

“Poor and Simple?”: The Economic Background of the Mennonite Immigrants to Manitoba, 1874-79

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I recently re-read a statement that the 1870s Mennonite immigrants to Manitoba “consisted primarily of Chortitza people, descendants of those poor and simple pioneers who in the previous century had left Prussia for Russia.”¹ This allegation was made by historian Frank H. Epp in *Mennonites in Canada, Volume One* (1974), an official history commissioned by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.²

The implication is almost condescending in its scope, implying that the lowest classes of Mennonite society emigrated from Prussia to Imperial Russia in 1788, with some going on to Bergthal and Fuerstenland in the 1830s and 1850s, and then to Canada in the 1870s with an overall impoverishment of genetic, spiritual and socio-economic conditions and values. This view is typical of much that has been written about the 1870s migration, and is largely based on popular mythology and without much apparent attempt to research and evaluate facts and statistics.

Three reasons have traditionally been cited for the emigration of 17,000 Mennonites from Russia during the 1870s, namely, the socio-economic, educational and religious factors.³ To these should be added the fears of many regarding liberty and justice within Russian society, as can be seen in the writings of Abraham F. Thiessen (1832-89) and Cornelius Jansen (1822-94).⁴ My research indicates that

of these factors, concerns regarding religious freedom were the most immutable.⁵

Conventional historiography holds that the 1870s migration was largely a flight of the landless and the conservative who were rigidly opposed to theological or social change, often derisively referred to as the "Kanadier." Simultaneously, it was claimed, those remaining in the homeland were the landowners, the educated and the cultured, who embarked upon a golden era once the lower elements were removed. In 1981 Professor Peter A. Koop wrote that, "Because [the 1870s] emigration was born in the landless strife in the colonies and helped to resolve many issues, Mennonite communities blossomed in both the old and the new environment."⁶

This interpretation was solidified with the publication of Peter M. Friesen's massive historical work in 1910, only a few years prior to the collapse of the Mennonite Commonwealth in the Russian Revolution.⁷

P. M. Friesen is representative of the triumphalist view: "... the most extreme element, incapable of God-willed and God-permitted closer association with Russian society. . . moves away. The Mennonite sheep stall which is far too low, too narrow, and too confined, is set in motion and ventilated. . . . Those who have left have the greatest aversion to culture. . . . Thank God that they left! . . . their children came in contact with a Christian culture which would not have happened in Russia.. . . it was good for Russia which is now free of these unmanageable, pious foster children whom it was impossible to satisfy."⁸ This school of thought has been characterized as "Molotschna pietist triumphalism."

This view of the Kanadier was accepted as unquestioned truth by those remaining in Russia after 1874, many of whom emigrated to Canada in the 1920s where they were known as the "Russlaender."⁹ My late friend John Dyck once told me that this myth was inspired in part by the desire of Mennonites remaining in Russia to distinguish themselves from the "bad" Mennonites who had left and prove that they were "good" Mennonites, loyal to the Russian State.

In any event, recent scholarship has questioned some of these traditional models for interpreting the migration and the integration of immigrant communities into host societies.¹⁰ It is widely understood that economics invariably played a role in important decisions such as group migration, not necessarily as a sign of poverty but as a strategy for economic advancement.¹¹

The purpose of this paper is to present economic data pertaining to the groups who settled in Manitoba in 1874 and thus to provide an alternative interpretation of the socio-economic background of these immigrants. This revisionist interpretation suggests that the immigrants were not poorer than the Mennonites who remained in Imperial Russia, and arguably much more economically secure than the large percentage of those who remained landless in Russia after 1880.

Russian Mennonite Society

To set the stage for this discussion it will be helpful to refer briefly to the

socio-economic structure of Russian-Mennonite society. It is well documented that the mother colonies--the Chortitza Colony (founded in 1789) and the Molotschna Colony (founded in 1804)--moved very quickly from full and egalitarian land ownership to the development of a large landless class.

P. A. Koop has provided the following statistics regarding the Chortitza Old Colony: "The 1500 people in 1796 grew to 4098 in 1825. The 1825 population consisted of 792 families. Of these, 460 were landowners. By 1848, in spite of the establishment of a daughter colony at Bergthal, its population was 7217, with the same number of landowning families. However, the number of landless families now stood at 673."¹²

According to the 1808 Revisions-Liste, 364 of the 371 families in the Molotschna in that year were *Vollwirten*, that is, farmers owning a full farm of 65 *desiatini* (1 *desiatina* equals 2.7 acres), or 165 acres.¹³ Significant class distinctions developed quickly.¹⁴ According to Dr. David G. Rempel, by 1841 1700 out of 2733 families in the Molotschna were landless.¹⁵ By 1865 this had increased to 2356 landless families, of whom 1063 were *Anwohner*, while 1293 owned small farms.¹⁶ In addition, there were 1384 landed families while another 490 families owned or rented land adjacent to the Molotschna Colony.

