

Blumenhof Village and the Archaeology of Social Difference

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Between 2008 and 2012 four archaeological excavation seasons were undertaken at two Mennonite habitation sites in the abandoned village of Blumenhof, Manitoba, three miles north of the City of Steinbach.¹ Blumenhof was settled in 1875 largely by *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonite immigrant families from the Borozenko (also Borosenko) Colony, New Russia (present day Ukraine). In Blumenhof, the Cornelius S. and Sarah Plett farm site was inhabited by three generations of Pletts from 1875-1906, after which it was abandoned as a habitation. The Peter and Justina Unger farm site was inhabited 1875-1889, at which time the family moved to a quarter-section one mile north of the village. The Plett and Unger families had very different landholdings and possessions, and represented the upper and lower financial status extremes in the village. Artefacts recovered from the two habitations indicate that this status difference was displayed in subtle ways.

Mennonites and Materiality

The material culture of nineteenth century Mennonite immigrants in Manitoba is largely known from museum collections rather than from archival sources. Some archival materials may

assist in documenting types of material possessions through tax and insurance records and transaction ledgers. Photographs can provide data on clothing, buildings and background artefacts. However, these sources are not rich in detailed descriptions of physical objects or in the meanings these objects held for their owners. This lack of detailed object information supports a common folk narrative about Mennonites in which material culture is 'simple' and dominated by an austere religiosity. A closer view of the actual objects used by Mennonites in the past tells a very different story. For traditionalist Mennonites, objects had the potential to reveal the level of adherence to *orthopraxis* (correct practice), as well as to individuality or 'worldliness.'

While the perception of Mennonites as materially 'simple' may hold some weight in the realm of Mennonite religious ideology, in which simplicity relative to the wider world was a moral objective, this perception is entirely untrue with regard to the quality and meaning of actual Mennonite possessions (Sawatzky 2005). The ceramics they chose to purchase, the vibrant colours of their household interiors, the modernity of their agricultural implements, and the importance they invested in their traditional furniture, clothing, linens and even clocks indicate a deep concern for both useful and symbolic objects (Einarsson and Tayler, eds. 1993; Janzen and Janzen 1991; Krahn, Mielitz and Mielitz 2010; Kroeger 2012; Sawatzky 2005, 2008).² Whether these possessions were used to display sameness or difference, they were invested with complex meanings.

Consumption studies view material culture as more than a provision of material needs. Material culture includes, indeed is entirely permeated with, a symbolic element. Material goods *as consumed* can be signifiers of both conformity and difference. Patterns of the consumption of material goods are structured in part by practices embodied by status position (Bourdieu 1984). Archaeologists are well suited to the study of these patterns because "consumption is what ultimately determines where most of the objects they excavate are located and in what state they are found" (Dietler 2010: 211). Archaeologists have for decades been quite attuned to the issue of status display and negotiation through the remnants of material goods found in household sites, although the matter is far from straightforward (Johnson 1996; McGuire and Paynter, eds. 1991; Monks 1999).

Likewise, the physical landscapes Mennonites from Russia developed in Manitoba, including village layouts, architecture, gardens and orchards, held symbolic value in their assistance in maintaining social order (Bruce 1998; Butterfield and Ledohowski

1984; Klippenstein 1997; Lehr 1997; Ruta Fuchs 2007; Sawatzky 2005; Warkentin 2000 [1960]). In settled societies throughout the world, the relative size and location of dwellings are “essential indicators of social standing” and physical positioning tends strongly to reflect social positioning (Daloz 2010: 68). The Mennonite village landscape of the late-nineteenth century was no different in this respect. The Mennonite street village was a structuring device. It both unified individuals and families and ordered socially differentiated families along physical space, thus reifying their social positions.

Among Mennonites, perceptible differences in material possessions fell into patterns based on household financial status, locale (often at the village level, as with domestic architecture), subgroup affiliation (e.g., *Bergthaler*, *Reinländer*, and *Kleine Gemeinde* each had ‘accepted’ forms of clothing), and, less importantly, individual taste. The social identity of the individual was tied to each of these elements, and the household (the basic social and economic unit of the village) was the primary site for teaching the daily lessons of this identity. Social and economic success, however that was defined, was based on the household unit, not the individual, and the objects that created the physical setting of the household were essential not only in inculcating social values, but also in communicating status, which was a part of that value system.

