

The Significance of the Peter Braun Russian Mennonite Archive:

A Review Essay

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Ingrid I. Epp and Harvey L. Dyck, *The Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive, 1803-1920: A Research Guide*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), xxxviii, 215pp.

Since the late 1980s, and especially following the collapse of the communist states, the archives and libraries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have opened. For those interested in Mennonite research this has led to some important discoveries, the most important to date being the relocation of the "lost" Molochna [also "Molotschna] Archive assembled by the school teacher Peter J. Braun before, during and after the Russian Revolution of 1917. This collection, hidden from the early Bolshevik authorities, was seized by Soviet officials in 1929 and disappeared until 1990. Most of it had been placed in the State Archive of the Odessa Region where in 1937 it was sorted into date order and catalogued. Through the energy and diplomatic skills of Professor Harvey Dyck, and with the cooperation of the Odessa archivists, the entire surviving Archive has been microfilmed and copies of the film today are

available in selected Mennonite archives and libraries in North America. The Russian-language catalogue to the Archive has been translated and through the efforts of Ingrid Epp and Professor Dyck forms the basis for this Research Guide published in an elegant, if somewhat expensive, edition.

As Epp indicates in her brief comments on using the Research Guide and the microfilms, the Archive consists of 3,618 files containing over 150,000 pages of documents. Approximately 17 per cent of the collection is missing or damaged, most likely due to events associated with World War II.¹ The editors of the Guide do not present a detailed discussion of the contents of the Archive, and no index is provided. For this reason, our intention here is to provide Mennonite readers and researchers with a brief outline of the context, contents and significance of the collection as revealed by a reading of the entries in the Guide.²

The Establishment of the Archive

As an introduction, Dyck provides a brief, colourful account of how the collection was formed, lost and “rediscovered.”³ This is an elaboration of his earlier article in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*.⁴ The key role of the Molochna school teacher Peter J. Braun (1880-1934) in the formation of the collection of documents provides the justification for the naming of the Archive in his honour. To prevent confusion it is important that the Archive also be identified with the Molochna Colony as almost all the papers deal with this Colony, not with other Mennonite settlements. For this reason we would have preferred the title, “The Molochna Mennonite Archive of Peter J. Braun.”

While Braun published an account of the contents of the collection after its seizure in 1929, he failed to provide details of how the collection was assembled and Dyck provides little further information.⁵ Dyck briefly mentions that Mennonites before 1914 were increasingly interested in studying their past, had begun to collect manuscripts and, as a consequence, more historical studies were being written and published. This was as true of Mennonites in Khortitsa [also “Chortitza”] Colony as for those in Molochna Colony. Church conferences of the large Kirchliche Mennonite group discussed the importance of Mennonite history to their attempts at creating unity among Mennonites and plans were drawn up to produce a school textbook on Russian Mennonite history. David H. Epp, the influential minister, writer and publisher, had issued a history of Khortitsa Colony as early as 1889 and he later published selected historical documents. After 1905 some of these were serialized in the newspaper he edited, the *Botschafter*, and he later published books on leading historical figures and accounts of other colonies. Similar material was published in the other Mennonite newspapers, journals and calendars which flourished before 1914.⁶ The most notable history of this period was P.M. Friesen’s massive *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitsche Bruederschaft in Russland* of 1911; Friesen had begun another history before his death in 1914.⁷ It should be remembered that “history,” and any archive, were not

primarily subjects of scholarly concern in this period. In late Imperial Russia, accounts and documents relating to the Mennonite past had important social and political roles to play in a Mennonite world keen to assert its achievements, loyalty and independence.

Braun, who was a member of the Molochna "Mennonite Brethren", had a special interest in history and before 1914 reviewed Russian and German history books in the newspaper, the *Friedensstimme*. Dyck suggests, based on a statement by Braun, that the need to assert Mennonite identity before 1914, followed by the crisis resulting from challenges to Mennonite loyalty during the First World War, stimulated efforts to start this collection of books and documents. In fact, as early as 1912 Braun had proposed an archive as part of a Mennonite Museum, using as its core P.M. Friesen's historical collection.⁸ While anti-German sentiments during the First World War increased the need to identify key documents on Mennonite history, in Molochna this work was concentrated on documents in the Halbstadt Volost [Government District] Office. A few of these documents may have been transferred to Braun's collection, but the rich files of the Office itself were dispersed and/or destroyed during the Civil War.⁹ Braun also appears to have started collecting documents before 1914 with the aim of writing a history of schooling in the Colony to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Molochna School Board in 1919.¹⁰ The Civil War prevented any such publication. When he emigrated from the Soviet Union in 1924, Braun apparently brought a copy of a manuscript on schooling and the Board with him to Germany, but it subsequently was lost.¹¹

Braun's interests help explain the presence of a large number of papers relating to the School Board and other aspects of education in the collection. Braun probably gathered these from the files of the Board and other educational institutions which as a teacher he knew well. But he may have also received a large number of papers from the files of Elder Abram Goerz (1840-1911) whose papers Braun indicated were in the Archive in 1929. Goerz, one of the most influential leaders in Molochna between 1880 and his death, was for many years (1876-1896) the Kirchliche representative on the School Board having himself once been a teacher.¹² The exact contribution of Goerz's papers to the collection is not easy to identify because, as far as they were able, the Soviet cataloguers archived all the documents in date order, rather than in terms of topic or source. But the importance of Goerz as source is clear from a close examination of the later files.

