Siberia in the Mennonite Imagination, 1880-1914: Land, Weather, Markets

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By the end of the nineteenth century Mennonites living in established and thriving colonies on the Ukrainian steppes began to see Siberia as a possible place of settlement to solve land shortages created by their burgeoning population. Between 1900 and 1914 an estimated 7,000 Mennonites migrated to the West Siberian plain and by 1914 some 18,000 Mennonites lived there.[1] The migration of Mennonites to Siberia was part of a much larger migration by Russian and other foreign colonists. Between 1891 and 1910 over three million peasants migrated from European to Asiatic Russia with an average number of 229,000 arriving each year in the peak period between 1901 and 1910.[2]

Ever since Mennonites from the former Soviet Union began immigrating to Germany in the 1970s and particularly after the fall of communism, a considerable body of memoir literature has appeared in which Siberia appears as a place to which Mennonites were exiled and banished.[3] Little has been written, however, about Siberia as a place of settlement in the early years of the twentieth century. Mennonite writers who had lived, or spent some time in Siberia, notably Gerhard Fast, Peter Rahn, and J. J. Hildebrand published relatively brief compilations of local histories that offer some glimpses into the early settlement history of Mennonites in Siberia.[4] Although the inaccessibility of Soviet sources meant their histories were largely anecdotal, their personal observations offer some glimpses into the common perceptions of Siberia held by the Mennonites from Ukraine. John B. Toews' 1973 article in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* offers a more critical perspective and sets the Mennonite experience more firmly in the greater settlement history of the West Siberian Plain. It is, however, broad in its approach and time span, and focuses particularly on Mennonite pioneering efforts and the subsequent development of the colonies.[5]

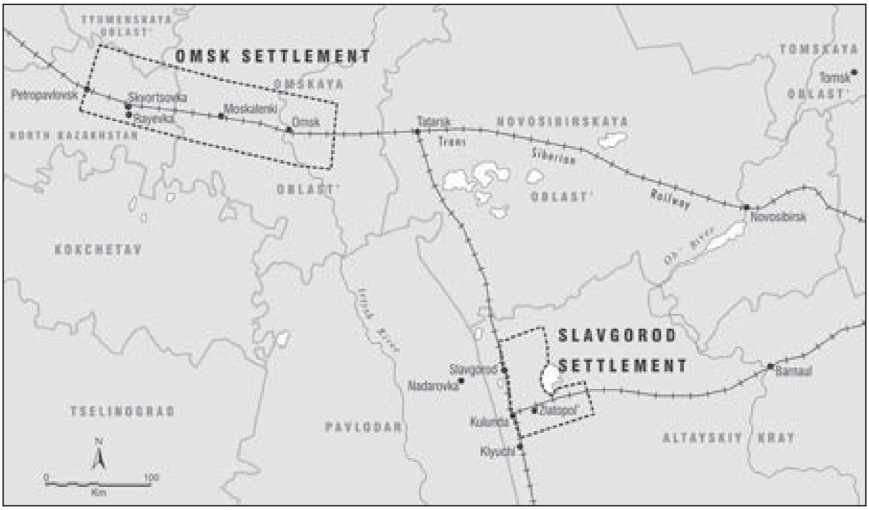
To be sure, there were economic and social factors within Mennonite society and external factors in Russian society that contributed to the migration to Siberia, however the argument pursued here is that in the twenty-year period before 1907 newspapers both fostered and reflected the changing Mennonite imagination of what Siberia was. Through the pages of the newspaper one can trace how Siberia was re-imagined to become a realistic destination for Mennonite settlement. The Mennonite imagination of Siberia had to come to terms with the practical obstacles that had to be overcome to make settlement on the West Siberian plain a reality. Although Mennonites were imbued with a certain sense of Christian utopianism and confidence in their pioneering ability, weather, land and markets were practical problems of settlement that Mennonites needed to come to terms with. By the early twentieth century, Mennonites were intensely conscious of the requirements of pioneering in an age of the railway, a market economy and an industrializing Mennonite economic world. For an agricultural people, land, weather and markets would be important and recurring themes in public conversation about Siberia in newspapers on the eve of the migration, and in the memoir literature that reflects on those days.