Archaeological Material

Museums such as the Kauffman Museum in North Newton, Kansas and the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba hold significant collections of ‘Russian’ Mennonite material culture from the 1500s to the present day. Other national and state or provincial museums in North America have also collected this material. Most of these artefacts have been donated by owners or their descendants, and many hold specific heirloom status, were of personal interest to the owners, or were part of larger family collections. Museums, in other words, tend to have collections made up of artefacts that have survived the process of discard, rot, loss and other forms of physical destruction. This survival is uneven as it favours items preserved by families, and tends to ignore items broken or worn out by use or discarded. The latter items, however, provide just as much information about the material culture and material conditions of past societies, and it is precisely such an assemblage that archaeological excavations provide. With this in

mind, archaeologists working at the Blumenhof sites were intent on gathering *in situ* refuse that, while suffering from the usual vagaries of unique depositional histories, would nevertheless provide a different class of collection. An archaeological assemblage includes a large cross-section of materials possessed and utilized by single household units, *including* items that were eventually considered worthless or unseemly and certainly without preservation value for the inhabitants.

The Village Context: Blumenhof

Blumenhof consisted of adherents to the *Kleine Gemeinde*, a conservative traditionalist group established in 1812 in New Russia. As a small subset of the larger traditionalist Mennonite society in Manitoba, the *Kleine Gemeinde* established a handful of villages in the East Reserve, a collection of sections east of the Red River set aside for initial Mennonite settlement in the 1870s. The Pletts and Ungers of Blumenhof shared religious beliefs as well as the social and physical context of the village setting, but they were divergent in their financial and social statuses. This is aptly described by Loewen: "There was ... a definite class of men [among the villages of Blumenort, Blumenhof and Neuanlage] of influence who held the leadership positions and who also were among the most affluent" (1983:80). In 1883 the wealthiest twenty-five per cent of Blumenhof residents were assessed at over \$900, while the poorest twenty-five per cent were assessed at under \$500. Loewen includes Cornelius S. Plett among the wealthiest (1983:80), while Unger was assessed at \$552. Tax records also note that the material possessions of each household differed in both quantity and quality. For example, in 1883 Plett owned twelve cattle, while Unger owned seven; Plett owned two wagons with a combined value of \$65.00, and Unger owned one wagon valued at \$5.00 (R.M. of Hespeler Tax Assessment, 1883).

Blumenhof was oriented in an East-West direction and crossed the boundary of sections 23 and 24, 7-6E. The Plett excavation site was the first farmyard east of the road allowance (previously known as Old Tom Road), located on the Southwest corner of the Northwest quarter of Section 24, Township 7, Range 6E. Two other yards and a school were once located east of the Plett farmyard. The two other yards, belonging to Johann Janzen and Peter Unger, yielded surface scatter concentrations of artefacts which were mapped in 2009 (Figure 1).

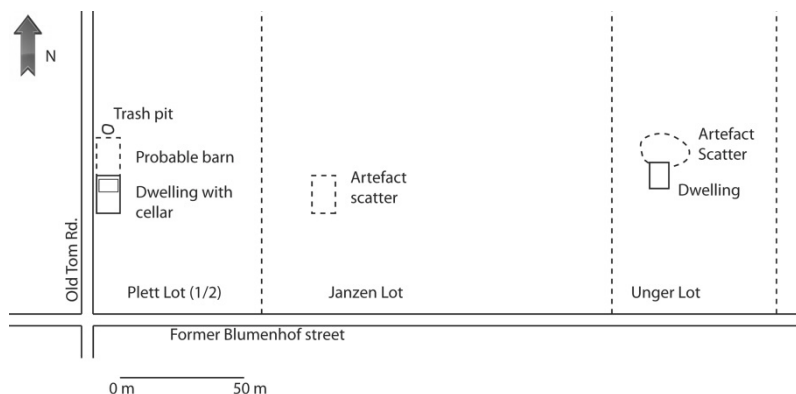


Figure 1. Blumenhof households identified through archaeological survey and excavation.