Goerz not only served for many years on the School Board, but he also helped organise the Forestry Service and often negotiated with government officials on behalf of the Colony and the Mennonite people in general.¹³ Moreover, the majority of the Forestry Service files cover the 1880s and 90s, followed by a gap until they suddenly begin again in 1906. In the late 1890s Goerz, who was elder of the important Ohrloff-Halbstadt-Neukirch congregation, became embroiled in controversy over the actions of certain of his relatives. The controversy raged for a number of years, appearing in the pages

of the *Odessaer Zeitung* and in an account published by the Molochna Church Council.¹⁴ Goerz offered to resign, but many in his congregation supported him and the congregation was divided. Goerz, however, withdrew as Church Council representative on the School Board, the Forestry Service and other public bodies until 1906 when, amidst rising concern about government reforms and the Duma, he was recalled to serve his community. In fact, probably on the basis of his experience and his own files, Goerz published in 1907 the first major account of the origins and organization of the Forestry Service.¹⁵ There are other indications of Goerz's contributions to the Archive in the presence of the accounts and reports of the School for Deaf in Tiede, on whose Board he also served and again about which he had published accounts.¹⁶ After 1906 he was manager of the "Home for the Aged" established at Kurushan, on which there are also documents in the archive.¹⁷ But Goerz's actual personal papers and documents on religious matters, except for a few items that may have been muddled with those involving his community activities, are absent from the collection.¹⁸ Presumably his family kept most of his personal papers, especially given the controversy of the 1890s, while his congregational papers were included as part of the congregation's records.

What neither Braun nor Dyck make clear is how well over half the archive as catalogued by the Soviet archivists in 1937 came to be in the collection. These are the papers of the Cornies and Wiebe family, including their personal family files and those of the Agricultural Society. Dyck appears to assume that these papers were part of the Braun collection from early in its formation, and were moved from place to place eventually to return to their original home in the old offices of the Society on the house lot of the Cornies/Wiebe family in the village of Ohrloff.¹⁹ This is undoubtedly incorrect as the documents and books Braun collected were added to the Cornies/Wiebe papers in the early 1920s in an attempt to hide them from the Soviets. In 1974 one of us (Urry) discussed with a former resident of Ohrloff, Gerhard Toews, the mysterious two-storey "Office" he had visited as a child on the house lot of Johann Wiebe, Philipp Wiebe's son and Johann Cornies' grandson. Although more interested in playing with the box of bronze soldiers kept in the Office, Toews remembered seeing rooms full of documents and shelves of books, bound in black. He especially recalled a drawer containing numerous gold coins and medals awarded by the Tsar to the illustrious family. This was during the First World War, so what was known locally as the "Cornies Archive" was still housed in the Agricultural Society's Office and was not part of Braun's original collection. It was these combined collections which were seized in 1929 when Peter Cornies, condemned as a kulak, was thrown out of his family's ancestral home.²⁰

In his earlier report on the archive, Dyck suggested that in addition to historical books listed by Braun in 1929, at least two sets of personal papers were also missing - those of Goerz and the historian P.M. Friesen. Dyck now suggests that the Archive contains all the manuscripts listed by Braun.²¹ As we

have suggested above, the Goerz papers, or at least many of them, probably are included, but it is difficult to identify any papers which might have belonged to Friesen. If the papers were those he used to write his 1911 book, then there should be an extensive collection of documents on religious topics, especially on the origins of the Mennonite Brethren in the Archive. In fact very little material on religious matters is immediately apparent from the listing.²² Friesen's collection, however, would have contained documents and other material not only relating to religion or Molochna, but to other topics and to other Russian Mennonite settlements. This may be one explanation why the Friesen papers appear not to be in the collection. Dyck reports that the official Soviet name for the collection is the "Mennonite Archive Society in the County of Berdiansk, Tavrida Province, 1803-1920", not "The Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive." That is, it was deposited and catalogued as a regional archive dealing with a particular group, not as a general archive on Mennonites in Russia.²³ If the Friesen material was identified as a separate collection because it still was ordered as a distinctive set of papers and clearly was concerned with Mennonites in general, not just the Molochna, could it have been separated from the collection even before it was sent to Odessa? As papers of a figure involved in the political as well as the religious affairs of late Tsarist Russia, could Friesen's collection also have been treated differently from the clearly Molochna-based papers? ²⁴ For instance, the religious papers may have been useful for the mounting of official anti-religious campaigns in the early Soviet period. At the moment we cannot speculate further, but it might be useful to search for the Friesen papers in places like Simferopol, where he lived for many years, or in Kharkov or Kiev, or in specialized collections in the anti-religious organizations.

The Cornies/Wiebe Collection

A rough calculation would suggest that between 65 and 70 percent of the file entries listed in the Research Guide consist of papers from the Cornies/Wiebe Collection and well over 95 percent of the files covering the years between 1820 and the mid 1860s are probably derived from this same source. Therefore, just in terms of its size, the Cornies/Wiebe Collection is a very important part of the entire Molochna Archive. This importance is further enhanced by the fact that a large part of this collection consists of the papers of the Molochna Agricultural Society from its foundation in 1830 to the late 1850s when the Society was controlled by Johann Cornies (1789-1848) and later by his son-in-law, Philipp Wiebe (1816-1870). There are also files on Cornies' earlier efforts to improve agriculture in the Colony. Mixed with these records are the personal papers of the Cornies and Wiebe families, letters and diaries of Cornies from before 1820 and other aspects of the family's affairs. These include documents relating to the control of Johann Cornies' estates at Yushanlee and Tashenak, with mention of his brother David's estate at Altahir and Philipp Wiebe's family estate at Kampenhausen. The accounts and details

of the latter estate continue from the 1850s to 1914. Finally, the papers of Philipp Wiebe's son, Johann Philipp (1849-1918), are also included. Among these are documents from the 1890s when Wiebe, as his father and grandfather had before him, became an important figure in the promotion of agricultural improvements in Molochna, particularly in animal breeding and fruit production. Wiebe also purchased new estates in Siberia as part of the Mennonite expansion into this frontier region before 1914.²⁵

