

Peasant Aristocracy: The Mennonite *Gutsbesitzertum* in Russia

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The Mennonite *Gutsbesitzertum*, the estate system in Imperial Russia, has long held a special fascination for me. In fact, some readers of my Russian-Mennonite historical novel *My Harp Is Turned To Mourning* have complained that I distort the historical picture by dwelling too much on upper-class estate families and not enough on ordinary villagers. I can't agree with that criticism. The *Gutsbesitzertum* seems to me to have been at the very heart of what Russian-Mennonite society was all about, reflecting some of its best but also some of its worst features. At the very least the estate system symbolized the Russian Mennonites' sturdy sense of enterprise and independence.

Back in the seventies, on one of my several trips to the Soviet Union, I finally got to see a former Mennonite estate, or at least the semblance of one. Through the persistence of our tour leader, the late Gerhard Lohrenz, our tour bus, after bumping and grinding its way through the Molochnaya, was permitted to take the narrow, winding road to Juschanlee, the first and best-known of the several model estates established by Johann Cornies. There we found the old brick manor house with the depressed gable ends favored by Cornies, half hidden behind white-legged trees that stood in what must have been part of the fore-garden or courtyard. We had been told that the place was now a home for war veterans, and there they were sitting and standing stiffly under the foilage looking quizzically at us, as though we were disturbing their privacy. And so we were.

In the few minutes we had to poke around we found the collapsed, weather-blackened ruins of what must have been the main entrance gate to the *Hof*. Carved into the wooden arch and barely legible were the Russian letters that spelled JUSCHANLEE. And that was about all. Beyond the manor was a vast open space that had construction equipment on it. We were told that the old outbuildings — the barns and sheds — had just been torn down to make room for new ones. The whole place had an air of decay and neglect.

I felt disappointed, but what had I expected? As our bus pulled away I

kept gazing at the faded manor and the spavined trees, which looked as superannuated as the old soldiers themselves. Everything looked dispirited and forlorn. It came to me forcibly that what was missing was the energy and purpose and pride of the place, the qualities you sense immediately when you look at the old photos of Juschanlee and other estates. The decrepit soldiers, waiting for death themselves, were living inside a bleached skeleton that had once been a vibrant, thriving organism, a self-sufficient agronomic system that the Mennonites of Russia usually referred to as a *khutor*, or, especially if it was a substantial estate of several thousand acres, as a *Gut* or *Ökenom*. Juschanlee, Cornies' model farm, which was officially granted to him and his heirs by Tsar Nicholas I in 1836, was one of the very first estates to be established in what would eventually become a system of somewhere between 400 and 500 estates (the precise number can no longer be determined) spread out over the Ukraine and east as far as Siberia. By 1914 the total land owned by estate owners represented almost one third of the roughly three million acres of farm land owned by the Mennonites of Russia.¹ By way of comparison, Manitoba has about 10 million acres under cultivation.

And yet, this important economic, financial and cultural force in Russian-Mennonite society has been largely ignored by historians. Older Russian-Mennonite historians like David Epp, Franz Isaac and P. M. Friesen have virtually nothing to say about the estate owners as a group, nor do *Mennonitisches Lexikon* and *Mennonite Encyclopedia* contain articles on the *Gutsbesitzer*. The only systematic attempt to tell the story of the estate system was a series of articles by Jacob Toews published in the *Bote* in 1954.² While providing valuable information, Toews account concentrates mainly on the positive aspects of the subject, as Toews was himself a former estate owner. James Urry has recently produced a comprehensive and objective analysis of Mennonite wealth in Russia, an analysis which includes aspects of the *Gutsbesitzertum* that I wish to explore further in this paper.³ Why, as Urry claims, has there been what amounts to a "conspiracy of silence" about the wealth and prestige of the more privileged groups in that society?⁴ And especially about the estate owners, I would add. Did the resentment and envy of those who had less make them see the estate owners as exploiters and betrayers of their own people? That there was bitterness towards the estate families is well documented and came out most strongly after their fall, both in Russia and here in Canada, in such insulting remarks as "Doa gone dee ritje —," "There go the rich —," or "Khuta Hunt mett aufjebätne Täne," Khutor dog with blunted teeth. Perhaps the mystique of the land came into play too. The land was a sacred trust from God. Did the estate owners have the moral right to so much of it when so many Mennonites in Russia had little or no land at all, not to mention the land-starved Russian peasant?

