosed within a square [palisade](#), 120 feet a side.

Fort Pelly was moved to [51°46'35"N 101°59'51"W](#) in 1856. This move, to approximately one quarter mile southeast of the original position, was due to problems with occasional flooding at the old location. The old fort was however still used in some capacity until at least 1859. On July 15, 1870, the Hudson's Bay Company surrendered its lands to Canada, while retaining its posts and some land immediately surrounding them. The fort was now located on block 17 of the Fort Pelly Reserve. Around 1871 [Fort Ellice](#) succeeded Fort Pelly as district headquarters. In 1909 the [Canadian Northern Railway](#) was built 6 miles north of Fort Pelly, and trade at the fort all but ceased, and it was abandoned in June, 1912

4. Fort Pelly Trail

Fort Pelly, built in 1824, was located at Indian Elbow, on the left bank of the Assiniboine River. All trails in this area leading into this post were generally referred to as Pelly trails, including the trail leading to Swan Lake, which however became known as the Swan Lake trail. At one time it was an important depot on the main trail of the Hudson's Bay Company from Fort Garry to the Athabasca territory. ^[32]

Fort Pelly, situated on the Upper Assiniboine River, was in a strategic location and therefore a pivotal point, through which the trade passed to the embarkation point on Swan Lake for York Factory. In reverse manner the incoming freight followed the route for the distribution



of goods to the various inland posts and depots. It was the headquarters of the Swan River district from 1824-72.

In the early days of settlement in Saskatchewan, the (Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB) purchased goods and supplies at the Town of Yorkton, the main trading and distribution center in the region. To get there, the Doukhobors followed the old Fort Pelly Trail which ran in a south-westerly direction from their village settlements in the Veregin district, through the Ebenezer district, to Yorkton. While passing through the Ebenezer district, the Doukhobor teamsters became acquainted with many of the settlers living along the trail.

"...THE TOLSTOY STORY (as quoted from family history)

In 1899, with the consent of the Canadian Government and the assistance from the American Society of Friends and Count Leo. N. Tolstoy, famous author of War and Peace, seventy- five



hundred Doukhobors were settled in the general area near Pelly. Tolstoy sent his son and an agent to the area to provide onsite assistance. For part of their stay the two were hosted by Ebenezer and Harriet. In spite of the 11 people living in their house, this worked out quite well.



When they departed the McKenzies would not take any money to cover expenses. On their journey home, while in New York, Tolstoy's son purchased a leather-bound set of his father's existing works and sent them to the McKenzies in gratitude. These books stayed in the family until recently when they were donated to a book sale (charity). The agent turned out to be Leopold Sulerzhitsky, a Russian theatre director and painter, who has become allied with Tolstoy in humanitarian causes. Leopold kept a diary of the trip, which he published into a book upon his return to Russia. The following extract from his book, although not totally consistent with other facts about Fort Pelly, is worth reading as a foreigner's account of the settlement

(Pamela's comments)

When my great grandmother, Harriet would become aware these two Russian gentlemen had no



lodgings, she would have insisted they stay at her house. The fact there were already 11 people in the house wouldn't have deterred her, she would have welcomed them knowing they were all alone in a new land, she would have fed them all her authentic dishes ensuring they were well fed for they must have been on the trail for days. She would have prepared them the most comfortable sleeping accommodations with layered bedding, first layer would be pure woolen flannel, next the feather tick filled with the finest, softest inner goose down then the cotton sheets topped with a "log cabin" patchwork , all handmade down filled quilt, for

warmth Harriet used the heated stove top covers, wrapped in flannel . She must have had a dozen extra covers sitting on the back of the stove ready to provide warmth for all . As the cook stove was large these covers would be about 12 inches diameter. A very effective way to heat a bed in the cold winter with no central heating. The pillows were wonderful, again filled with the finest, softest inner goose down . Then this warmth was topped with a layer of flannel sort of like insulation to hold the heat for the night.

There was always a pitcher and glass of water at the bedside. Harriet made her own soap, she hand scrubbed all the laundry in already boiled water, all water was boiled before using it , I guess the water was from melted snow or the river . Upon leaving and wishing to pay, Harriet would have told them she was so blessed to have them visit her home.

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Inserted edits and by Pamela Kochinsky and Marilyn Verigin