Mennonites had initially migrated to the Russian Empire from Prussia at the invitation of Catherine in the eighteenth century to create colonies in New Russia (Ukraine), where they lived in thriving semi-autonomous colonies. In the nineteenth century their population grew dramatically, which helped to trigger a number of cycles of land shortages. By World War One there were about 104,000 Mennonites in Russia, despite the emigration of one-third of their number to the United States and Canada in the 1870s.[6] The persistent shortages of land that accompanied population growth created deep divisions in a community that maintained an ethos that living in agricultural villages was the most desirable expression of their ethno-religious identity. The most successful strategy to reproduce an agricultural society had been to create daughter colonies where the younger landless families could again become landowners.

In 1836 the first of these daughter colonies, Bergthal, was created in the Mariupol district on land acquired by the Guardian's Committee of the Foreign Colonists and provided to the Khortitza Colony for its landless.[7] After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, Mennonite expansion took place using a variety of models. One method saw the older colonies collecting fees from their landowners to finance the purchase of lands from the Russian nobility. Between 1868 and 1889 the Khortizta Colony established five such colonies with sixteen villages, while the Molotschna (Molochna) Colony established two large colonies with a total of twenty seven villages. Increasingly as well, groups of individuals purchased a block of land outside the colonies, which they then subdivided them amongst themselves. In some cases land was rented, as in the case of the Fuerstenland Colony, which would pick up and move to Canada when their lease expired in the 1870s.[8] The increasing industrialization of the Mennonite economy meant that wealthy merchants, millers and manufacturers were at the forefront of making land purchases outside the colonies. The number of Mennonite colonies and settlements of various kinds exploded in the latter half of nineteenth century with the establishment of an additional thirteen major colonies by the turn of the century.[9]

By the 1890s the possibilities of acquiring large contiguous blocks of land to create new colonies in European Russia had all but disappeared. Land prices were high and competition for land was keen. In some cases land prices more than doubled between 1882 and 1888 and then doubled again by 1909.[10] The challenges of making block purchases of land stimulated interest in new frontiers. The possibility of establishing settlements in Siberia and the Far East were explored as early as 1859 when Bernard Warkentin and two companions, Friesen and Riediger, made a trip from the Crimea to the Amur River area of Eastern Siberia in search of land.[11] The Amur area was the first to be opened to assisted settlement when the Tsar established a fund to aid Russian peasants to settle there after the area was acquired from China in 1858.[12] In the 1860s there were still too many factors that held back Mennonites from migrating, such as the lack of a railway and the great distances from their coreligionists in Ukraine.[13] By 1900, however, most of the impediments to travel had been removed and in the years leading up to 1907 the German language newspapers read by Mennonites were engaged in a lively conversation that created a new image of Siberia and prepared the way for its settlement. The first Mennonites to settle on the West Siberian plain were industrialists and estate owners, or family groups that purchased or rented land in a twenty or thirty kilometer band along the Trans-Siberian Railway between Omsk and Petropavlovsk. After 1907 a large number of Mennonites would leave their villages in southern areas of Russia to begin again on the

West Siberian plain, establishing the largest Mennonite colony on the Kulunda Steppe southeast of Omsk near the city of Slavgorod.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For Mennonites, like for most European Russians, Siberia was a land of exile, a land where one could encounter wild animals on primitive roads and trails, and where lawlessness and crime prevailed. Mennonites did not think of Siberia as a place where church and school could be built; where one brought a wife and started a family. For nineteenth-century Russians too, as Mark Bassin notes, "the primeval aspect of untouched Siberia was frightening ... an empty stretch of territory all the more awesome in that its extraordinary size was matched by its uselessness to which Nature, it seemed, had condemned it."[14] By the time the Trans-Siberian Railway opened the Siberian plain to settlement it was, as historian William Sunderland notes still "immeasurably vast" and populated with "backward," "exotic," non-Russian peoples, but increasingly also "rich in potentially promising places for Russian settlers."[15]

The transformation of Mennonite ideas about Siberia is in many ways parallel to that of the perception of the Canadian West, which also had to be re-imagined from being a savage and wild place to a land suitable for settlement. Doug Owram argues in his book, *The Promise of Eden*, that "between 1856 and 1869 the image of the West was transformed in Canadian writings from a semi-arctic wilderness to a fertile garden."[16] While free land and the railway made settlement economically viable, pamphlets, immigration posters and newspapers served to change not only the perception of the landscape, but also the image of the Canadian West as a place where civilization could flourish.