The personal and professional papers of Johann Cornies and Philipp Wiebe are significant as they chronicle perhaps the most important period before the Great Reforms of 1861-1880 when the Agricultural Society was predominant in the affairs of Molochna.²⁶ Between the late 1830s and his death in 1848, Cornies assumed not just economic, but also political control of Molochna and with official backing expanded his influence further afield. It is possible, given the scope and detail of the documents, that David H. Epp consulted the Cornies/Wiebe collection while writing his 1909 biography of Cornies.²⁷ For any modern historian, however, the Cornies/Wiebe papers will have to be interpreted in the context of government policy in the period before the Great Reforms, but after 1836. They will need to be supplemented by other papers of the Guardian's Committee located in Odessa and those of the ministries of the Interior and State Domains situated in archives in St. Petersburg.²⁸ The significance of these papers is not restricted to the study of Mennonites or even foreign colonists, but to an understanding of an important period and subject of Imperial Russian history.

The Society papers in the Molochna Archive include official and unofficial correspondence with visitors, officials and bureaucrats, including members of the scientific intelligentsia.²⁹ There are also detailed reports and statistics on farm production, industry and population including a detailed 1835 census which has already been translated from the Russian and used extensively by genealogists in North America.³⁰ Experiments with new animal breeds and a range of crops are represented in the files as is the establishment of an industrial base of skilled craftsmen in Molochna with the immigration of artisans and their settlement in Neu Halbstadt. Other reports on industry include material on Johann Klassen's cloth factory in Halbstadt, and Cornies' promotion of the use of farm machinery and the establishment of mills.

Cornies' efforts at economic and social improvement extended beyond Molochna and the Mennonites. Included in the collection are extensive papers on the Nogai Tartars, and specific reports on Russian Doukhobor and Molokan sects, and papers on his efforts to train local peasants in new farming techniques. There also are files on the Hutterites relocated from Radichev close to Molochna.³¹ And there are brief references to the Bergthal and Khortitsa Colonies and to the small but influential community in the port of Berdiansk, all of which eventually fell within his orbit of concern.³² Files relating to the new migration from Prussia begin before Cornies' death and continue into the 1850s as the migration continued to the Volga.³³

Cornies' increasing control of Molochna in the late 1830s and early 1840s is represented in documents relating to rules concerning land settlement, the establishment of new farms, improved fire regulations for buildings and the enforcement of obligatory work. These continue into the period of Wiebe's control. The bitter conflict of the 1840s between Cornies and the leaders of the conservative congregations is also represented in the collection.³⁴ But so too are interesting papers from the early 1850s relating to the establishment of the Church Council in Molochna, undoubtedly under the aegis of Wiebe and the Agricultural Society as a way of resolving these earlier differences between the civil and spiritual authorities.³⁵

The importance of education in Cornies' plans is also well represented in the collection. These include plans for a library, support for the Ohrloff School beginning in the 1820s, and his blueprint for extensive reorganisation of schooling in Molochna in the 1840s. This work was of particular concern to Cornies' successor, Philipp Wiebe and resulted in the early 1850s in the establishment of a "Society for the Advancement of Schools," consisting mainly of teachers. This Association was clearly the direct predecessor of the Molochna School Board established in 1869. The interesting reports on the moral condition of the Colony in the late 1850s by members of this Society also are included.³⁶

Following the end of the Crimean War in 1856, an event only briefly covered by separate files, power and influence in Molochna shifted from the Agricultural Society to the District Office.³⁷ The Society's responsibilities were divided with control of agricultural and economic affairs moving to Peter Schmidt of the Steinbach estate and schooling being maintained by Wiebe. For at least a decade after 1856 both he and the larger Ohrloff community lost much power in colony affairs. This lasted until the District Mayor, David Friesen, was overthrown in the mid-1860s following the social upheavals associated with land and other issues.³⁸ Documents relating to the problems of the landless are listed in the Archive's files, including those on the related issues of economic credit, access to rented land and patterns of inheritance.³⁹ It is known that Wiebe was involved in these issues, and these files, possibly combined with his correspondence, will aid further understanding of these events when combined with official Ministry files in Petersburg and Guardian Committee documents in Odessa.

Of special interest to the religious history of Molochna are papers in the Cornies/Wiebe collection that indicate the family's involvement in religious activities with individuals and groups outside the established colony congregations. These begin with the founding of a Molochna branch of the Russian Bible Society before 1820 and subsequent contacts with a variety of religious figures of the European pan-evangelical movement operating in Russia. These contacts caused major problems for the Ohrloff Congregation, which was opposed by conservative Colony congregation leaders.⁴⁰ While imperial support for the Bible Society ended in the 1820s a "Protestant" society was

permitted to operate, supplying Bibles to non-Orthodox groups. This will clarify the extent of the Molochna involvement in this Bible Society. It now appears that either the Cornies/ Wiebe family maintained links with the Society, or the Agricultural Society provided a non-religious base for such contacts, thereby avoiding conflict with conservative forces. These files on the Molochna Branch (1820s to 1856), when combined with Society's archives in Petersburg, will throw new light on the external religious contacts of Mennonites in Molochna before the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren. This will help to counter the established image of Russian Mennonite religious life before the 1860s revivals as being insular and devoid of evangelical interests.⁴¹

Educational Matters and the Molochna School Board

As has been noted above, the files on education are well represented in Cornies/Wiebe Family papers from early in the life of the Colony. They start with Cornies' interests in furthering higher education with the private secondary school established in Ohrloff in the 1820s, leading on through his reforms for elementary education in the 1840s, Philipp Wiebe's establishment of the Society for the Advancement of Schools in the 1850s and the establishment of the Molochna School Board in 1869 and its policies and programmes and other records almost until 1914. This means, at least for the development of elementary education, there is now a very significant record in a single archive. Even so, developments in Molochna will need to be checked with official government agencies, local and central, with which Mennonites dealt to produce a fuller picture of the great importance of education in the development of the Colony.

