



**Mennonite Library & Archives
Fresno Pacific University**

**Dietrich J. & Lena Claassen
An Inventory of Their Papers**

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Creator: Claassen, Dietrich J., 1877-1952.
Claassen, Lena, 1878-1953.
Title: Papers of Dietrich J. and Lena Claassen.
Inclusive dates: 1896-1941.
Quantity: 1.2 linear ft.
Record Group No.: M295.

BIOGRAPHY OF DIETRICH J. AND LENA CLAASSEN

Dietrich John Claassen was born in 1877 in the Kuban Colony of South Russia. In 1884 he migrated with his parents to Hillsboro, Kansas. He moved to Oklahoma in 1894, and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in Cooper, Oklahoma, in 1895. Claassen later returned to Kansas to attend McPherson College, from which he graduated in 1900.

Also in 1900 Claassen took part in the Cherokee Strip land run in the Oklahoma Territory, where he secured 160 acres of land in Caddo County. One year later he married Lena Duerksen, She was born in Alexanderthal, Molotschna, South Russia, in 1878, and migrated with her parents to Lehigh, Kansas, in 1884. Lena joined the Lehigh Mennonite Brethren Church in 1893.

In 1901 Dietrich and Lena moved to Corn, Oklahoma, where they both worked as school teachers in the newly-established Corn Bible Academy from 1902 until 1904. At about this same time, the Claassens also began teaching at the Gethsemane High School in Fairview, Oklahoma, where they remained for a few years.

In 1909 the Claassens moved to Kern County, California, part of a settlement organized by land agent Henry J. Martens. In anticipation of this move, it appears that the Claassens subdivided and sold land that they owned in Fairview to establish the "Claassen Addition" there.

The town of Martensdale, as the Kern County settlement came to be called, survived only a few months. It collapsed in early 1910 when it was revealed that Martens did not actually own the land he had sold to the settlers. Before this occurred, however, Dietrich Claassen was part of discussions to establish a Mennonite Brethren college in the town of Martensdale. After losing their land in Martensdale, the Claassens moved to the Rosedale area near Bakersfield. They joined the Rosedale Mennonite Brethren Church, where they remained members for the rest of their lives.

The Claassens farmed in Kern County until their retirement. Dietrich Claassen died in 1952, after which Lena briefly moved to Reedley, California. She soon returned to Bakersfield, where she died in 1953.

(Record Group M295: Dietrich J. & Lena Claassen Papers)

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

This record group includes real estate transaction documents; documents regarding the real estate work of Henry J. Martens in Kern County, California; student and teacher notebooks belonging to both Dietrich and Lena Claassen; minute books of Mennonite school literary societies in Oklahoma; and other miscellaneous items.

LANGUAGES APPEARING IN THE COLLECTION

Most of the school notebooks are in German Gothic script.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Box 1

Series I: Land records

Documents re: Henry J. Martens and the Martensdale settlement, 1907-1909
Chattel mortgage documents, 1902-1928
Real estate transaction documents, 1899-1941
Claassen Addition (Fairview, Okla.) documents, 1909-1917
Oil and gas lease documents, 1925-1941

Series II: School papers (Lena Claassen)

Penmanship lesson books, 1901-1904
Student essay books, 1900-1906
Grade book / "Einige Schulregeln" / Student program minutes, 1903
Protokollbuch der Litterarischen [sic] Sitzungen der Fortbildsschule von Washita Co., 1903-1904
Protokollbuch des literarischen Vereins zur Gethsemane Hochschule, 1905-1907
Protokollbuch des litterarischen [sic] Schulvereins, undated
Notebook, undated

Series III: School papers (Dietrich Claassen)

Student notebooks written by Claassen, with markings and grades by instructor ("Duerksen"), 1896-1897
"Ordnungsregeln für die Schüler der Gemeindeschule der M.-Br. Gemeinde in Washita Co., Okla." and Grade book, 1902
Grade books, 1900-1905
Notebooks, undated
Topics include, Biblical history, Church history, World history, Natural history, Geography, Literature, Music, Doctrine

Box 2

Other notebooks, undated

Series IV: Other papers

Naturalization document (Dietrich Claassen), 1903
Financial notebook / "Meine bekerung [sic], Januar den 5, 1895" (Dietrich Claassen), undated
Handwritten songbook, undated