The view of the West was changed to become what R. Douglas Francis calls the "Utopian West," a place where "moral and civic virtues would be perfected." Fortuitous for both the settlement of the Canadian prairies and that of Siberia by Mennonites was a philosophical context that Francis describes as "an age of racial theories," where "it was believed that climate had a profound effect in molding character," and where a cold climate in particular "created fecundity and virility."[17]

Articles and letters from and about Siberia appeared frequently in German language newspapers that were read by Mennonites in the decade before the large wave of migration to Siberia between 1907 and 1910.[18] The *Odessa Zeitung* and *Der Botschafter*, published in Russia, and the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and the *Zionsbote,* published in the United States, were the newspapers most widely read by Mennonites in the period up to 1907. The periodical collections of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg have fairly complete microfilm collections of these newspapers along with indexes for some of them, making them accessible for research.[19] There are also a more limited number of memoirs that recall the period leading up to settlement in Siberia and offer some recollections of how Siberia was perceived. Together these sources provide some sense of the transformation of Siberia in the Mennonite imagination, from "an unreal land in the eternal snow and ice regions of the north," to "a beautiful land full of promise" as an unidentified contributor to the *Odessa Zeitung* wrote in 1904.[20]

Land was most critical to the Mennonite sense of whether Siberia could sustain a prosperous settlement. Most accounts in the newspapers went to great lengths to describe the landscape for their southern Mennonite readers. The earliest appearance of Siberia in the periodicals read by Mennonites came in reprinted reports written by explorers, adventurers and the early Mennonite land and seekers who travelled to Siberia. In 1894 the *Rundschau* published a glowing account of Siberia attributed to the Norwegian explorer, Nils Nordenskjold. According to the article, the explorer believed that "in spite of its bad reputation," Siberia was "the largest agricultural region of the world." The article compared Siberia to the Great Plains and Prairies of the United States and Canada. In both regions the plain was bordered on the North by arctic tundra with a climate that could not support large populations. Both had a rim of forest whose southern limits give way to an endless steppe with a richness and diversity of plant life. The explorer extoled in poetic language the Siberian steppes where the warm summer "charms" a succession of mostly large blossoms from the fertile ground "that clothe the fields" with their rich colors. Without fertilizer and only modest effort, the explorer continued, "bountiful harvests could be enticed year after year" from this land.[21]

When the land seeking delegations and early settlers reported on the land, the focus became more practical. Although these writers still took pains to counter the prevailing perception of the austerity of the landscape by noting its raw beauty, their emphasis was on the productivity and availability of the land. Dietrich Rempel sold his farm, gave his family into the care of his mother-in-law and embarked on a trip to the Amur in 1898. Three years later when interest in Siberia was on the rise his journal was serialized in the *Odessa Zeitung*. Rempel described the beauty of the Ural Mountains and his surprise when they emerged onto the West Siberian steppe. But, he cautioned his readers, "you must not imagine them to be as the steppes in South Russia." Rather "the Siberian steppes are dotted throughout with small Birch forests, with the odd spruce grove here and there." Rempel was taken by the scene of the Siberian steppe and assured his readers, "the result is quite pretty."[22] By the time the Trans-Siberian Railway had taken them to Omsk, Rempel was not as impressed with the landscape, noting that "the area is always the same, meadow, forest, birch forest, steppe."[23]