The papers of the School Board, which mostly deal with elementary village schools and their teachers, cover a wide range of topics. These include correspondence, accounts, reports and appeals as well as conferences for Board members and later for teachers. There are records for pupil attendance, examinations and exercises, teaching plans, programmes and curricula information, teacher examinations, contracts and reports of inspections. The relations between the government and the Board are represented in separate files as are issues concerning the introduction of the Russian language into schools in the late 1880s and early 1890s; these and similar topics are probably also touched upon in the general conference files.⁴² For a brief period between 1884 and 1888 the School Board also was involved with Mennonite schools in the Crimea, and possibly the private settlement of Schoenfeld on Ekaterinoslav settled by people from Molochna. The existence Schoenfeld school files, however, was destroyed in the Revolution and Civil War, and probably reflects the removal of the files to Molochna by refugees from Schoenfeld in 1918/1919.

Details on secondary education are not strongly represented in the collection by separate files, although the general Board files probably do contain more material. The Ohrloff private school has files from its foundation, but

then only occasional files from the 1890s and early 1900s. The Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld schools only have brief references. But there is a file on the early private girls' school in Halbstadt, but apparently little on their later growth.⁴³ Although Braun indicated in his 1920s listing that there were files on the Teachers' Seminary in Halbstadt, few actually appear.⁴⁴ Also of interest are files of professional teachers' associations, begun after the 1905 Revolution.⁴⁵

The Forestry Service Papers and Mennonite Alternative Service

In his listing of the collection, Braun stated that it contained the "archive" of the President of the Service, but as we have argued above, it would appear that these were supplemented by documents from Elder Goerz. Whatever their origin, the files on the Service are particularly voluminous from its establishment in the 1880s until about 1900. There is then a gap until files, mainly dealing with the presidency and management, are listed for 1906 and 1907. This is followed with material from 1909-1912 and reports of the meetings of the representatives of the Service for 1914 through to its demise in 1917. A number of the early files are poorly dated and are listed out of sequence in the Cornies/Wiebe files of the 1840s and 1860s.⁴⁶

The Forestry files are interleaved by date with the School Board files and Johann Wiebe's papers. It is unclear if these papers have a particular Molochna-focus or cover all aspects of the Forestry Service's activities. The papers are particularly strong on the early establishment of the Service with details on the building of the camps, clothing of recruits and regular management reports from each camp. There are large collections of documents containing camp accounts and bills for the 1880s and 1890s, enough, no doubt, to keep an accountant busy for years to come. The camps covered in the files are Veliko Anodal, New and Old Berdiansk, Vladimirorov and Razin. There are also files, though mostly missing, on the Crimean units organized to counter the phylloxera threat to the vineyards of the peninsula. In some cases lists of recruits are obviously included.

The organisation of the central management of the Service, election of the President and other representatives and their correspondence is included for the years covered. The files promise for the first time to reveal how the Service was managed and financed at the central, district and local levels. The correspondence with village and district authorities should reveal important aspects of regionality and the requirements for Mennonites to act as a unified people. The role of the religious leaders, congregations and conferences in this process should be much clearer. The Service was funded through assessments based on population and assets and there are indications of files with important details on the wealth of estate owners, industrialists and other business peoples.⁴⁷ There are files which indicate how village and district assessments were established and problems encountered such as tardiness in paying levies during the early 1890s.⁴⁸ This was to become a major problem before 1914 and it is a pity that the archive does not include detailed files for these crucial years.

While the final report of the congress of Forestry deputies held in 1917 is missing from the collection, printed copies of the minutes of this meeting are available in Canada. The 1914 meeting is also missing, but the local conference of civil and church leaders and the President of the Forestry Service in response to the outbreak of the First World War is included. So are the reports of the congress of deputies for the Service for 1915 and 1916.⁴⁹ There are only a few files on the formation of Mennonite recruits for service in the hospital and medical services, however, and the archives of the various units to which Mennonites were attached are probably in Moscow and Petersburg.⁵⁰

Mennonites and the Russian State 1900-1920

The Cornies/Wiebe papers contain details of the interaction between Mennonites, the state and its agencies and, no doubt, other material on these matters is contained in the papers of the School Board and the Forestry Service. Although there are also files which contain other material on Mennonite interaction with the state from earlier periods, the major files are from the period before, during and following the First World War.⁵¹ Given that the collection was assembled between 1914 and 1922, one would have expected it to contain rich holdings for this period. In fact, the opposite is the case as only around five percent of the files date from this period. Perhaps at first, current history was considered less important than the more distant past. As has been discussed, the papers that do survive from the period after 1900 deal primarily with local education and the Forestry Service.

