



John Hoas from Gammel-Svenskby in Ukraine has lived under the rules of Tsar Nikolaus II, Lenin, Stalin, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, Queen Elizabeth II and various Canadian Prime Ministers:

“In Russia we could not even figure out how a man could ride a bike.”

Viking Swedish with certain influences from other languages like German, Estonian and Russian.

John Hoas still lives on the “Gammel-svenskby” farm, that his family was one of the founders of, in Meadow, Manitoba with his two sons and their families.

This interview was done in August 2005.

Interview:

Swedish Press: What do you remember of your life in Gammelsvenskby in Ukraine?

John Hoas: We were a few families, most people had the same family names. We were all Albers, Annas, Buskas, Hansas, Jarman, Hamberg, Hinas, Hoas, Knutas, Koppers, Kotz, Larsas, Malmas, Martis, Mutas, Norberg, Serges, Sigalet, Takne, Tinis or Utas. The name Hoas came from Hoagården. Or Malmas, my wife was born Malmas, comes from the word “malm”. The svenskbybor were the first ones in the south Ukraine. It was wilderness there. When they got their cattle, they had to kill wolves all the time so they would not lose all their livestock. Katarina the Great was the ruler at that time and she welcomed them with open arms and she had given them a beautiful spot along the river. We had apricots, peaches, pears and luscious grapes grew all year round. It was a little like Florida. But three years after the Svenskbybor came the Germans moved in too. They took over the villages one after the other. They had teachers with them and ministers and the German minister had said you Swedes might as well

start working with the Germans. But the Swedes were stubborn and said they were Swedes and were going to stay Swedish. Then they started building their own church. They had already saved up enough rubles and then they got a donation from Sweden. It is a beautiful church, solid stone, well built. And the marble finish inside is something else and it seated 500 people. Then the Germans built a church and they built the same type of church. There were a few intermarriages and my grandmother’s grandmother was German. When we were in the village it was all Swedish but when we left the village we either had to speak Russian or German. We had Swedish school one day and the next day it was Russian. When you went to the city it was all Russian. When the Revolution broke out, they took away the religion in the schools. My education was nil because of the Revolution. When we left the village was empty. They destroyed the buildings and the beautiful trees and the fruit orchards.

SP: How did your repatriation to Sweden come about?

JH: The Russians did not want us to leave. They took us in one by one and promised to give us everything. But everybody said they wanted to go home. When the day came that we were to leave they sent two small boats along the river. We got on these boats and then at the coast in Cherson there was an old Turkish coal freighter that came in. The Swedish government had made an agreement with Italy to send in an Italian passenger boat but the Russians said they

did not have anything to do with Italy and they would not let them in. We could not speak to one another and the guy was watching us with a finger on the trigger. They searched all of us. And you know the ladies had their long hair braided up and they searched through it. By the time we got on the boat it was getting late already and they had a small tugboat to lead the ocean boat through the Black Sea and the ocean boat was led right into a concrete bank and that ripped a hole in the front. But they said nothing and they blocked the hole up with cement bags. We were on the boat one night and one day and >>>

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