By 1867 only thirty-eight percent of families in the Molotschna and forty percent in the Chortitza Colony belonged to the full-farmer, landowning class.

Table 1. Molotschna Land Ownership Patterns

Year	<i>Vollwirthen</i>	Landless/Small holdings	Total
1808	364	7	371
1841	1033	1700	2733
1865	1384	2356	4803

In spite of the emigration of one-third of the populace to North America and a great deal of land purchasing activity, the situation in Imperial Russia did not improve. Statistics are sparse but P. M. Friesen does provide a valuable sketch of the socio-economic situation as of 1910, stating that there were 4000 *Vollwirten* among a population of 80,000 to 100,000.¹⁷ At an assumed ratio of five members per family this would mean that twenty to twenty-five percent were full landowners. The remaining 12,000 families, noted Friesen, were small farmers, fruit and vegetable growers, owning less than sixteen *desiatini*, as well as the *Anwohner* who worked for their *Vollwirt* neighbours or in the factories of Chortitza. In addition, there were three hundred estate owners holding anywhere from 270 to 18,000 acres.¹⁸ Although these figures represented the Russian Mennonite community a generation after the 1870s migration, they do suggest quite a different picture from that presented in traditional historiography.

In 1886, 8449 Mennonites in Hanover, Douglas and Rineland Municipalities

occupied 1470 farm units with an average of 161 acres each in the West Reserve and 197 acres each in the East Reserve.¹⁹ Starting in the 1880s, newspapers such as the *Mennonitische Rundschau* regularly included appeals for help from impoverished Mennonites in Russia, appeals which were invariably responded to favourably by their co-religionists in Manitoba.

These figures simply do not support the thesis that the 1870s emigrants were of the landless class. Clearly, further consideration is required to determine the socio-economic status of these emigrants. My intention is to deal specifically with the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), Bergthaler and Fuerstenlaender, the three founding denominations of the Mennonite community in Western Canada.

The Bergthaler

In many ways the Bergthaler were the most representative of the Kanadier, as their migration represented the exodus not only of an entire *Gemeinde* but of a complete territorial community.²⁰ It is, however, difficult to obtain a detailed economic picture of the Bergthal Colony.

Perhaps because of the strident squabbling over wealth and status taking place on the Molotschna Colony some 100 miles to the northwest, the Bergthaler tended to be modest about their financial situation. Their *Aeltester*, Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), for example, quotes statistics that the 500 Bergthaler migrant families included 145 landed farmers and concluded that "... most of [his] people. . . were poor."²¹ Often statements such as these have been considered in isolation from their context or taken in support of the view that only the poor emigrated.²²

When considered in a comparative way, however, such information becomes more significant. In his study *Unsere Kolonien*, Alexander Klaus provided data for 1867 which showed that with regard to average farm size and percentage of farmers who were landowners, Chortitz, Molotschna and Bergthal were very similar.²³ For example, the number of landowning farmers was between thirty-six and forty per cent for all three colonies.

These findings are substantiated by other sources as well.²⁴ In his 1908 book *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, Franz Isaac found that seventy-one per cent of Molotschna families in 1865 were landless, an identical figure to Gerhard Wiebe's findings for Bergthal.²⁵ Clearly, Bergthal was a representative Mennonite community, and not, as sociologist E. K. Francis has alleged, "... an economic failure."²⁶

The astute observer might point out that the average Bergthal farm would have been worth less than its counterpart in the two more established mother colonies. But I would counter with the fact that the Bergthal settlement had existed for only forty years, thus making it only half as old as the others. Although the number of landless appears to be about the same, there was a greater sense of Christian community in Bergthal so that there was less tendency for wealthy individuals or groups to move out of the settlement on their own, as had happened to a considerable degree in the Molotschna.²⁷

Table 2. Land Ownership Distribution 1867

Category	Chortitz	Bergthal	Molotschna
Arable Land	29,776	9492	103,901
Total Families	1451	397	4229
<i>Desiatina</i> per Family	20.5	23.9	24.5
<i>Landowners</i>			
65 <i>Desiatini</i>	320	112	290
32 <i>Desiatina</i>	257	32	322
Total Landowners	577	144	1620
Percentage	40%	36%	38%
<i>Anwohner:</i>			
16 <i>Desiatina</i> or less	46	5	1304
Landless	828	248	1313
Total <i>Anwohner</i>	874	253	2617
Percentage	60%	64%	62%