There are two files, however, which hint that the Mennonites as a community had begun to discuss political issues prior to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, a war which was to herald a new era of reforms.⁵² In the period between the Revolution of 1905 and the outbreak of the First World War, the Mennonites energetically defended both their political and social status and their religious and cultural integrity. Unfortunately, the collection adds little to the extensive public discussions in the two Mennonite newspapers, *Die Friedensstimme* (1903-14) and *Der Botschafter* (1905-1914).⁵³

More disappointing is the apparent absence of materials on Mennonite interaction with the Russian state during World War I.⁵⁴ As German-language newspapers were closed during the War, material on this period is lacking. The extremely limited Mennonite historiography of the War written to date is therefore based almost entirely on personal memoirs. It is possible that internal documents on Mennonite efforts to defend their property from the 1915 anti-German expropriation laws have been permanently lost. Their appeals to government and politicians, however, undoubtedly survive. To this end Mennonite historians should consult the records of the central government's "Commission on the Battle with German Oppression" in the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg.⁵⁵

Our current source base is particularly weak for the fascinating period between the February and October revolutions of 1917, when it appeared that a

new democratic Russian state might emerge. The German-language Mennonite press was still not allowed to publish, so printed sources from this period are sparse. Most Mennonite memoirs quite naturally skip over this brief period and instead focus their attention on the dramatic and tragic events of 1918 to 1922. Nor can one turn to central Petersburg archives to fill this source gap. During this period the government had far more important concerns than the continued harassment of their “Germans” and Mennonites. On this topic, the Braun collection thankfully does contain files of a few hundred pages of invaluable material. These obviously reflect the Molochna Mennonite elite’s efforts to develop strategies to respond to the radically altered political situation. These include papers on elections to the proposed Constituent Assembly, the formation of a Mennocentrum and the discussions with other “German colonists.”⁵⁶ Also included are files relating to the calling of an All-Mennonite Congress in 1917 and the minutes of the Ohrloff Congress held in the difficult circumstances in the late summer of 1918.⁵⁷ But beyond these sources the collection contains little else on the period from 1918 to 1920. Mennonite historians, however, will have little cause to complain of a lack of sources on this period. Mennonite newspapers from this period are available even if their publication was irregular, and there are other contemporary newspapers in German, Russian and Ukrainian to check.⁵⁸ Finally, given the massive documentation in regional south Ukrainian archives, there should be decades of future research available for industrious historians.⁵⁹

Other Molochna Material Needed for a History of the Colony

Although the Archive is mainly concerned with Molochna, it does not contain sufficient sources needed to write a detailed history of the Colony. Of course, no single archive ever covers all aspects of a topic or place. But the Molochna Mennonite Archive of Peter J. Braun, although very important for any study of pre-Reform Mennonite life and topics such as education, alternative service and political events in the period 1914 to 1920, is insufficient to understand important aspects of the history of Molochna, let alone the complex history of all Mennonites in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. For instance, there is practically nothing on the 1870s emigration to North America.⁶⁰

With respect to the Molochna Colony there are few documents on the civil government of the Colony from the village to the level of the District Office(s), except those papers involving official communications with the Agricultural Society, the School Board and Forestry Service. This is especially true of the complex functions fulfilled by the District Offices in Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld before 1914. There are no detailed documents on civil government, elections or its administration and management. The District Office was responsible for law and order and the court system, the registration of Mennonites, the gathering of local and other taxes and handling the funds for daughter colonies and their initial administration and management.⁶¹ Such

records would provide insights into the economic and social life of the Colony, information basically missing from the Archive for the period after 1860.⁶² The reason why these papers were not included in the Archive is that they were part of the ongoing civil administration of the colony before 1917 and were subsequently lost in the Revolution and Civil War.

Also missing from the Archive is any detailed material on the religious life of the Colony, particularly the records of the congregations. Again, this is probably because such records belonged to continuing congregations before and after 1917. This includes records relating to membership (baptisms, marriages, deaths and transfers), local and congregational meetings, most of the papers of the Molochna Church Board and their conferences with the ministers and congregations of other Mennonite colonies. Unlike the emigration of the 1870s, that of the 1920s did not involve entire congregations, so to our knowledge no congregational records were removed to Canada at that time.⁶³ Also missing are the papers of key ministers who often assembled much of the congregational correspondence and other church material. Many such documents were dispersed within families, rather than accumulated in any central, congregational collection.

Papers of important community leaders: civil officials, school teachers, estate owners, industrialists, millers and merchants also appear not to be represented in the collection outside those of the Cornies/Wiebe families. Again, much of this material will have been lost, although some records relating to Molochna-linked estate owners and businessmen probably has survived in other regional collections such as those in Berdiansk, Melitopol, Mariupol, and Simferopol.

Finally, the Peter J. Braun Archive is almost entirely concerned with the Imperial period up to 1917. The Molochna Colony, however, survived as a Mennonite settlement until the 1940s and documents relating to this Soviet period are entirely absent. Mennonite history for Braun the archivist may have ended with the collapse of the Mennonite Commonwealth, but in reality it continued. Numerous documents on this fascinating later period are available in archival collections in Russia and Ukraine and Mennonite researchers will have to rely on the good will and assistance of local archivists to reconstruct the history of this neglected aspect of the history of Molochna.

Conclusion

The Braun Archive is an important collection for anyone interested in the history of Russian Mennonite life in Imperial Russia. The listing of the contents of this collection provides an initial glimpse of what the opening of the archives in Russia and Ukraine promises for Mennonite and other researchers, amateur and professional. For this we all owe a debt to Harvey Dyck and Ingrid Epp.

Notes

¹ Ingrid I. Epp, "Using the microfilm and its research guide," xxv.

² We have not actually consulted the contents of the files themselves; this discussion is based almost entirely on a consideration of the listing as it appears in the Guide.

³ "Introduction: Recovering an Inheritance," xi-xxiv.

⁴ Harvey L. Dyck, "Odyssey to Odessa: Fresh Sources and Perspectives in Russian Mennonite Studies," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 65 (1991), 437-49.

⁵ Peter J. Braun, "Archiv von Bolschewisten zerstört: Wichtige Urkunden der Mennoniten in Russland vernichtet." *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 1 (1936), 32-36; Dyck, "Introduction," xvii.