We know that the estate owners themselves tended to play down their affluence and influence. While some of them did display the arrogance and

conspicuous consumption of an aristocratic ruling class, the great majority did nothing of the kind. They kept “low profiles,” as we say now, trying to avoid any appearance of either greed or stinginess, and lived dignified but simple — even frugal — lifestyles. Their wealth was discreetly hidden, often reinvested in more land at a suitable distance away and the rest invested in business enterprises and donated to schools and charitable projects. There is the story of an old *Gutsbesitzer* who went to his bank one day and insisted on having his entire account placed before him in the form of gold and gold coins as concrete evidence of his good fortune. After gazing at it intently for a while he quietly said, “All right, now you can put it back again,” thereby proving that strength of will can at least control a miserly instinct even if it can’t eradicate it. The handsome, well-ordered and productive Mennonite estates often stood in marked contrast to the many shabby, mismanaged and barren estates owned by the Russian landed gentry in the area. Mennonite estates were built to last, concrete manifestations of the traditional Mennonite faith in bible and plow.

And something else: the instinct for capitalism, the entrepreneurial spirit. For a group that began as a religious movement and believed in living apart from the wicked world, the Mennonites have always managed to do well for themselves materially. The estate system began in the earliest years of settlement in Russia and even in Prussia there had been Mennonite estates, although not on the scale of those on the steppes of New Russia. As early as 1812 Klaas Wiens, the first district mayor of Molochanaya, established a sheep ranch at Steinbach near the southern perimeter of the settlement on land leased from the Crown.⁵ In 1819 the Czar granted Wiens almost a thousand acres of land in perpetuity at Steinbach, and thus the estate system was born. Cornies also rented land for sheep grazing in 1812, which led to the establishment of Juschanlee. In 1832 Cornies established a second estate at Taschchenak, south-west of Molochnaya near Melitopol and later established a third estate — Kampenhausen — on a huge tract of land farther south.

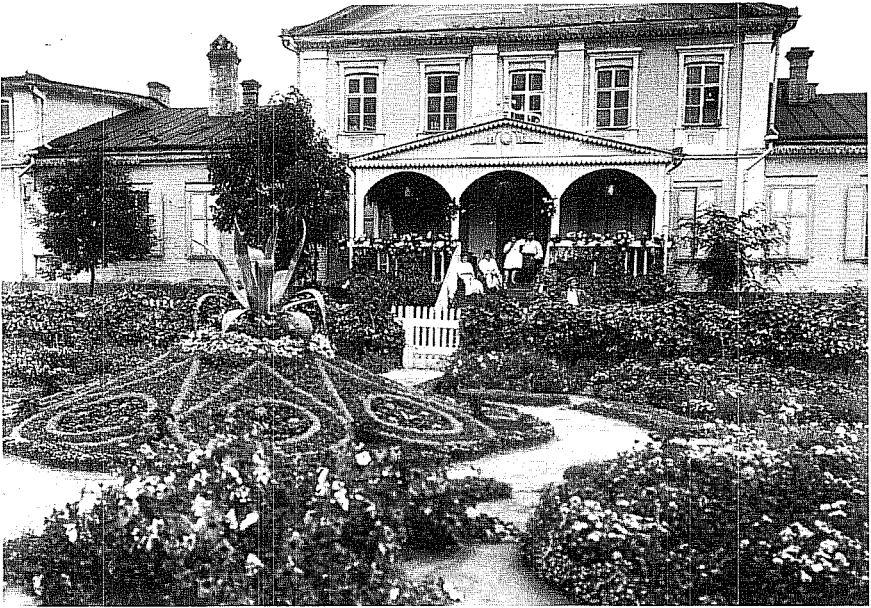
Other Mennonites who in the 1830s purchased vast tracts of land for sheep ranching on the Taschchenak steppes between Melitopol and the Black Sea, were Wilhelm Martens, David Schroeder and Thomas Wiens, who established such well-known estates as Meerfeld, Schöntal, Brodsky, Hochfeld and Ebenfeld. During the same period Heinrich Janzen founded Silberfeld north-east of Molochnaya near Gulai Polye. This first generation of estate owners all came from Prussia, had business and entrepreneurial backgrounds, and acquired their vast holdings for the sole purpose of raising sheep and other livestock. Ambitious, strong-willed men who knew how to get what they wanted, they nevertheless remained good Mennonites who retained their links with the Mennonite community. Wilhelm Martens holds the record as the greatest Mennonite landowner of all time: at his death in 1845 he was reputed to possess between 200,000 and 270,000 acres (no one was sure, perhaps not even