Johann Matthies, who was eleven when his family settled in Siberia, recalled how the early land seekers crossed the Ural Mountains and after two days of travel came upon "many pleasing small birch forests with their adjacent steppe," but he also noted how little of it was settled by farmers: "it was exceptional to see ploughed land."[24] A similar romantic image pervaded the memories of the land scout Jacob B. Peters who recalled the "knee high grass" where they had dismounted to collect samples of soil, and where "as far as you could see there was no evidence of human settlement."[25] J. D. Enns, a settler from Siberia and a 1902 contributor to the *Rundschau* assured readers that "the land is fertile and yields good crops" and the best way to acquire it was to rent, "as rent is very cheap." In his mind the birch forests were not a disadvantage, but "offered effective protection against the snowstorms and provide excellent fuel."[26] A 1904 article specifically directed at potential settlers acknowledged that the stands of birch and aspen in the Omsk area were an impediment to agriculture, but newly arrived settlers found the surprise of seeing them pleasant because they provided a welcome break in the landscape. The writer, who had lived there for a year, also assured readers that the topsoil was fertile and deep. The land he described as being flat and not well endowed with streams other than the large rivers, the Ob and the Irtysch. He noted the numerous large and small lakes, some with sweet and others with salty water.[27]

While the quality of the land was important, whether it was available for settlement and hence agricultural production was critical. Peter Wiens, a frequent contributor to the *Odessa Zeitung*, wrote extensively about the prospects for Mennonite settlement in the Omsk area. Wiens was originally from the Molotschna Colony, migrating to Omsk in 1897 where he established a variety of business ventures. He sold farm equipment, operated a general merchandise store, farmed on rented land and was shareholder in a bank. When the settlement on the Kulunda Steppe began, he also opened branches of his businesses in the city of Slavgorod.[28] Wiens assured readers that the image of Siberia as a land filled with dangerous wild animals was erroneous. He claimed to have acquaintances, some of whom lived in the forest, others on the steppe, who maintained they had experienced entire winters without seeing a single wolf.[29] Not only had the wild animals vacated the land, the indigenous inhabitants, the Kirghiz, had moved away from the area near the railway, back into steppes and forests, far away from settled areas. He added that Russian banks, which had not been willing to finance land purchases in Siberia, were now prepared to borrow money against Siberian land.[30] J. D. Enns also pointed out how thinly populated the land was, with the Kirghiz in the area engaged mostly "in pastoral pursuits in summer, living in tents in true nomadic style."[31] Up to 1907 the land could generally not be purchased. Enns explained that most of the land was owned by the government, the Cossacks or army officers. Even though in the early years most Mennonites rented their land, for many it still offered a way out of becoming a landless proletariat. As Katharina Hinz notes in her memoirs, when her mother objected to the idea of moving to far away Siberia her father asked her if "the children should always only be servants for other people?" That, he had said he could not bear, and lamented even for the two of them: "we live in a stranger's house, have no garden, no land and have to be workers." Even if the land in Siberia "was only rented land," their situation would be better than what they faced in South Russia.[32]

While it may not have been that difficult for southern readers to envision the vast lands of the West Siberian plain, or that it could be available for rent, or even that it was fertile, the reputation of the Siberian winter and shortness of its summers was hard to overcome. J. J. Hildebrand suggests that after 1907 when free land became available even the "Siberian winter, about which one had the most sinister thoughts" became a small problem.[33] Nevertheless, writers to newspapers were forced to address the problem of the weather and most did so in their submissions. Certainly there was no option but to acknowledge that winters were cold. J. D. Enns suggested "the winter is very severe … the temperature falls very low, —we had as low as forty-eight degrees below zero."[34] Only rarely was the cold disputed. In one of three letters printed in a 1907 issue, a writer challenged an earlier contributor who had warned that in Siberia the temperature could fall to -27 degrees Réaumur (-34 ^{o} C) in October. The writer assured readers that although the previous contributor had not been clear about his exact location, in his own thirteen-year experience in the Orenburg area he had never experienced more than -28 degrees R (-35° C) even in the dead of winter and on those days it had been completely calm.[35]