⁶ See David G. Rempel, "An introduction to Russian Mennonite historiography," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48 (1974), 409-446 which deals mainly with Khortitsa accounts and particularly the work of David H. Epp; Rempel's promised other papers on Khortitsa and Molochna historiography were not completed before his death.

⁷ Peter M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland... Halbstadt* (Raduga, 1911). Translated into English, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno: Christian Press, 1978).

⁸ Peter J. Braun, review of P. M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, in *Friedensstimme*, 10 (1 January 1912), 5-7; Braun wrote: "Es waere durchaus wuensenswert, dass das ganze geschichtliche Material, das Friesen gesammelt und benutzt hat, sorgfaeltig aufbewahrt bliebe, etwa in einem gruendenden Mennonitischen Museum mit Archive haetten wir ein solches, dann wuerde ueberhaupt vieles erhalten bleiben zu Nutz und Frommen der Nachwelt, was setzt unwiederbringlich verloren geht." p.5ft.

⁹ Among these documents may have been files 1-6 of the Guide dating from the foundation of the Molochna colony; aspects of schooling (2013, 2021) on the rights of Mennonites (f. 2117/2784 dated 1869-1916; and f. 1888), appeals to the Tsar (1827) and records of loyal gifts of horses to the military (1298). The missing early material on the lists of early settlers may have been stolen by the Nazis during World War II, as under the direction of Karl Stumpp the collection of such material was given priority because of SS interest in recruiting from the Volksdeutschen and their racial purity first had to be established as a matter of priority. Stumpp later published some of the material he "liberated" and Benjamin Unruh apparently was also a recipient of similar documents for his own research, driven in part by similar concerns.

¹⁰ Dyck refers to the Board as a Council, although the use of the term "board" is well established. For a good overview of Mennonite schools, schooling and the organization of education in prerevolutionary Russia see Adolf Ens, "Mennonite education in Russia," *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lorenz*, ed. John Friesen (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), 75-97.

¹¹ The basis of his working papers appear in f. 3026 and what is probably a draft of his manuscript in f.3616. In his article on "Education among the Mennonites in Russia" in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* [henceforth *ME*] (Vol. 2, 157) Braun cites a manuscript entitled "Der Molotschnaer Mennonitische Schulrat." The Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, which also has Braun's official qualification papers and some of his post-emigration correspondence, has a manuscript by Braun on the Halbstadt Lehrerseminar (1878-1922), written to assess the needs for the reconstruction of Mennonite institutions following the Civil War (in A.A. Friesen Collection, 60-9).

¹² A[braham] B[raun], Goerz, Abraham, *ME*, 2, 536. On his important roles in schools and the fact that he must have held papers on the Molochna School Board see *Die Schulen in den*

Mennoniten Kolonien an der Molotschna im Suedlichen Russland dargestellt von dem Kirchen=Aeltesten Abraham Goerz und herausgegeben von dem Molotschner Mennoniten-Kirchenkonvent (Berdiansk: E. Kylius, 1882). This "brochure" is probably that referred to in file 2298.

¹³ File 3507, unfortunately missing from the archive, involves the visit by Mennonite deputies in 1906 (not 1907 as listed) to St. Petersburg to meet the Duma representative M.V. Rodzianko and government official Count Heyden on government policy, particularly with regard to military service; Goerz was an important member of this group.

¹⁴ *Klarlegung der Stellung des Molotschnaer Mennoniten Kirchenconvents zu dem Ohrloffter Aeltestenstreit* (Berdiansk: J.A. Ediger, 1899).

¹⁵ Abram Goerz, *Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Forstdienstes der Mennoniten in Russland, nach urkundenlichen Akten zusammengestellt* (Gross Tokmak: H. Lenzmann, 1907); cf. Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study of Church-State Relations, 1789-1936 (Ph.D. Diss., University of Minnesota, 1984).

¹⁶ Abram Goerz, "Kurzgefasster Bericht ueber die Marienschule fuer Taubstumme in Blumenort in Suedrussland," *Jahrbuch der Alevangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten-Gemeinden*, ed., H.G. Mannhardt (Danzig, 1888); Abram Goerz, "Festrede auf dem 25-Jaehrigen Jubilaem der Taubstummenanstalt in Tiege," *Botschafter* 43/44 (4-17 June 1910). The files on the School can be found in f. 2653, 2654, 2710, 2812, 2851, 2936, 3004, 3019, 3066, 3152, 3399, 3436, 3445, 3450, 3484, 3499.

¹⁷ See f. 3449, 3468 (missing). There is also a file (3414) on a constitution for a "Shelter for the Poor in Halbstadt" from around 1902 and an invitation to support the mental hospital at Bethania from 1906 (3414). On these institutions see also James Urry, "The Cost of Community: The Funding and Economic Management of the Mennonite Commonwealth Before 1914," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1992), 22-55.

¹⁸ These include documents on the General Conference of Mennonites 1883 (2472) 1884 (2542 missing, but see 2563) 1892 (3013), the Church Councils of Molochna for 1880, 1884, 1887 (f. 2333), 1883 (2443), 1896 (3239), 1910 (3539), the Molochna Elders' Conferences 1883 (2485), 1892 (2982 missing); the Ohrloff-Neukirch congregation 1897 (3286), 1906 (3480; 3485), some correspondence of Elder Goerz for 1910 (3541), and church correspondence and baptismal certificates probably relating to Goerz for 1892-94 (3126). In addition there is a file (3470) from 1905 on a constitution for a School for Mennonite preachers, an idea discussed on numerous occasions between the 1890s and 1914.

¹⁹ Dyck, "Introduction," xv.