Additional statistics from A. Klaus' work support the proposition that the Bergthaler were representative of the socio-economic situation among the Russian Mennonites.²⁸

Table 3. Comparative Land Usage 1867

Category	Chortitz	Bergthal	Molotschna
Number of Families	1,451	397	4,229
Yards and Plantations	494	220	2,461
<i>Desiatina</i> per Family	.34	.55	.58
Cultivated Land	8,991	2,747	34,633
<i>Desiatina</i> per Family	6.19	5.9	8.1
Pasture	14,235	4,997	41,293
<i>Desiatina</i> per Family	9.81	12.58	9.76
Hay Field (<i>Heuschlag</i>)	664	1,483	11,716
<i>Desiatina</i> per Family	.45	3.73	2.77
Total Arable Land	27,738	9,450	96,098
<i>Desiatina</i> per Family	19.11	23.8	22.72

As might be expected the Molotschna ranked first in terms of cultivated land per family, underscoring the predominance of its grain growing economy. At the same time, these statistics are deceiving, as allowance must be made for the 29,000 *desiatini* which were held in the land reserves of the Molotschna Colony and unavailable for settlement by the landless.

The statistics show that the Bergthal Colony was actually leading the two mother colonies in terms of average size of hay field, pasture and arable land. In the size of yards and fruit plantation Bergthal was below Molotschna but well ahead of Chortitz; in the area of cultivated land, Bergthal was only slightly below Chortitz. A greater percentage of Bergthal's land was in hay field and pasture, indicating a degree of specialization in the sheep, dairy and beef industries. This made the Bergthaler ideal settlers for Manitoba where the primitive economy and climate at the time were not suitable for a commercial wheat growing economy, as was the case along the northern perimeter of the Black Sea.²⁹

The Kleine Gemeinde

Like the Bergthaler, the Kleine Gemeinde represented the emigration of a complete *Gemeinde* or Christian Community, which had been a minority of some three per cent within the Molotschna Colony since the time of its founding in 1812. Unfortunately, there are no statistics available which break down the land ownership in the Molotschna by church affiliation or by individual, although the 1808 Revisions-Liste as well as the 1835 census are of considerable help.

It can be shown, however, that the Kleine Gemeinde were above average in socio-economic terms in the Molotschna. As a group the Kleine Gemeinde had a reputation for producing successful farmers and craftsmen, even becoming the model farmers of Johann Cornies. Peter M. Friesen, for example, the protagonist of conservative Mennonitism in Russia, granted that "The yards, fields, gardens, and cattle of the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the best in the Colonies."³⁰

To maintain this reputation during the great land squeeze of the 1860s the Kleine Gemeinde initiated an active assistance program for young farmers and landless members through interest free loans and later by outright land purchases and resettlement schemes. The internal writings of the group indicate that it was unusual for a Kleine Gemeinde family not to have its own farm. My estimation is that fully two-thirds of Kleine Gemeinde families in the Molotschna were in the full farm ownership category, a figure that rose as high as ninety per cent for the congregations in Borozenko.

The Borozenko Colony was an example of the Kleine Gemeinde practice of purchasing or leasing large blocks of land for resettlement purposes during the 1860s.³¹ The Kleine Gemeinde portion of Borozenko had been established in 1865 with the purchase of 6137 *desiatini* for 184,110 rubles.³² It has been reported that 120 Kleine Gemeinde families settled in the Borozenko area, an estimated ninety families in six Borozenko villages.³³ The consequence was that each family had an

average of sixty-eight *desiatini*, more than double the twenty to twenty-five *desiatini* per family of the Molotschna and Chortitza Colonies.³⁴

Ironically, the reason some of the 1870s immigrants may have been considered “poor and simple” was that they were the victims of a “buyers market” atmosphere once they announced plans of migrating to Canada in the 1870s. Although initially advantageous to farm families, the movement to new settlements outside of the mother colonies turned disastrous when the bottom fell out of the property market in 1874.