It was more common for newspaper conversation to deal with Siberia's temperatures by minimizing how cold it felt, noting how short a time the cold temperatures lasted, and even how invigorating and healthy the cold was. Siberian settlers wrote in a similar vein as the settlers quoted in Canadian immigration pamphlets. Fred Hopping, a Lacombe, Alberta migrant claimed the "dry cold air" of Alberta was "bracing and entirely different from the damp chilly wind" he had been used to in Chicago.[36] Writing from Siberia in 1900, Peter Wiens reported to his southern readers that while the temperature did fall to minus thirty it did not feel as cold as it did in the south.[37] J. D. Enns noted that low temperatures "lasted but a short time" and there was "usually no wind" on the coldest days. While he acknowledged that there were a lot of snow storms, like the language adopted by most writers, he thought snow storms in Siberia did not last as long as in the south. Enns also pointed out that there were warm days in winter, with "a number of fine days" where the temperature rose to the freezing mark. Jacob Rogalsky, writing in the *Zionsbote* in December 1904 reported that to that point the winter had been mild with one day where the temperature rose to a few degrees below freezing.[38] Another 1904 contributor acknowledged that winters were long and cold, but pointed out that they were not nearly as hard as people of the south tended to believe, and the cold usually only lasted for a few days at a time. In fact, he argued, because of the crisp clear air people were generally healthier than in the south.[39] In a similar vein a letter to the *Odessa Zeitung* from a Saskatchewan Mennonite claimed that although the thermometer went lower there than it had in the writer's former home in Ukraine it did not feel as cold. In his response to the Saskatchewan letter, P. Wiens argued that the writer's description underlined the fact that there was no need to migrate to America because Omsk offered a healthy climate that appeared to be quite similar to that of Saskatchewan.[40]

Siberian contributors to the newspapers were not blind to the vagaries of Siberian weather. Peter Wiens reported in 1903 that it had been a cool and rainy summer and most farmers, both German and Russian, had brought the crop under roof to be threshed in spring. He noted however that the harvest had been very large, over two hundred pud per dessiatin (three tonnes per hectare) with the wheat plants producing five and six kernels per head.[41] A similar report in the *Zionsbote*, also from the Omsk area, acknowledged that the previous three years had produced poor crops but the 1903 crop was an "overall larger than expected and bountiful harvest." The writer also reported wheat yields of up to two hundred pud per dessiatin with similarly high yields of barley and oats.[42]

The most difficult theme for promoters of Siberia to address was the market. In an 1881 article, written before the arrival of the railway or significant numbers of Mennonites and other settlers, the author outlined the challenges of the Siberian economy. Taxes were low, but so were grain prices. There were shortages of basics such as window glass and farm equipment, and carpenters and other tradesmen were few in number.[43] Twenty years later on the eve of significant migration, an article analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of Siberian settlement reported that hiring blacksmiths, shoemakers and other tradesmen still came at a higher price than their counterparts in the south because demand for their services exceeded the supply of such workers.[44] J. Wiens had to acknowledge that the whole labor question "was somewhat cloudy." The large 1903 crop and the wet weather during harvest had made apparent the shortage of workers in the Siberian labor market and some of the crop had stayed on the field.[45]

The arrival of the railway and the effect it would have on the West Siberian economy was largely self-evident to the contributors to the newspapers and very quickly the question of the market took on new dimensions. In 1900 P. Wiens reported that land prices along the railway near the city of Omsk were rising. In spite of the greater demand for land near the railway, a 1907 letter writer cautioned the landless from southern areas to be very careful about their selection of land. Only the land "near the city or the railway" should be considered. A more pessimistic letter in the same issue of the *Odessa Zeitung* cautioned the landless from southern regions that while it was true that there was an abundance of land in Siberia it quickly became "dead capital" if the migrant was unable to purchase the livestock needed to make the farm profitable. Those who did not have the necessary finances to buy livestock were doomed to "starve on their own land."[46]

Repeatedly writers had to acknowledge that prices for grain were low. More importantly, perhaps, grain prices were extremely volatile. Given the distance to markets outside of their immediate area the prices fluctuated wildly with the vagaries of the harvest. In an extensive report in a 1901 issue of the *Rundschau* on settlement conditions in the Semipalatinsk area, the writer reported that settlers did not grow barley because up to that point there was no market and hence no price for the grain. Johann Matthies recalled that in 1903 wheat prices were twenty to twenty five kopecks per pud (16.4 kgs) and then only small quantities could be sold "because the Omsk market was overfilled." J. Wiens reported that during the fall and winter after the large 1903 crop the prices for grain "had sunk to low levels," a fact acknowledged by Peter Wiens later that year. In the July issue of the *Zionsbote*, the latter noted however that prices had since improved to sixty kopeks per pud. By 1906 the cheap wheat prices had been discovered by outside buyers and the prices for some sales of wheat in 1906 were one ruble per pud.[47] The distance from markets was a constant frustration for Siberian writers and they had to acknowledge that grain prices were low because of that fact. There was much greater optimism about the possibilities of the dairy industry and writers painted a glowing picture of this industry for their southern readers. J. D. Enns noted that "owing to the cheapness of the land and the excellent pasturage … butter has become one of the chief articles in the export trade of West Siberia."[48] In 1905 Peter Wiens was pleased to report that butter was bringing nine rubles per pud and that some two thousand three-and-half-pud (fifty seven kgs) barrels of butter were being shipped for export from Omsk each week.[49]