²⁰ Dyck quotes a resident of Ohrloff noting in a contemporary letter to Canada that the archive had been seized (Dyck, "Introduction," xv) but does not note the significance of her referring to it as "the Kornies archive." See *Letters From Susan: A Woman's View of the Russian Mennonite Experience* (1828-1941), ed. and trans., John B. Toews (North Newton: Bethel College, 1988), 60; Susan Toews was the sister of Gerhard Toews noted above.

²¹ Dyck, "Odyssey to Odessa," 445; Dyck, "Introduction," xvii.

²² The only document on the Mennonite Brethren secession apparent from the listing is probably from the Cornies/Wiebe collection (f.1528). Apart from the religious papers probably from the Goerz collection (see n.16 above; none of these probably deal with the Mennonite Brethren) and the material on the Bible Society and related activities from the Cornies/Wiebe Collection (see below). The only other documents obviously on religious topics are an account of Baptists and Mennonites in Ekaterinoslav province in 1880 (2302) and on the Russian Stundists in 1899 (3350). Both these could have come from Goerz's papers.

²³ In a recent survey of material on foreign "German" colonists in Odessa archives, the Archive's title is translated into German slightly differently: Mennonitengemeinde des Melitopoler

Kreises im Taurischen Gouvernement; see Olga Konovalova, "Deutsche Kolonisten in Dokumenten des Staatlichen Gebietsarchivs Odessa," *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur der Russlanddeutschen* 5 (1995), 148-49.

²⁴ On Friesen's political activities when living in the Crimea in 1905/06 see Terry Martin, "The Mennonites and the Russian State Duma, 1905-1914," *The Donald W. Treadgold Papers in Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies* 4 (Seattle: The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, 1996), 11-20

²⁵ See Nikolai Regehr, "Johann Philipp Wiebe: Sein Leben und Wirken in den Mennoniten-Siedlungen in Russland," *Zwei Vordermaenner des suedrusslaendischen Mennonitentums*, David H. Epp, et.al. (Steinbach: Echo Verlag, 1952). Files 3536 and 3554 deal with his Siberian purchases in Tobolsk province in 1910.

²⁶ See David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48 (1974), 5-54; James Urry, *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia* (Winnipeg: Hyperion, 1989), chapters 6-9.

²⁷ David H. Epp, *Johann Cornies: Zuege aus seinem Leben und Wirken* (Berdiansk, 1909). This book was republished in Steinbach, Canada in 1946 as part of the Echo Verlag series (Buch) and recently translated by Peter Pauls as *Johann Cornies* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1995). An indication that this might be a possibility is a letter from Epp in the 1900s in a file of the Society, see 636.

²⁸ The late David G. Rempel copied a number of these documents in the then Soviet Archives in Leningrad in the 1960s and his microfilms are available for research in North America. From material he sent to one of us (JU) in the 1980s, it would appear that some of the documents Cornies prepared are preserved in both Petersburg and the Molochna Archive of Peter J. Braun. On the other Odessa archives, including the files of the Guardians Committee, see Konovalova, "Deutsche Kolonisten in Dokumenten," 146-49.

²⁹ Of particular interest are files detailing Cornies' archaeological exploration of kurgan, ancient burial mounds in southern Russia, making Cornies an early pioneer in archaeological exploration in Russia.

³⁰ This listing which is already in widespread use, will be published separately.

³¹ On the Hutterites see files 316, 415a, 510, 804, 947, 967, 1017, 1087, 1089, 1169, 1222, 1402, 1765, 1817, 1945, 2004, 2072, 2092.

³² The Bergthal material relates to school accounts for 1845/46 (1341), a list of colonies in the Mariupol area, possibly in 1860 (1901), and there is a letter from Elder Heinrich Wiens of 1874 (2202) probably from the Goerz papers and most likely dealing with emigration. The Khortitsa material relates to the period when the Society attempted to control its development (1846-49), and a later summary of the Colony's population from 1885 (2582). The Berdiansk references are in files 1564, 1866, 1877, 2088.

³³ The Prussian emigration references are in files 1257-58, 1271, 1288, 1305, 1504, 1647. There is also a reference to a document in Russian on the Mennonites in Poland from 1894 (3119).

³⁴ Urry, *None but Saints*, Chapter 7; see files 837, 845, 1169, 1229, 1232; other files will undoubtedly contain more, for instance, the exchanges with the President of the Guardian's Committee von Hahn (eg. 889, 1361).

³⁵ Files 1633, possibly 1661, 1669.

³⁶ File 1820, consisting of 112 pages, contains the responses of school teachers on moral conditions in Molochna in 1856; these first were mentioned, although not in detail, by Peter Braun's brother, Abraham, in his article, "Die Kirchlichen Spaltungen in den Russland-Deutsch Mennoniten Gemeinden," *Beitrage zur Geschichte der Mennoniten: Festschrift fuer D.Christian Neff* (Weirhoff, 1938), 8-9.

³⁷ Files 1738, 1776.

³⁸ See Urry, *None but Saints*, 196-206.

³⁹ On the land issues see 1487, 1925; a list of landless for 1846 is in 1416; on rented land, 1472, 1518; credit, 1833, 1896; inheritance, 1897, 1919, 1953 (on this issue cf. n. 62 below).

⁴⁰ As well as the early contact with the Bible Society (files 6, 26, 28), the files include references to contact with the Scots missionary, Alexander Paterson (39 cf. 1060?), the Basel Missionary Society (51), J. C. Moritz, the missionary to the Jews (871) and Daniel Schlatter, the Swiss missionary to the Nogai Tartars (873). On all these contacts see James Urry "'Servants from Far': Mennonites and the Pan-Evangelical Impulse in Early Nineteenth Century Russia," *MQR* 61 (1987), 213- 27.