The Plett Family

Cornelius S. Plett was born in 1820 in West Prussia, moved to Russia in 1828 with his parents, and married Sarah Loewen in 1841. They lived as renters (*Anwohner*) in Lindenau village, Molotschna Colony, and Cornelius worked as a wagon wheel maker. In 1854 the couple moved to the newly founded village of Kleefeld, Molotschna Colony, where they took up a *Wirtschaft*, a full farm of 165 acres. Being a *Wirtschaft* owner (*Vollwirt*) meant Cornelius had voting rights in the village, which represented a significant increase in power and personal status. For a time he also acted as mayor (*Vorsteher*) of the village. The couple had sixteen children, some of whom survived to migrate to Canada in 1875.

In 1872 the family moved to the new village of Blumenhof in the Borozenko Colony, New Russia, where Plett was responsible for hiring the teacher, representing the village, mediating disputes, and enforcing the building code. This building code was made explicit in two German language agricultural periodicals published in Russia in the mid-nineteenth century (Jaensch 1846; Wiebe 1852).

In 1875 the Pletts moved to the Mennonite East Reserve in Manitoba, where they helped found the village of Blumenhof. Cornelius S. Plett again took up a position of leadership. The Cornelius S. Plett yard was located just east of the road allowance between Sections 23 and 24 (Plett 1981: 22). After eight years of building up the farm business, Plett reduced his operations beginning in 1883 and began selling or giving materials to his descendants. In 1884

Cornelius S. and Sarah moved into a new small retirement house on the same yard, although they were still somewhat independent farmers, working in an official partnership with two of their sons. The Plett's eldest son, Cornelius L. Plett, and his family moved into the original Plett housebarn at this time. The Mennonite housebarn of the period included a single storey residence attached at one end to a barn and stable, usually sharing a ridgeline. This created a huge structure often in excess of ninety feet long. The housebarn structure has an ancient history in Northern Europe, and Mennonites utilized this design as well during their period of habitation in South Russia.

Despite the financial success of the village, or perhaps because of it, the village underwent dissolution in 1887, whereby the inhabitants agreed to remove themselves from their yards and move onto their granted quarter sections. Most of the other Mennonite villages would follow this pattern through to the 1920s. However, because Cornelius S. Plett held title to the quarter section on which his lot was already located, this residence was not moved or destroyed immediately after village dissolution. By 1893 Cornelius S. and Sarah Plett had given or sold all of their property to their children.

In 1897 the elderly couple moved to the residence of their son David Plett, and in their final years lived with their youngest son Jakob. In 1900 Cornelius S. died, evidently after contracting typhoid from his dying estranged son, whom he had kissed on his son's deathbed. Sarah moved to Blumenort to live with children there. She died in 1903 at the age of eighty and was buried in the Blumenort cemetery.

Cornelius L. Plett, the eldest son of Cornelius S. and Sarah, was already married to his second wife, Helena Rempel when they moved onto his parents' yard and into their home in 1884. The couple had four children living with them at this time. Cornelius L. was an important minister and elder in the church. He established a large dairy farm on the yard and in 1889 owned twenty-one cattle. Cornelius L. was involved in horticulture and constantly worked in the garden and orchard. In about 1906 he retired and sold his farm to son Heinrich Plett (b. 1870) for \$4,000. Cornelius L. and Helena moved to Steinbach and lived there until Helena died in 1913. Cornelius L. eventually moved to Kansas and was married a third time. He died in 1935.

Heinrich Plett was married to Elisabeth F. Reimer. When Heinrich purchased the land from his father around 1906, the barn was used to shelter the oxen and horses. He and his wife and children

continued to live in their house in Blumenort and the Cornelius Plett yard afterwards became known as the Blumenhof Farm.

A local inhabitant recalled the remains of four village yards on the Blumenhof Farm, which were a distraction to the oxen when plowing. These four yards were probably the Cornelius Plett yard, the Johann Janzen yard, the Peter H. Unger yard and the school house, all east of the former Old Tom Road, now Municipal Road 35 E (Eric Toews, personal communication, 2008).