Scholarly discussion about both Siberia and the plains of the United States and Canada has often debated the role of the frontier in the national consciousness of the two countries. Most influential and a backdrop for almost all the later analysis of the American West is Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis outlined in a famous essay in 1893. Turner argued that the "existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of America settlement westward," made new people out of immigrants thereby creating a new American identity.[50] William Katerberg in a comparison of Canadian and American ideas of the West argues that "the frontier west in American culture is typically a land all its own … where people go to escape the burdens of a civilized world," while in the "Canadian imagination frontiers usually are tied to the larger world as peripheries shaped and controlled by distant capitols." Both countries justified "the process of conquest with imperialist, racialist, and often religious visions of national destiny."[51] Mark Bassin's analysis tracing how Siberia was invented in the nineteenth century argues that images of Siberia "reflected more than anything the growing political and cultural fragmentation of European Russian society." Siberia was at the same time a "withered and useless remnant of a past colonial glory" and "the home of a democratic and egalitarian society."[52] In Eva Maria Stolberg's analysis of the Russian view of Siberia in the early twentieth century, the racialist tendencies identified by Katerberg in North America also loom large. Stolberg argues that frontiers are membranes through which opposing group identities penetrate each other's geographic and social space. Siberia then "became a contest ground for Russian and Japanese imperialism," a contest between a "Yellow Peril" and a "White Mission."[53]

While the Tsar's Germans, and Mennonites in particular, did not constitute a nation as conceived in the above analysis, it remains an interesting question whether Siberia was more than land, weather and markets in the Mennonite imagination. The newspaper conversations examined here only betray the occasional suggestion of such meanings. The most explicit are the racial biases and a general attitude of cultural superiority exhibited by early Mennonite settlers writing from Siberia. The Kirghiz are described as a "half wild shepherd people" who were lazier than the Asiatic people of the Caucasus, although not as given to murder and theft.[54] The Cossacks, although they owned most of the land "engage in agriculture … in a very primitive way," while Russians who are described as poor also farm, but "not in the way we are used to it in the south."[55] Peter Wiens, writing in mid-May 1904 noted that the "Siberiaky" were still seeding but Germans, a category that included Mennonites, were already finished even though they had started late.[56]

A least one Siberian Mennonite contributor believed that Siberia represented a new frontier mission to a primitive east for Mennonites. J. D. Enns began his letter to the *Rundschau* by suggesting that "the civilizing influences of Western Europe entered Russia from the western frontier" and that Mennonites "were from the West and brought civilization to Southern Russia." He ends the letter assuring readers that "the further eastward movement of the Mennonites is only a question of time."[57] More common, particularly for contributors to the more specifically religious Mennonite Brethren paper, the *Zionsbote*, were lengthy chronicles of the vibrancy of religious life in Siberia. As if to reassure readers that the faith could, and was being maintained in far off Siberia, Jacob Rogalsky wondered out loud if southern readers might "think that we feel very lonely here in Siberia," but then responded to his query by detailing the well attended services of the recent Christmas season.[58]