Real estate values in the more established economies such as the Molotschna only fell by about half, compared to two-thirds or three-quarters of the value in the newer settlements such as Bergthal. Cruelly, all organized purchases of land for resettlement of the landless were suspended during the emigration period. This in spite of the fact that a number of choice properties such as the entire Bergthal Colony were sold at very low prices to non-Mennonites, that is, for nineteen rubles per *desiatina* of land including buildings and improvements. This works out to 1235 rubles per sixty-five *desiatini* *Wirtschaft* when the average price per farm during the 1860s had been 6000 and more.³⁵

The situation seemed equally grim in Borosenko where, for example, *Aeltester* Peter Toews reports the sale of his fifty *desiatini* *Wirtschaft*, including all buildings and improvements, for 1900 rubles, about thirty-eight rubles per *desiatina*. Entire villages were sold for thirty to fifty rubles per *desiatina*; that is to say, properties, including buildings and appurtenant improvements, were sold for more or less the same price that had been paid for the raw undeveloped land in 1865.³⁶

American newspaper reports indicate that many Russian Mennonite immigrants had been forced to dispose of properties normally worth from \$6,000.00 to \$7,000.00 for as little as \$2,000.00 and even as low as \$1,000.00.³⁷ The economic effects of these sales were devastating. A farmer with a farm worth \$6,000.00 and \$1,000.00 of debt, for example, would have been considered well-to-do. Now such a farm was sold for \$2,000.00, with barely \$600.00 left over after paying the family debt of \$1,000.00 and the travelling expenses estimated at \$400.00 per family.

The foregoing data, thus, seems to underscore oral tradition among the Kanadier immigrants that they were sometimes taken advantage of by their co-religionists who stayed behind. Stories were told of shrewd purchasers who waited until the day that the emigrants were to embark on their ship to “make a final offer, take it or leave it.”³⁸ This is confirmed by General Totleben, the Czar’s personal envoy during the emigration period, who referred to three classes among the Mennonites: “those fanatics who have already decided to move at all costs, the more enlightened who want to stay in Russia but are afraid to speak out and those who intend to remain but are inciting others to leave so as to be able to buy their farms cheaply.”³⁹

Assuming that one-third of the estimated 1400 families emigrating to Manitoba were full-farm owners and an average drop in property values of only a third, from 6000 to 4000, a simple calculation reveals that the loss caused by the market collapse, amounted to almost a million rubles.⁴⁰ Clearly, it is unfair to credit the financial difficulties faced by some of the immigrants to their “poor and simple” ancestry

when falling land prices during the emigration years put many families in an economically vulnerable position.

Fuerstenland/Reinlaender

The third and largest branch of the 1870s migration movement is usually referred to as the Fuerstenlaender. In one sense this is a misnomer as only about a third of this 3,200 member migration group actually came from Fuerstenland, the majority coming from the Chortitza mother colony.⁴¹ They will be referred to as the Reinlaender Gemeinde, the name chosen by the group in Manitoba to denote the combined Fuerstenlaender and Old Chortitza Colony Mennonites united under the leadership of *Aeltester* Johann Wiebe (1837-1906) (although in common parlance they were soon known as the "Old Coloniers").⁴²

Table 4. Origin of Manitoba Mennonites

Denomination	Families	Population	Origin
Kleine Gemeinde	150	750	Molotschna
Bergthaler	600	3000	Bergthal
Reinlaender	200	1000	Fuerstenlandt
Reinlaender	450	2250	Chortitza
Totals	1400	7000	

Fuerstenland had been founded on rented land in 1864. For this reason those who originated there have occasionally been denigrated as poor landless peasant farmers whose only hope of survival was to emigrate.⁴³ That traditional thinking does not really hold water. Leasing was a common vehicle of farming in Russia which was later used to great economic advantage by those Mennonites who remained. Indeed, the most prosperous farmers and estate owners in the Molotschna acquired their initial wealth through land leasing.⁴⁴ It may even be argued that those who settled on the Fuerstenland settlement were progressive farmers who recognized an opportunity to obtain a very fertile and attractive piece of land.⁴⁵

The Fuerstenland "... villages were located in a fertile region where plenty of fruit was growing, their holdings were only about 140-157 acres."⁴⁶ The settlement had a total of 11,413 *desiatini* divided into 154 full farms of fifty-two to fifty-eight *desiatini* each.⁴⁷

Virtually the entire colony, some 200 families, emigrated in 1875. Accordingly, the ratio of full farmers was in the range of seventy-five percent, almost twice the average in the mother colonies. The average land holding per family was in the range of fifty-four *desiatini* per family compared to 24.5 *desiatini* in the Molotschna (see Table 2. above). It is true that the value of a leasehold farm would be less than that of a freehold. But the difference is not necessarily that great since the tenant

farmer still owned his own buildings, equipment, etc. Any differential in value would be at least partially offset by the fact that the average Fuerstenland farm covered twice the amount of ground.