Architectural Features

According to the “Application for Homestead Patent” filed by Cornelius S. Plett in 1886, the dwelling he built was 26 x 40 feet (8 x 12.2 metres), and the attached stable matched this size. Numerous architectural features uncovered during archaeological excavation confirmed the size of the house and established the exact location of the dwelling. Features included remnants of the fieldstone foundation and the discovery of the 3 x 5 metre (m) cellar. Other elements that supported the location of the dwelling included the slight increase in elevation of the dwelling area up to 30 centimetres (cm) higher than the surrounding fields, weed growth patterns associated with yard sites, a high concentration of artefacts in and around the dwelling area (including lumber and plate glass fragments), and accounts by local residents. The dwelling was situated in a north-south orientation perpendicular to the village street, located about 40 m north of the original street (Figure 2, next page).

The cellar was approximately 3 x 5 m and was likely located beneath the pantry and kitchen of the housebarn. The stratigraphy of the cellar excavation indicates the depositional history of this pit. While the top 20 to 30 cm show a mix of black topsoil, clay and red woody soil, after 40 cm to about 135 cm a thick but varied layer of friable, red woody soil slopes down on all sides towards the centre. Directly beneath this layer of woody soil is mottled clay, also sloping towards the centre. The largest artefacts were recovered at a depth of 150 cm in the mottled clay, in the centre of the excavated blocks. This included artefacts such as shoes, shaped timber elements, large metal fragments, bricks, cedar shingles and fabric. The clay walls of the cellar may have been braced with wooden shelving which was also useful for storage. After the abandonment of the site, and with perhaps persistent filling of the cellar floor with water, and then constant freezing and thawing, this would

have weakened the shelving and clay walls, causing slumping to the centre of the pit.

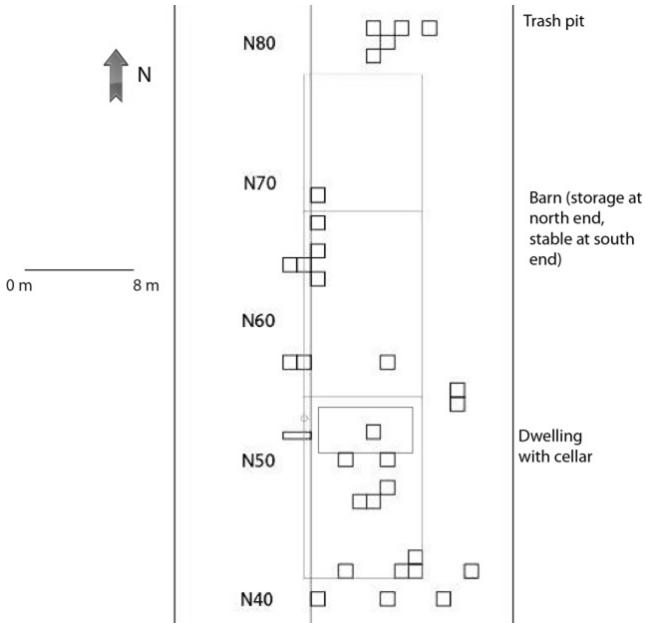


Figure 2. Excavation units and features of the Plett household.

At some point the bottom of the cellar was filled with larger artefacts, probably from around the site. This may have occurred early after abandonment or after the building was finally demolished sometime in the 1940s. It may also have been filled because the pit presented a safety concern. This deposit of objects was eventually covered with architectural wood remains, which decomposed over time into a reddish friable soil. However, few pieces of identifiable wood were found in this soil, and in fact large pieces of wood (shingles and timbers) were found only in the compact, wet clay at the bottom of the cellar. Soil was eventually taken from the surrounding land to cover this material, and the site was leveled for farming.

The cellar remains do not seem to include any items dating later than 1906, although numerous artefacts have earlier dates, including ceramics and a Bank of Montreal half-penny token dated to 1844. If the pit was filled later than 1906 (e.g., in the 1940s) it was filled with items from directly around the site.