he, and some of the land may have been only rented).⁶ Martens was married three times and after his death his widow, who had also been married three times, divided the land among the ten offspring produced by all these marriages. And thus began the kinship network that became both a strength and a weakness of the estate system.

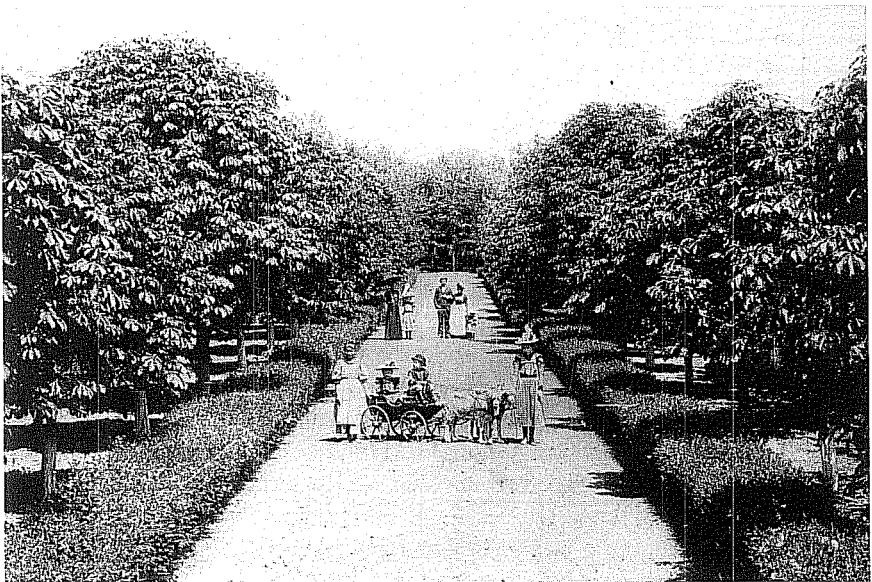
The estate system was by no means restricted to the Molochnaya. Also in the 1830s, large estates were founded just north of the Old Colony by Daniel Peters and Kornelius Heinrichs. Following the Crimean War families like the Bergmanns, the Zachariases, the Neustaedters and others established *khutors* in the same region. In the Schönfeld-Brazol area, estates like Ebenfeld, Bergfeld and Wintergrün were started by heirs and relatives of the early estate owners around Taschchenak. In the late 1860s and 70s scores of smaller *khutors* sprang up in this area on land purchased from Russian estate owners. The Crimea also became dotted with estates in the 1870s through the 90s. The other main areas in which Mennonite estates flourished included the Bachmut-Memrik area north-east of Schönfeld, Mariupol to the south-east, the Kharkov and Don regions, the Kuban and Terek areas in the Caucasus, and, by the early years of this century, in such remote eastern areas as Ufa near the Urals and far-east Siberia. In addition there were many estates that were situated away from Mennonite settlements altogether.