Siberia represented cold, snow, desolation and exile in the Mennonite imagination. The German language press became an important vehicle for the reimagining of Siberia as a possible place of settlement. The main questions that confronted Mennonites were the fertility and availability of land, the weather as it related to the harshness of winter and the length of summer and the markets. The early migrants to Siberia were instrumental in transforming the image of Siberia, helping to create Siberia as a place where Mennonites could imagine living. Their writings created a Siberia that while cold, had a healthier climate than that of the south. There was fertile land in abundance, and although markets were poorly developed, Siberia offered the prospect of a bright future. Invariably the writers from Siberia concluded that few Mennonites who had come to settle in Siberia wanted to "return to Egypt" as one put it.[59] By the time the Tsar announced the availability of free land in the Kulunda Steppe south of Omsk in 1906, Mennonites in southern Russia had re-imagined Siberia and for the landless it had come to represent the opportunity to become landed farmers. In his report in a 1907 journal, the Molotschna colony administrator Bernhard Fast reported that the announcement that land was becoming available on the Kulunda Steppe produced "feverish interest" among the landless as well as among property owners. He also noted the widespread interest in hearing what the land scouts who had been commissioned to inspect the possibilities of Siberian settlement would have found. When they returned in the summer of 1907 to give their report, the *Volost* office in Tiege was much too small for the turnout and the meeting had to be held outside in the shade of the *Volost* office's garden.[60] For many Mennonites, Siberia had become the Promised Land.

Notes

[1] James Urry, "Prolegomena to the Study of Russian Mennonite Society in Russia, 1880-1914," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 8 (1990): 53-54.

[2] Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 33.

[3] A few examples include: Anita Enns Priess, *Exiled to Siberia*, (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1972); Lawrence Klippenstein, ed., Esther Klaassen Bergen, trans.. *The Siberian Diary of Aron P. Toews*, (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1984); Georg Hildebrand, *Wieso lebst du noch?: Ein Deutscher im Gulag*, (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1993) and Johann Epp, *Und nun Herr Doktor?* (Lage: LogosVerlag, 2000).

[4] Gerhard Fast, *In den Steppen Sibiriens*, (Rosthern: Heese, 1957); Peter Rahn, *Mennoniten in der Umgebung von Omsk*, (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975); and J. J. Hildebrand, *Sibirien* (Winnipeg: by the author, 1952).

[5] John B. Toews, "Mennonites and the Siberian Frontier (1907-1930) Some Observations," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47, no. 2 (1973): 83-101.

[6] James Urry, *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889*, (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), 286 and David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48, no. 1 (1974): 36.

[7] William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, 2nd ed., (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1986), 16.

[8] Urry, *None but Saints*, 221-24.

[9] Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," 31.

[10] Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth," 33. Rempel uses the example of the land acquisitions of A. Wallman, a large Mennonite landowner as the basis for this assessment. See also Urry, *None but Saints*, 222.

[11] Bernard Warkentin, "Eine Reise nach Sibierien im Jahre 1859," *Der Botschafter* 5, no. 55, July 16/29, 1910, 4.

[12] Treadgold, 69-70.

[13] Urry, *None but Saints*, 197.

[14] Mark Bassin, "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review* (June 1991): 771.

[15] Willard Sunderland, "Peasant Pioneering: Russian Peasant Settlers Describe Colonization and the Eastern Frontier, 1880s-1910," *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 899.

[16] Doug Owram, *The Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 3.

[17] R. Douglas Francis, *Images of the West: Responses to the Canadian Prairies* (Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer Books, 1989), 107 and 110.

[18] Toews, "Siberian Frontier," 84.

[19] I am particularly indebted to James Urry, who made available to me his index of the *Odessa Zeitung*. It is now also available on the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies website, http://www.mbconf.ca/home/products_and_services/resources/published_genealogies/resources/. The *Mennonitisiche Rundschau* is also indexed for the years 1880 to 1910.

[20] "Etwas Über Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 89, April 18/May 1, 1904, 2-3.

[21] "Siberien ein Land der Zukunft," *Mennonitische Rundschau*, May 9, 1893.

[22] Dietrich Rempel, "Eine Reise durch Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 84, April 13/26, 1901, 2-3.

[23] Dietrich Rempel, "Eine Reise durch Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 87, April 17/30, 1901, 2-3.

[24] Johann J. Matthies, "51 Jahre Mennoniten siedlungen in Westsiberien," *Mennonitische Rundschau*, August 22, 1951, 3.

[25] Jacob B. Peters in Fast, *In den Steppen*, 1.

[26] J. D. Enns, "West Siberien," *Mennonitische Rundschau*, March 19, 1902. A translation appeared in *Herald of Truth* and was reprinted in J. D. Enns, "Letter from a Mennonite in West Siberia," *The Friend: a Religious and Literary Journal (1827-1906)* (July 12, 1902). The quotations are from the latter source.