Emigration Data

Unfortunately no comparable data is available for the Reinlaender, who originated in the Chortitz Colony. The poor *Anwohner* were certainly not included among the immigrants, as a minimum of resources estimated at between \$200.00 and \$400.00 per family was required for transportation and shipping costs. This was beyond the means of most *Anwohner* and labourers unless they belonged to a denomination such as the Bergthaler or Kleine Gemeinde which had resources to assist the less fortunate.

This point is confirmed in a article from the Winnipeg Standard, presumably from early 1877, which states as follows: "The emigrating class. . . are neither the rich nor the poor, but are an intermediate body, who are, however, by no means destitute. Mr. Hespeler estimates that the sum brought into the province by the Mennonite immigration is \$500,000 . . ." ⁴⁸

A listing of the amounts of cash brought along by the various immigration parties sheds light on the comparative economic status of the Reinlaendler.⁴⁹ Some rough mathematics quickly reveals that the cash brought by the Kleine Gemeinde per family was around \$1,000.00, that of the Bergthaler \$500.00 and that of the Reinlaender \$300.00.

Even these figures may need adjustment upward, as a report of the "Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization" of the Dominion Parliament from 1878 states that the amount of money brought in by these immigrants (thirty-five families, almost exclusively Old Colonists), in 1877 "was \$287,766." In addition, "the value of settlers goods was \$344,503." The report goes on the state that by adding in "unascertained amounts" the total would "swell the amount" to about a million.⁵⁰

In referring to these statistics it must be remembered that the Old Colony people had sold out in a market where values dropped by an average of two-thirds to one-half, with transportation costs of \$400.00 per family. By calculating backwards and estimating \$300 worth of tools and effects brought along, it appears that the average Old Colonist emigrant cleared \$1000.00 after paying the debt on his *Wirtschaft*, namely a pre-emigration net worth of over \$2000.00. This is a viable sum when considering that a typical Molotschna *Wirtschaft* in pre-emigration days sold for 6000 rubles.

1880 Manitoba Data

As has been established, the Bergthaler immigrants were of average and the

Kleine Gemeinde of above average financial standing. A comparison of their wealth in Manitoba should define the relative position of the Reinlaender people and perhaps even provide some comparisons between those of Fuerstenlandt and Chortitza origins. But even such a comparison must be considered carefully, as the demographics of the Bergthaler and Fuerstenlaender and the families originating in the Chortitza Colony differed in that the former had both emigrated as entire communities including elderly, sick and handicapped, whereas the latter consisted mainly of younger families.

A listing of property ownership for 1880 for the West Reserve was prepared by Peter Wiens for the Nebraska Ansiedler, February 1880, Issue No. 21. For example, the village of Reinland, the heartland of Reinlaender/Old Colonist life in Manitoba, included twenty-two owners, seventy-seven horses, twelve oxen, forty-nine cows, fifty-five yearlings, two steam powered threshing machines, one horse powered machine, nineteen mowers, thirty-one wagons, twenty-two plows, and 709 acres of land cultivated. The total value of machinery, livestock and buildings for the thirty-six villages in the West Reserve was given as \$480,348.80.

That data compares favourably with that of the 1883 Municipal assessments on the East Reserve, but is of limited assistance in that there is no comparable data for the other immigrant groups for as early as 1880.⁵¹

Considering the forgoing, one can conclude that there were no significant differences between the Bergthaler and Reinlaender economically. Given the rather competitive relationship of the two groups on the West Reserve such a distinction would undoubtedly have been noted by some observer. According to Peter Zacharias, author of the widely known Reinland history, no such oral tradition ever existed to his knowledge.⁵²

It needs to be pointed out that it was Johann Wiebe and his Fuerstenlaenders who had the foresight to select "the downs between the Red River and the Pembina Mountains. . . which turned out to be some of the best farmland in the whole Province of Manitoba", in the process establishing what was "really the first permanent agricultural settlement ever established in the open prairies of Western Canada."⁵³

Another observation worth making when studying the emigration movement is that all three denominations that came to Manitoba had resettled within Imperial Russia in the decades prior to 1874. The resettlement process not only taught the emigrants invaluable lessons in the science of establishing new "frontier" communities but also exposed them to a host of ethnic and cultural groups prevalent in the territory, and evidently gave them a broader world view than many Mennonites in the mother colonies had.

As a matter of interest I can also report that during my five years as editor of *Preservings* I have had opportunity to research the economic background of at least two dozen families of Bergthaler and Old Colony background. These families invariably trace their ancestry to Chortitza immigrants of the *Vollwirt* class, and were not infrequently above average in terms of their property holdings. Although the topic is in need of more focused research, the evidence gathered to date

indicates that these immigrants typically were the descendants of well-to-do farmers in the *Vollwirt* tradition, who had the resources and entrepreneurial ingenuity to pursue re-settlement and/or emigration as a strategy to perpetuate that tradition.