This rapid expansion of the estate system had much to do with changing economic conditions. The middle decades of the nineteenth century ushered in a major changeover from sheep ranching to grain farming. Not long after the price of wool began to drop the demand for wheat and barley increased markedly in Europe, and in the decades after the 1860s grain farming on a large scale became much more profitable than sheep raising had ever been. And the *Gutsbesitzer* were ideally placed to become big-time grain producers. Their grazing lands could easily be broken to the plow and they were quick to adopt the new land-tilling methods of summer fallow and crop rotation which Cornies had already introduced so successfully in the colonies. Mennonite industrialists were among the first to introduce more sophisticated field implements, including gang plows, mechanized cultivators and mowers, and later steam-driven threshing machines. Moreover, railway transportation lines to seaports like Berdyansk, Mariupol and Odessa made it possible to ship the grain expeditiously to Western Europe.

What followed was a period of great economic prosperity and cultural evolution for the *Gutsbesitzertum*, the still fondly remembered "golden age," before it all came crashing down in ruins. As the estate system grew in numbers and size, it maintained its economic and social stability through carefully arranged inheritance practises, and above all through selective intermarriage among estate families. And, as James Urry has expressed it, "The resulting labyrinthine pedigrees, masquerading as genealogies, have been lovingly preserved to this day."⁷ Estate families also began to intermarry with the new



Home of Abram K. Bergmann, Voronaia estate. On the front steps the Bergmann family.
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre.



Garden alley on the Apanlee estate, property of the David Dick family. Chestnut trees.
Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Mennonite business and industrial elite — the Lepps and Wallmanns, the Wilms and Schroeders and Koops and Niebuhrs — who in turn invested their money in land and also became estate owners. In time the frequent cousin-marriages among estate families resulted in serious inbreeding, a problem that was, ironically, solved only by the destruction of the estate system during the Revolution.

While it enjoyed wealth and privilege, the *Gutsbesitzertum* for the most part avoided the decadent lifestyles and social excesses that had been weakening the Russian landed gentry for generations. Your typical Mennonite estate owner was an active farmer who worked hard, planned carefully, and taught his sons every facet of estate ownership from buying pedigreed stock to fixing machinery in the smithy. He experimented with new crops and helped to develop new machinery. Estate owners were also keen on improving livestock breeds and took active part in local and regional breeders associations. They had the money and initiative to import expensive breeding stock from abroad — bulls and stallions, primarily — and took particular pride in their purebred horses. Indeed, these fine animals became a kind of symbolic trademark — almost a fetish — for Mennonite estate owners in the era before cars and other mechanical vehicles. Visitors to the estate were always encouraged to inspect the horse barns, and prize horses were paraded around the rondell in the courtyard by well-practised stable boys. The owners probably took more photos of their purebred stallions than of their marriageable daughters. Not only were estate owners concerned to improve their own equine stock and dairy herds but also those of the Mennonite colonies.

Actually, Mennonite estate owners played a variety of leadership roles, some of which the villagers were hardly in a position to appreciate. The leading estate owners were equally at home in Mennonite and Russian circles and moved constantly from one to the other. Most villagers, however, saw only the “Mennonite” side of the owners’ busy and varied careers. They were aware that the owners made generous donations to the *Zentralschulen*, to hospitals and orphanages and to special institutions like the deaf-mute school in Tiege and the mental institution at Bethania in the Old Colony. They probably knew that the estate owners paid more than their fair share of taxes to the Mennonite community.⁸ They also served the Mennonite community by sitting on key boards and committees such as hospital and church boards and land-purchasing committees.

What the villagers were less aware of were the active roles the estate owners played in Russian local and regional government. Because of their reputation for honesty and fairness they were much in demand for local jury duty. They were frequently elected to county and district office: according to Jacob Toews, there were at one time as many as five Mennonite estate owners serving on the Melitopol district council.⁹ And there were two estate owners — Hermann Bergmann and Peter Schroeder — who served in the national Duma

in the dying years of the Czardom. The estate owners were elected to these various political offices not by their co-religionists but by other estate owners, most of whom were non-Mennonite. In general, the estate owners were a vital link between the Mennonite community and the outside Russian world, about which the villagers knew all too little. Without them the villagers would have had a much more difficult time in dealing with the world beyond their colonies. The estate owners came into contact with the Russian world at all levels and felt much more at ease in that world than did the villagers, who tended to be much narrower and more parochial in outlook.