⁴¹ It is not surprising that Jacob Martens, a member of the Ohrloff congregation, was prominent in the work of the Bible Branch, see James Urry "John Melville and the Mennonites: A British Evangelist in South Russia, 1834-ca. 1875," *MQR* 54 (1980), 305-22.

⁴² See files 2590, 3001, 3028 in particular; the 1889 Church Council's response to the order that school prayers to the Tsar be spoken in Russian is noted in 2821.

⁴³ On Ohrloff see files 20, 126, 3125, 3129, 3384, 3521; on Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld 2712-13, 3291. The "Tochterschule" sponsored by Abraham Dueck of Pordenau in 1884 is mentioned in 2560. There is also a file (2744) concerning awards given to Helen Wiebe, probably a daughter of Johann Philipp Wiebe, in 1886-89 by the Halbstadt Girls' School.

⁴⁴ Files 2296, 3243 and two entries, the first (2296) covering education for the period 1880-1922, the second (2434) the programmes for the period 1880-1922; both of these may be by Braun, see n. 11 above.

⁴⁵ Before 1917 in files 3438, 3483, and from 1917 to 1920 in files 3601, 3603, 3609, 3611 and 3615.

⁴⁶ Files 779 (missing), 797, 1863, 1970.

⁴⁷ Files 3100, 3257 (1897), 3334, 3372 for Berdiansk residents in 1900.

⁴⁸ Files 3124, 3133; 3358 may record "inspection" trips when properties were assessed. Listings of properties in 1910 and 1911 in the newly formed settlements at Arkadak and in Saratov may well be related to valuations involved with Forestry Service levies, see 3546, 3550, 3552, 3556.

⁴⁹ 1914 Congress (3526 missing), local conference (3669), Congresses for 1915 (3575), 1916 (3578) and 1917 (3587 missing). The printed version of the 1917 meeting is in the archive of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Canada) in Winnipeg.

⁵⁰ The files included in the Archive are 3527, 3577, 3582 (probably referring to those Mennonite recruits taken captive by the Germans), 3583. There is very little on the earlier Russo-Japanese War except files on welfare organizations probably intended to support the families of non-Mennonite soldiers, see 3447, 3469 (missing) and 3469.

⁵¹ For the nineteenth century see files 2588 which contain appeals to the authorities on the control of schools (1885), 2871 addresses to the Tsar (1890); see also n.42 above.

⁵² These include a congress of Mennonite deputies held at the estate of David Dick at Apanlee in 1900 (3412) and discussions with other south Russian "German" colonists in Halbstadt in 1903 (3427, 3430)

⁵³ See files 2771, 2889, 3442 on preparations for elections in 1905, and files 3462 and 3464 on changes to citizenship. File 3462, with the hopeful title of "Political Platform - Notes" contains the platform of P.M. Friesen's political party, which was published in 1905 in *Der Botschafter*, "Martin: The Mennonites and the Russian State Duma," 11-20, On the importance of the newspaper reports for understanding the politics of this period see Leonard G. Friesen, "Mennonites in Russia and the Russian Revolution of 1905: Experiences, Perceptions and Responses," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 62 (1988), 42-55.

⁵⁴ See note 50 above on the few sources relating to alternative service.

⁵⁵ Personal communication to Terry Martin [TM] from Eric Lohr of Harvard University, who is currently researching a dissertation on the “internal enemy” during World War I. In 1992, TM worked briefly in this archive and was able to consult the card catalogue, which also revealed extensive records on Mennonite alternative military service during World War I. In addition, TM looked at the records of the Ministry of Interior’s Department of Spiritual Affairs, which contain the extensive materials collected by S.D. Bondar in 1915 for his *Sekta mennonitov v Rossii* (Petrograd, 1916). Various published and unpublished writings by David G. Rempel and his brother Johann, are highly relevant to this issue especially their “Of things Remembered: Recollections of War, Revolution and Civil War, 1914-1920.”

⁵⁶ For the elections see file 3591 (cf. 3593), the Mennocentrum 3591, (cf. 3595), and for discussions with other German groups which continued into the Civil War period see 3602, 3603, 3606, 3614.

⁵⁷ On the 1917 Congress, file 3598, on the Ohrloff Congress, file 3607 (dated September 18-21, although the printed minutes report the dates as August 14-18); cf. John B. Toews ed., *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1975), 449-80.

⁵⁸ John B. Toews has made extensive use of the Mennonite newspapers published during the Civil War; see for example his *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton: Faith and Life, 1982), Chapter 6.

⁵⁹ The regional archivists in the areas of Mennonite settlement such as Dmitrii Meshkov at the Dnepropetrovsk State Archive and Aleksandr Tadeev of the Zaporozhe Regional State Archives have already done important work in identifying sources on Mennonites and other “Germans” during the Imperial, revolutionary and Soviet periods.

⁶⁰ A single file (2276) on military service in the 1870s is missing.

⁶¹ On land purchases in Zagradovka in 1886 see file 2655 (missing); in Samara 1891-93 (3022); in Terek in 1901 (3394 missing) and in the Arkadak/Saratov settlements 1910-11 see n. 48 above.

⁶² See especially the interesting papers on inheritance, a crucial area where Mennonite customs, religious principles, legal rules of the state and new economic challenges combined to create problems (files 1897, 1919, 1953 [missing] 2270 [missing], 2214, 2307-08, 2327, 2329).

⁶³ What happened to them is unclear. They may have been seized or hidden, and subsequently lost but reports by Nazi officials indicate that some were still available for checking the purity of Mennonite marriage and descent in 1942/43. The regional archivists (n.58) might help locate any that have survived.