Conclusion

The foregoing data raises serious questions regarding the view that the Kanadier who left Russia during the 1870s were in some way “poor and simple”. The available evidence indicates that on the whole they were financially in the median range among the Russian Mennonites. Certainly they were not a lower socio-economic caste, as the statement by historian Frank H. Epp has often been interpreted to mean.

The unquestioned acceptance of Molotschna pietist triumphalism in our historiography has serious consequences for the Mennonite community. It has influenced the way that reformed or liberal Mennonites (typically those who had adopted separatist pietist or American revivalist religious culture) have treated their conservative and traditional co-religionists, often with barely concealed disdain, and encouraging them in the pursuit of their filio-pietistic agendas. Even worse, often times the descendants of the Kanadiers themselves have started believing these unsubstantiated characterizations, resulting in a negative view towards their own faith and culture.⁵⁴

In a paper chiding descendants of the Kanadier for interpreting events with the benefit of hindsight and projecting later values and concerns back into history, James Urry concludes that “Explanations of the 1870s migrations must be multi-focal. There is no simple, single reason for the emigration although the reforms of the Russian State, especially in its military reforms, must be seen as the major catalyst which unleashed the pent-up tension and differences between Mennonites and the Russian State, and between Mennonites and Mennonites, which led to the great parting of ways of the Russian Mennonites.”⁵⁵

I conclude with a further quotation by Urry that “the real economic issue is the complex one of capitalizing/liquidizing wealth in Russia, transferring it across the oceans and then reestablishing a self-sustaining community in Canada—Makes a car salesman look small, and I doubt if they needed a lawyer.”⁵⁶

In considering the remarkable achievement of the transfer of the conservative Mennonite communities from Imperial Russia to Manitoba and their subsequent growth and prosperity within a few short years, the 1870s immigrants should be regarded as anything but “poor and simple”.

Notes

¹ Benjamin W. Redekop, "Levi Giesbrecht: The Mennonite Ethic and the Spirit of Family," in Calvin W. Redekop and Benjamin W. Redekop, *Entrepreneurs in the Faith Community: Profiles of Mennonites in Business* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 197.

² Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: The History of a Separate People 1786 - 1920* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1967), 195.

³ Separation between groups of Mennonites with vastly different views of Christianity was also an important motive for the emigration. Those who left Russia for Manitoba during the 1870s generally held to more traditional forms of religiosity referred to as conservative Mennonitism. In terms of doctrine and practice many immigrants felt quite at home with Old Mennonite leaders in America such as John F. Funk. See D. Plett, *Storm and Triumph* (Steinbach: 1986), 283 - 291 and 307 - 310. Many of those remaining in Russia had been significantly influenced by the Separatist Pietism emanating from Germany during the nineteenth century and can be referred to as Pietist Mennonites. Their proselytization among the marginal membership of the conservative Mennonites caused much anxiety. Frequently such missionizing was associated with a condescending "we alone have the truth" attitude which did not foster the ambience for mutual respect and fellowship among the targets of such predator activities.

⁴ Substantial extracts from their writings have been translated and published in Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 251 - 266.

⁵ The religious issue also had several components, many of the Mennonites who stayed in Russia adopted pietist teachings which included a bizarre eastward millennialism often associated with Jung-Stilling. They believed that Russia would be the refuge of the true church in the end times where it would escape the tribulation. If that was true it naturally made little sense to move 6,000 miles away to America to fight with Indians and robbers. That these beliefs were held by a fanatical fringe is evidenced by the fact that evangelist Bernhard Harder was one of the proponents of these teachings. See Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 240 - 241, for a discussion of this point. Proponents of the "triumphalist view" have chosen to ignore this aspect of the influences of pietism. Recent scholarship has confirmed that "eastward chiliasm" was a significant factor in the decisions of many Mennonites to remain in Russia after 1874. James Urry, *None but Saints* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), 227.

⁶ Dr. Peter A. Koop, "Socio Economic Aspects of the Mennonite Migration; With special Emphasis on the 1870s Migration from Russia to North America," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, (April 1981): 151. I am indebted to Dr. Koop for reviewing this article and providing constructive criticism.

⁷ Peter M. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland 1789 - 1910* (Halbstadt, 1911), Vol. 1 and 2. English translation of Vol. 1; *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1879 - 1910)* (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren, 1978). Because of the intervention of the Russian Revolution and the Depression this work stood as the bench mark of Russian Mennonite historiography for many years.