One could go further and say that in the last decades there was a process of linguistic and cultural assimilation at work in the estate system that was much less apparent in the villages. The work force on the estate, often sizeable, was made up mainly of Russian and Little Russian (Ukrainian) peasants. Many estate children were beginning to learn Russian and/or Ukrainian almost as a first language from their Russian "nanyas." Some, not many, of the estate families were influenced by the Russian landed gentry and began imitating their more permissive and sophisticated lifestyles,¹⁰ not always for the better. In at least one prominent Mennonite estate family there was a lamentable pattern for several generations of alcoholism, gambling, wife abuse, adultery, suicide and even murder.¹¹ And while russification and marriage outside the Mennonite confession did not get to be a serious problem in estate families, there is no doubt that they were on the increase, especially in the last generation of the *Gutsbesitzertum*.

Most estate owners, however, continued to lead sober, respectable lives along traditional Mennonite lines, even though that was not always easy given their physical and social separation from the Mennonite community. Most retained membership in the nearest colony church or in the church congregation in which they had been raised even if distance made it impractical for them to attend Sunday morning worship services regularly. They did make a point of attending the annual communion Sunday and special church functions such as weddings and funerals. The usual practise on Sunday mornings was for the estate owner himself to conduct a private worship service at which he would read Scripture and a sermon from a book of sermons. On many estates the estate tutor or teacher would also be asked to conduct the worship service, and occasionally there would be a visiting minister from the colonies to preach.

Education was given a high priority on the estate. While some estate families hired private tutors just for their own children others set up fully equipped private schools in separate buildings that were open to all children who lived on the estate, including the children of employees' families. Since some estates had half a dozen or more related estate families living on them, these schools could become sizeable. And of course the entire costs of these schools were born by the owners themselves. In addition, on the larger es-

tates there were often well-educated, German-speaking governesses, usually from Baltic countries, who instructed children in piano, art, handicrafts and refined manners.

Since their schools provided only an elementary education, estate families were strong supporters of colony *Zentralschulen*, to which they could send their children to round off their education before returning home to the family enterprise. Estate owners were also well represented on colony school boards, donated generously to the school system and generally had a strong voice in all educational matters within the settlements.

As a physical entity the Mennonite estate was almost completely self-sustaining. The estate buildings were typically laid out in a loose square or rectangle around a central *Hof* or courtyard dominated by the *gornitsa*, or manor house, on one side and the horse barns and carriage sheds on the opposite side with a magnificent ornamental flower and shrub bed known as a *rondell* placed at the centre of the yard. The rest of the outbuildings — barns, granaries, machine sheds, often a smithy and/or carpenter's shop, married employees' cottages, barracks for single workers, workers' kitchen, and often a school — were situated on the flanking sides of the courtyard. The manor house could vary from a modest two-story dwelling of brick (wood in earlier times) to a handsome, architecturally distinctive mansion of quarried stone with 15 to 20 rooms, such as the one owned by the Jacob Dyck family at Steinbach or the Johann Dick mansion at Rosenhof. On these two estates even the barns and other buildings were handsome stone buildings of the same general design as the manor.¹² Behind the manor there was always a spacious well-laid-out garden-orchard with cherry, apple and pear trees and other exotic fruits like peaches and apricots if the estate was in the south. Beyond the garden or adjoining it there was usually a man-made brook or small lake bordered by stately trees.

The permanent staff on a fair-sized estate might consist of a *prikaschnik*, an overseer, who was usually a Mennonite or Lutheran German, a liveried coachman (usually a Russian), a gardener, steward, smith and/or carpenter, a night watchman, stable boys and cowherds. Inside the manor the estate owner's wife supervised a female staff that might consist of a cook, a nursemaid and several maids or domestics, all of them usually Russian. During the summer, when there were many seasonal workers to be fed, the domestic staff had their work cut out to provide fresh bread, baked daily, borscht (at least twice a day) and other plain but hearty food to the *kuchnja*, the workers' kitchen. The married workers on the estate cooked their meals in their own quarters.