Artefact Types

Ceramics

Ceramics found at the site can be divided into two large categories: British-style ceramics available for purchase in Manitoba, and Ukrainian and Russian ceramics. The former category contains by far the largest amount and variety of artefacts, while the latter contains only a handful of small fragments.

British-style ceramics, made in Great Britain or Canada, were dated where possible, and ranged from crockery to stoneware. While the dates of individual styles sometimes spanned many decades (i.e., Rockingham glaze, 1850–1900) the dates from the British-style ceramics all overlapped between 1880 and 1900, when the site was occupied.

Four earthenware shards have a reddish orange paste, with orange and green glaze on one side (Cover, bottom right). The paste, paint patterns and one-sided glaze all correspond to a bowl from the Mennonite Heritage Village that was received as a gift by Jakob L. Dueck in 1854 or 1856, prior to his immigration to Canada, probably on the occasion of his marriage to Maria Rempel (Figure 3, next page). The four excavated pieces therefore likely belonged to a ceramic piece transported with the immigrants. This type of ceramic was manufactured by Ukrainians in the region surrounding the Chortitza Colony and was probably purchased at a local market (Sawatzky and Dyck 2014). The pieces from the Plett site may also represent a special gift item rather than an everyday use item.

One porcelain ceramic piece with a partial maker's mark in Cyrillic script originated in the giant Kuznetsov potteries near Moscow, which was responsible for producing mass quantities of inexpensive porcelain. Kuznetsov was particularly active between 1800 and 1917, although it continued to produce products after this date, but as a state-owned pottery. This fragment was likely part of a piece that was brought with the Pletts in 1875. Other porcelain pieces include gold and pink hand-painted designs, which are more Russian-Kuznetsov in appearance than British-Canadian, and are probably of a more expensive variety (Cover, bottom left).

Other types of ceramics recovered include crock fragments, green and yellow salt-glazed earthenware, "Ceres" (Wheat Pattern) stoneware (1840 – twentieth century) and a number of porcelain potsherds.



Figure 3. Earthenware bowl belonged to Jacob L. and Maria Dueck of Kleefeld, MB. They received it as a wedding gift in 1854 or 1856 in Russia. MHV Acc. No. 970.21.2.

Three white stoneware figurine fragments were recovered, probably belonging to a set. Two pieces were part of a rabbit figurine, while the other was the base of a horse or cow figurine (Figure 4). A number of distinctive ginger beer bottle fragments were also recovered that indicated the recreational consumption of alcohol. Ginger beer, with an alcohol content ranging from two per cent to eleven per cent, was brewed in Manitoba by at least eight different companies at the end of the nineteenth century (Chopping 1978:153-160).

Five fragments of a white stoneware plate with reddish pink transfer print (possibly faded) indicate a print of a clock face, with hours depicted with Roman numerals, and minutes with Arabic numerals (Cover, top left). The month “JUNE” appears on one potsherd, although it is a damaged transfer. The plate was about 25.4 cm in diameter and may have been a commemorative item.

Some of the 631 total ceramic potsherds recovered from the Plett site contained decorative elements, but very few are considered examples of “expensive” or “fine” ceramics. Mennonite women were known to be collectors of decorative ceramics for display in a piece of furniture in the formal parlour known as a *Glausschaup*, or glass cabinet. These items were rarely, if ever, used and often included gift items and inherited pieces from other women within the extended family.



Figure 4. Stoneware rabbit figurine (right) and base of horse or cow (left), dates unknown. MHV Acc. Nos. 2008.14.185, 2009.20.72.

One example of this kind of ceramic that belonged to Sarah Plett still survives in the hands of descendants (Plett 1998: 98-99). A plate, cup and saucer were inherited by Sarah's son David L. Plett and daughter-in-law Helena Koop Plett. The set is an example of "Regent" pattern, produced by Johnson Bros. of England dated post-1891, meaning the set was purchased in Manitoba between 1891 and the time of Sarah's death in 1903 (Plett 2003: 348).