[27] "Etwas Über Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 89, April 18/May 1, 1904, 2-3.

[28] J. J. Hildebrand, 17-18.

[29] P. Wiens, "Aus Omsk," *Odessa Zeitung* 94, April 23/May 6, 1900, 3.

[30] "Etwas Über Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 89, April 18/May 1, 1904, 2-3.

[31] Enns, "West Siberien."

[32] Tina Hinz, "Memoir," 16. The memoir was transcribed and printed by the family in Germany. The original is in the possession of Flora Wilms, Paderborn, Germany.

[33] J. J. Hildebrand, 23.

[34] Enns, "West Siberien." In the *Rundschau* version the temperature is given as -33 ° Réaumur, which would be -42 °F or -41 °C.

[35] "Uebersiedlung nach Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 10, January 13/26, 1907. Orenburg is just west of the Ural Mountains and not actually in Siberia.

[36] Fred Hopping as quoted in Francis, 110. A similar theme arises in the letters of Estonian migrants to Siberia who claimed that winters were colder than in Estonia, but "not as damp." See, Aivar Jürgenson, "The Wild and Homely Siberia: How Siberian Estonians Perceive their Natural Environment," *Folklore* 21 (2002), 59.

[37] P. Wiens, "Aus Omsk," *Odessa Zeitung* 94, April 23/May 6, 1900, 3.

[38] Jacob Rogalsky, *Zionsbote*, February 15, 1905, 8. The article mentions twenty three degrees, suggesting the editors converted the Russian units to degrees Fahrenheit.

[39] Frederich Gebbert, "Etwas Über Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 89, April 18/May 1, 1904, 2-3.

[40] Peter Klaassen, *Odessa Zeitung* 40, February 20/March 5, 1901, 2 and P. Wiens, *Odessa Zeitung* 65, March 21/April 3, 1901, 2.

[41] P. Wiens, *Odessa Zeitung*, 227, October 11/24 1903, 2. The reported yield would be almost forty five bushels per acre of wheat, a very high yield for the time by Western Canadian standards.

[42] J. Wiens, *Zionsbote*, February 17, 1904, 3.

[43] "Zur Auswanderung nach Siberien," *Mennonitische Rundschau*, August 15, 1881, 2.

[44] S. Kludt, "Zur Ubersiedlung nach Siberien. Mitteilung nach amtlichen Quellen," *Odessa Zeitung* 131, June 11/24, 1900, 3.

[45] J. Wiens, *Zionsbote*, February 17, 1904, 3.

[46] "Uebersiedlung nach Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 10, January 13/26, 1907.

[47] Matthies, "51 Jahre Mennonitensiedlungen," J. Wiens, *Zionsbote*, February 17, 1904, 3 and P. Wiens, *Zionbote*, July 20, 1904, 3.

[48] Enns, "West Siberien."

[49] Peter Wiens, *Zionsbote*, July 20, 1904, 3.

[50] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 1.

[51] William H. Katerberg, "A Northern Vision: Frontiers and the West in the Canadian and American Imagination," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Winter 2003): 545 and 547.

[52] Bassin, 792.

[53] Eva Maria Stolberg, "The Siberian Frontier between 'White Mission' and 'Yellow Peril,' 1890s–1920s," *Nationalities Papers* 32, no. 1 (2004): 166.

[54] "Etwas Über Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 89, April 18/May 1, 1904, 2-3 and Friedrich Gebbert, "Etwas über das Kaiserliche Kabinettsland um Semipalatinsk in Siberien," *Mennonitische Rundschau* 20, November 27, 1901.

[55] Enns, "West Siberien."

[56] Peter Wiens, *Zionsbote*, July 20, 1904, 3.

[57] Enns, "West Siberien."

[58] Jacob Rogalsky, *Zionsbote*, February 5, 1905, 8.

[59] "Etwas Über Siberien," *Odessa Zeitung* 89, April 18/May 1, 1904, 2-3.

[60] Bernard Fast, "Die Ansiedlungen in Siberien aus der Orloffer Wollost," *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* (1907): 18-19.