To take care of the field work between spring and fall the estate owner, depending on the size of his estate, might hire anywhere from a dozen to a hundred or more seasonal workers, almost always Russian or Ukrainian, with the latter preferred by most employers as being more tractable and less quar-

relsome. At least one owner is said to have preferred peasants with pointed noses over those with snub noses because he believed them to be harder workers.¹³ Wages varied, but field workers might get anywhere from 40 to 80 rubles for the five or six-month season, plus, or course, room and board. The field work was done mainly with oxen and horses, although a few primitive tractors and steam engines were coming into use in the decade before the war. Since oxen were stronger than horses they were used for heavy plowing and breaking the land, while horses were used for the lighter tasks of seeding, cultivating and grain cutting. On an estate of several thousand acres there might be a hundred to two hundred oxen, 30 to 40 draught horses, dozens of plows, cultivators and seeding drills, as well as a dozen or more carriage and riding horses. In the years just before the war automobiles — usually Opels or Fords — could be seen on some estates.¹⁴ Herds of 30 to 40 milk cows were common, while hogs and sheep provided meat for the estate tables. On some large estates 20-30 hogs might be slaughtered at a time, most of the meat destined for the workers.

Daily life on the estate, while certainly comfortable, dignified and abundant by the standards of the time, would strike us now as isolated, slow of pace and lacking in most of the mechanical marvels and creature comforts we take for granted today. Some estates had electricity and a crude type of local telephone service in the years just before the war, and such amenities as separate bathrooms with hot and cold water were coming into use. Most estates boasted a piano or harmonium and a windup gramophone with a few classical recordings. There was much visiting back and forth among the estate families with communal outings in summer and other leisure activities that ranged from fishing and boating on the estate pond to organized games, including ball games, skating in winter, and even private theatricals in the more culturally advanced families. Special events such as weddings lasted for several days and involved hundreds of guests for whom food and lodging had to be provided on the estate.¹⁵ Trips to foreign countries were not uncommon, especially to Germany, and many middle-aged estate wives worn out from child-bearing, and their husbands, worn out from work and overeating, made regular trips to German spas to cure their livers and other organs.¹⁶ On the other hand, there was no direct mail service to estates, and news about the world outside came from newspapers and journals that were days or even weeks old.

There is an interesting contemporary account of what life was like on a large estate between 1907-10 based on a journal kept by Gerhard P. Schroeder when he was a private tutor on the estate of Julius Bergmann, son of Hermann Bergmann.¹⁷ Young Schroeder received an annual salary of 300 rubles at Trietusnoye and took to estate living with great zest. As a village boy from Rosental, he was impressed by the refined style of living on the estate, including the formal meals in the dining room where Frau Bergmann could

summon the serving girl by means of an electric bell. There was also a hired *Gesellschafter*, or companion, a young married man who lived in a rent-free cottage in the garden with his wife, widowed mother and sister, and whose main duty was to serve as a companion to Herr Bergmann while his young wife performed a similar role for Frau Bergmann. The *Gesellschafter* was furnished with his own stable and some land he could work. Whether he also got a salary Schroeder doesn't say. As Julius Bergmann was very active in the local stockbreeders association and did a lot of business traveling by carriage to Ekaterinoslav (20 miles away) and other nearby towns, he would often invite his companion along for company.

Organized fox hunts complete with packs of greyhounds were held on the estate, and there was a private race track where Schroeder could race his favorite riding horse against the *Gesellschafter's* best. Bergmann kept many fine horses and his liveried coachman would go through an elaborate ritual of inspecting the carriage and horses before pulling up smartly before the manor to await his passengers. On one occasion, however, he went all the way to Ekaterinoslav before discovering that he had no passenger in the back seat, that he had started on a false signal and left Herr Bergmann behind.