⁸ Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 592 - 594.

⁹ The triumphalist view of Russian Mennonite history can be generally identified with Toonie's "Gesellschaft" and "Gemeinschaft" typologies. Some modern sociological schools of thought seriously question the traditional view of emigrants and their relationship to their host societies.

¹⁰ For discussion of this point see Dr. John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonite Migrations of the 1870s and 1880s - Some Background Aspects," *Christian Leader* 37 no. 7 (April 2, 1974): 4 - 6. I am indebted to Dr. Toews for assistance in reviewing and commenting on this paper.

¹¹ See, for example, Henry Schapansky, "From Prussia to Russia: Towards a Revisionist (Chortitza-Old Colony) Interpretation of Mennonite History," *Preservings*, no. 14: 9 - 14.

¹² P.A. Koop, *Mennonite Migration*, 152.

¹³ B.H. Unruh, *Mennonitische Ostwanderung* (Karlsruhe, 1955), 304 - 330.

¹⁴ See Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 127 - 144, for a more complete discussion of these developments. One of the reasons for this was that many of the later more pietistical Molotschna immigrants were very poor.

¹⁵ David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in South Russia," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1933), 182. Dr. James Urry has also pointed out that the landless problem was increased by the immigration of the 1820s and 1830s; many of whom were skilled artisans of limited means. I gratefully acknowledge Dr. Urry for taking the time to review this article and providing a critique.

¹⁶ Franz Isaac, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* (Taurien, 1908), 72 - 73.

¹⁷ Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 865, 879.

¹⁸ See D. Plett, *The Golden Years* (Steinbach: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), 106 - 109, for a discussion of this point. It appears that two-thirds of the "estates" consisted of 1000 acres or less and would have been regarded as little more than substantial farms in North America. See also Rempel, 237 - 238. It seems that much of the mythology which has developed regarding the wealth of the Russian Mennonites by the end of the nineteenth century is based more on differences between Russian and American society than the amount of actual land ownership or production. For example a Russian estate of 500 acres was operated with a large number of peasants in whose eyes the owner was an upper class land baron. By comparison the American or Canadian farmer of a similar acreage would have taken pride in doing most of the work himself together with his sons and would have considered himself rather average in socio-economic terms. As a consequence the typical Russian Mennonite *Wirtschaft* at the turn of the century was inefficient and backward by North American standards.

¹⁹ E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1955), 117 and 123.

²⁰ "Gemeinde" was the German word used to describe the individual Mennonite church community or denomination.

²¹ Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America* (M.M.H.S., Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1981), 35. W. Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1986), 59.

²² Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 594. The triumphalists also refer to the fact that the Colony was originally founded by 145 landless families mainly from Chortitza and conclude incorrectly that the Bergthaler represented a lower genetic socio-economic class. The truth, in fact, was that the Bergthal pioneers were mainly young newly married couples who were invariably landless in any agrarian society, whether Molotschna, German, English or otherwise. D.H. Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1984), 89. The fact that they were each allowed five wagon loads of belongs in addition to their horses and cattle (Schroeder, 17) seems to speak for itself. Indeed it would be more logical to assume that the Bergthaler founders represented an above average socio-economic class as the very poorest individuals rarely had the foresight nor the support network required to take advantage of such a situation.

²³ A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien* (Odessa, Russia, 1869), 231. I am grateful to John Dyck, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, for gathering this information for me.

²⁴ The percentage of landless for the Molotschna shown on Table 1 and Table 2 varies somewhat indicating that these statistics are not exact and that allowance must be made for differences in categorization, etc..

²⁵ Isaac, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, 72 - 73.

²⁶ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 39.

²⁷ Normative aspects of conservative Mennonitism, such as a Gospel-centric faith, ethos of love and community and the ethic of peace, were practiced to a greater degree among the Bergthaler than in the Molotschna. This was largely due to the wise leadership which Bergthaler was fortunate to enjoy during most of its years. For a discussion of this point see Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 255 - 259.

²⁸ Klaus, 232. Dr. Urry has pointed out that the owners of the one-quarter *Wirtschaften* should not be included among the landless. Since the purpose of this paper is to provide a background to the situation of the Kanadier in Manitoba, where such small holdings of 40 acres or less were almost unknown, this category seems to be justified.

²⁹ This adjustment from grain growing to a dairy and red meat economy had to be made by many Kleine Gemeinde farmers in the East Reserve no doubt at considerable expense.

³⁰ Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 93 - 198.

³¹ See Plett, *Saints and Sinners* (Steinbach: 1999), 111 - 120, for a discussion of the various settlements established by the Kleine Gemeinde during the 1860s.