Increasingly, the *Gutsbesitzertum* was plagued by inherent problems to which there seemed to be no satisfactory solutions. One was the problem of inheritance. Whereas village farms were indivisible by law and could be inherited by only one child, usually the oldest son, estates were not subject to inheritance laws. By custom, estate owners usually divided their estates among all their children, male and female. Since estate owners, like villagers, tended to have large families, this practise often had the effect of cutting up already smallish estates into rather modest pieces. Many estate owners were also apprehensive about the effects of higher education on their sons, who after attending university might be unwilling to return to estate life. Daughters could marry teachers, village secretaries and ministers, members of the so-called semi-intelligentsia, but sons were usually discouraged from entering other careers or the professions.¹⁸

What the estate owners feared most of all was that their days of privilege and power were numbered as the grumblings of discontent and threats of violence from peasants and workers became ever louder and more ominous. The 1905 revolution and its aftermath frightened them badly.¹⁹ There were sporadic cases of violence and murder on estates, and some estate owners left their estates in the hands of managers and retreated to the villages.

These premonitions of disaster were, as we know, realized all too soon. Estate owners were among the earliest victims of the terrorism that broke out in 1917 and many were forced to abandon their estates and flee to the villages. A brief respite came in 1918 when the German army occupied the Ukraine and owners reclaimed estates that had been in many cases despoiled through theft and vandalism or converted into primitive collective farms.²⁰

Posses made up of vengeful estate owners and their sons, especially in the Schönfeld-Brazol area, tried to get their possessions back from the peasants, in some cases themselves committing acts of brutal violence in the process. These estate hotheads also fraternized freely with German officers and were among the first to help organize the *Selbstschutz* later on. But with the withdrawal of the German forces in November, the merciless destruction of the *Gutsbesitzertum* was inevitable. Scores of estate owners were butchered during this terrible time, including all the Bergmanns except Henry, the youngest son, some of the Heinrichs men, three male generations of Peters at Petersdorf, and in the Molochnaya the estate philanthropists Jacob Sudermann, and David Dick and his wife of Apanlee, among many others.²¹ Many, of course, survived and were able to emigrate to Canada, as did most of the wives and children of the murdered estate owners. Here they were forced to make new lives for themselves on a much more modest scale than they had enjoyed in Russia.

And how could it have been otherwise? The Mennonite *Gutsbesitzertum* in Russia was unique to the times and conditions of that country. Such a peasant aristocracy could never have been replicated in Canadian-Mennonite society, as Russian-Mennonite family business enterprises have been with great success in some cases.²² The estate system was an important part of Russian-Mennonite society that for a relatively brief time in history held in balance a way of life that was based on love and respect for the land, a strong drive for economic success and material well-being, a confident belief in family and kinship traditions, and a proud sense of personal freedom and independence. But the estate system was also based on a fatal illusion: the belief that Mennonites could live and function freely and indefinitely in a land where ordinary people, the peasants and workers, had not enjoyed freedom for a thousand years; where only the members of the ruling elite enjoyed freedom and where, all too briefly, Mennonite estate owners, for better or for worse, were permitted to be part of that ruling elite. They could not see until it was too late that they had created their small oases of prosperity and privilege within a horizonless steppe that was more like a prison to its peasant millions. And that sooner or later those peasants would stop singing their melancholy songs and start rattling their chains.

And so the faded glory of Juschanlee will always symbolize for me the fate of the Mennonite estate system in Imperial Russia, the system that seemed so permanent, so right, so endlessly productive, until those final years when the sense of doom began to thicken and spread like a pre-dawn mist. And sometimes in fantasy I wonder if even old Cornies in his more prophetic moments, those rare moments when he wasn't plotting or scheming progress, could already hear the black curses and murderous shots of peasant terrorists who would one day come thundering down on Juschanlee, could already see in the future the ghostly figures of pensioned soldiers under his trees, smok-

ing idly, playing chess, rehashing old battles, and remaining stolidly unknowing of a Mennonite past once so vibrant and alive, a past that now reveals only the faint scars of an old battlefield covered by the indifferent grass.

Notes

¹These figures have been compiled and rounded off from figures given by P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno: Board of Christian Education, General Conference of Mennnite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp. 864-65, and David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance 1789-1919," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 47, 1973, p. 94.

²Jacob C. Toews, "Das mennonitische Gutsbesitzertum in Russland," 17 installments in *Der Bote* from no. 26 (June 30, 1954) to no. 45 (November 24, 1954).

³See James Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia," *JMS*, 3, 1985, pp. 7-35 passim. My research for this article has benefited not only from this important article but also from Professor Urry's generosity in putting at my disposal some of the invaluable private research materials he has collected on this subject over the years.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵Until the law was recinded in 1817, Mennonite colonists were forbidden to buy private land outside the settlements. See J. J. Hildebrand, *Hildebrands Zeittafel* (Winnipeg: J. Regehr, 1945), p. 176.

⁶Toews, "Das mennonitische Gutsbesitzertum," no. 35 (Sept. 15, 1954), p. 4.

⁷Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle," p. 15.

⁸According to Ehrst, for example, the estate owners although forming less than 2% of the Mennonite population, provided over 30% of the money required to support the Forstei during its 35 years of operation. Adolf Ehrst, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart* (Langensalza: J. Betz, 1932), p. 88.

⁹Toews, "Das mennonitische Gutsbesitzertum," no. 27 (July 7, 1954), p. 3.

¹⁰See Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle," p. 21.

¹¹Information gathered from *Kornelius Heinrichs and his Descendants (1782-1979)* (Winnipeg: Kornelius Historical Society, 1980), pp. 48-49, and from private sources.

¹²See Walter Quiring and Helen Bartel, *In the Fullness of Time: 150 Years of Mennonite Sojourn in Russia* (Kitchener, 1974), pp. 122-23. The photos that make up the chapter "Farm nobility and their estates" (pp. 115-118) in this volume present a vivid pictorial record of the *Gutsbesitzertum* at the height of its affluence and power.

¹³Mentioned in H. Schroeder's unpublished account of life on a Mennonite estate, n.d. (Mennonite Heritage Centre, James Urry Collection), p. 3.

¹⁴The difference in speed between the early cars and horses was not as dramatic as one might expect, although cars could cover longer distances (provided they could be used on decent roads). According to contemporary accounts a pair of good trotters could average up to 10 miles per hour for short distances, while most autos around 1910 or so averaged between 15 and 20 miles per hour.

¹⁵See the fine depiction of an estate wedding in Peter Klassen, *Bei uns im alten Russland* (Winnipeg: Echo-Verlag, 1959), pp. 41-75. This semi-fictionalized account vividly dramatizes what it felt like to be on an estate for a special event like a wedding.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁷Gerhard P. Schroeder, "Auf und Ab: Aus dem Leben der deutschen Gutsbesitzer in Süd-Russland 1907-1919," unpublished manuscript, n.d. (Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno. Gerhard P. Schroeder Papers M5 (Box 2, Folders 11/11a)).

¹⁸See Klassen, *Bei uns im alten Russland*, pp. 74-75.

¹⁹See Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle," pp. 26-27.

²⁰Toews, "Das mennonitische Gutsbesitzertum," no. 33 (Sept. 1, 1954), p. 3.

²¹The grisly story of the slaying of the Peters men is told in A. A. Toews, ed., *Mennonitische Martyrer: Band 2: Der Grosse Leidensweg* (North Clearbrook, 1954), pp. 233-236.

²²The C. A. Defehr family of Winnipeg is an outstanding example of a successful Russian-Mennonite business family that owned a thriving farm implement factory in Russia, came to Canada after the Revolution and founded an important business and later a furniture and appliance wholesale store that is still flourishing. See Cornelius A. DeFehr, *Memories of my Life: Recalled for my Family* (Altona: D. W. Friesen and sons, 1967), pp. 65 ff.