³² This amounted to just over half of the entire Borozenko Settlement which had a total of 12,000 *desiatini*: Paul Langhans, "Der heutige Stand der Siedlungsthaetigkeit deutscher Mennoniten in Suedruszland," *Petermann's Mitteilungen*, 44 (1898), 169 - 173. I am indebted to Dr. Royden Loewen for referring me to this material.

³³ P.J.B. Reimer, "The Sesquicentennial of the Evangelical Mennonite Church, 1812 - 1962)," *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference 1812 - 1962* ed. Abe Unger (Steinbach: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), 10. The figure cited by Peter J. B. Reimer seems high to this writer. In any event the figure of 120 must include all the families that moved to the Borozenko area including the villages of Friedensfeld, Grunfeld, the *Chutor* Hochfeld, and possibly Neuanlage, which were neither part of the original Borozenko purchase nor the Nikolaithaler Vollst.

³⁴ The difference would be even more significant if the Kleine Gemeinde settlement of Friedensfeld were taken into account, approximately twenty families settled here on 5400 acres or about 100 *desiatini* per family.

³⁵ By comparison during the 1860s the Bergthaler made a serious effort to purchase a block of 12,250 *desiatini* of land for 245,000 ruble for resettlement purposes. See Schroeder, 59 and 92. This would have been unimproved land without buildings. Not quite ten years later they were forced to sell established farms with buildings, fences, mills, roads, bridges and other improvements for about the same price.

³⁶ Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 327 - 328.

³⁷ Clarence Hiebert, *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1977), 98 and 103.

³⁸ Consul Cornelius Jansen quoted in Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 253.

³⁹ As quoted in Koop, 51. I am indebted to Professor Koop for referring me to this information.

⁴⁰ Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 243. Compounded with interest annually at ten percent to 1910, this amounted to 6,000,000 ruble. This is no small amount when one considers that in 1908 the total declared value of all Mennonite owned industrial plants and trade firms in Russia was 5,595,878 ruble, Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 868. The fact that property values in the mother colonies soared to over 300 ruble per *desiatina* by 1910 supported a triumphalist view and obscured the fact that in 1874 the situation was much different.

⁴¹ According to Dr. Cornelius Krahn in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. Two, 426 - 427) 1000 - 1110 people from Furstenlandt emigrated in the 1870s. At the assumed ratio of five members per family this would be approximately 200 families.

⁴² Peter Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Winkler, MB: Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976), 57.

⁴³ Urry, *None but Saints*, 219 - 220.

⁴⁴ Eg. Johan Cornies. Others such as Peter Schmidt of the Estate Steinbach made fortunes by leasing the reserve lands for forty five kopek per *desiatina* and then subleasing the same land to *Anwohner* for whom it was reserved for up to six ruble per *desiatina*. See Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 136 - 137.

⁴⁵ Triumphalists such as Peter M. Friesen and Frank H. Epp, cannot have it both ways. If those who remained in Russia were regarded as progressive and astute when they leased land the same reasoning should hold true for the Kanadier when they leased land.

⁴⁶ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 39.

⁴⁷ Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten*, 91.

⁴⁸ *The Friends*, English Quaker Journal, Tenth Month, 1877, 279. I am indebted to James Urry for referring me to this information.

⁴⁹ Listing by Philip Wismer, published in Epp, 201. The various groups can be cross referenced to the Quebec ship lists now published by John Dyck, ed., *Bergthaler Gemeinde Buch*, 253 - 333.

⁵⁰ "Report of the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization," Ottawa, 1878, 15 - 17, 27. I am indebted to Dr. James Urry, Wellington, New Zealand, for referring this material to me.

⁵¹ This list was published in Zacharias, 147. In 1880 the West Reserve was still almost exclusively Reinlander, the Bergthaler resettlement to the West Reserve was still in progress in 1880, so that this data is of relatively little value in a comparative sense. Equivalent statistics for the East Reserve only commence in 1883 and largely unsuitable for comparison purposes.

⁵² Telephone conversation with the author on February 13, 1988.

⁵³ Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, 61 - 62.

⁵⁴ Unfortunately this prejudiced stereotype still crops up from time to time, again quite recently: Martin W. Friesen, *Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis* (Altona: D.W. Friesen; Asuncion Paraguay: Chortitzer Komitee, 1987), 466 - 467.

⁵⁵ James Urry, "The Russian State, the Mennonite World and the Migration from Russia to North America in the 1870s," *Mennonite Life*, 46 (1), March 1991:16.

⁵⁶ James Urry, letter to author, June 15, 1999.