Glass

The glass recovered from the site can be divided into four categories: plate glass, bottle glass, lantern glass and melted glass. The



Figure 5. Chamfered case gin bottle fragment from excavation (MHV Acc. No. 2009.20.535) and whole chamfered case gin bottle from the MHV collection (Acc. No. 974.94.3). Both are European imports dated 1870-1920.

plate glass indicates the existence of windows (and thus the presence of a building), while the bottle glass indicates storage and/or consumption. Some fragments of case gin bottles were found at the site (Figure 5, previous page). Fragments of small medicine bottle glass were also recovered.

Metal

A variety of metal pieces were found at the site, including machine cut square nails, York-eye style open harness bells, barrel hoop fragments, iron stove pieces (including heavy cast stove top sections), a pewter spoon, a garden hoe, a latch, harness rivets, buckles, hay mower teeth, a pail handle, etc. These metal items indicate a domestic dwelling and agricultural field activities. The pewter spoon fragment is a match to a pewter spoon in the Mennonite Heritage Village collection in size and material (Figure 6). The latter was brought to Canada in 1874 by Steinbach Mennonite settlers (also *Kleine Gemeinde*), and the Plett spoon was probably brought with the Plett family in 1875.



Figure 6. Pewter spoon fragment (MHV Acc. No. 2008.14.1137) and Pewter spoon from the MHV collection (Acc. No. 980.7.1.), both likely pre-1874.

Bricks

A number of yellow bricks were recovered from the surface and below the surface of the site. While Mennonites built their homes in Manitoba entirely of wood, brick was used for the interior central oven and chimney, which was a massive structure requiring many hundreds of bricks. The relative scarcity of bricks at the site

indicates a number of possibilities: there was no brick oven and the bricks at the site are merely the remains of a demolished chimney (used in tandem with an iron stove); the brick oven was removed when the house was still standing, but the chimney remained in use with a newer iron stove; the brick oven and chimney were demolished at the same time and the site well cleaned. The presence of iron stove pieces would suggest one of the first two possibilities.

Bone

Bone on the site can be divided into six categories, including mulched fertilizer bone (found in the plow zone), larger bone pieces indicative of butchering practices, calcined bone, wild rodent bone, fish bone, and bone and shell buttons. Large cattle and pig bone pieces indicating butchering were largely found in the lower levels of the pit feature found at the north end of the site and in the cellar.

A small number of fish bones and scales were also found at the site, indicating that while domestic mammals and chickens were the main source of meat protein, local fishing or trading for fish supplemented this diet. One bone was identified as pike operculum. A local MHV volunteer, when questioned about the presence of this large predatory fish far from any large bodies of water, stated that when he was a boy in the 1940s the Red River would flood in the spring, causing the local Twin Creeks to swell (personal communication, Al Hamm, 2009). Pike would swim from the Red up the Twin Creeks following prey, where the pike could easily be captured or in this case, shot. One of the Twin Creeks runs three-quarters of a mile south of the Blumenhof site, and this may be the location where this fish was caught in the spring season.

Leather and Textile

The conditions for preservation of textiles and leather were uneven in the pit and cellar areas, although some items were found in fair condition. The items in the best condition were found encased in wet clay, such as a woman's shirt and felt hat (Figures 7 and 8, next page). Eighty-six leather shoes were also discovered, some in remarkably good condition (Figure 9, page 29).

The woman's shirt was found in the bottom of the cellar bunched up into a ball and covered in wet clay. It conforms to styles found among Mennonite women from the 1870s to the 1920s: the arms are tight fitting and long, while the waist is quite high. A matching skirt, along with an apron, would have completed the

outfit. The shirt was quite fragmentary, but its shape and pattern were reconstructed after cleaning.



Figure 7. Textile fragment (woman's shirt) after treatment. MHV Acc. No. 2011.38.1733



Figure 8. A felt hat recovered from the heavy clay matrix near the bottom of the cellar. It was cleaned, re-shaped and dried, in accordance with Canadian Conservation Institute recommendations. An imprint of an original band can be seen, but the band itself has fully disintegrated.

Conservation reveals a hat that seems to conform to popular Canadian styles of the late-nineteenth century. MHV Acc. No. 2011.38.1346.

Leather was recovered in the form of either straps or shoes. Some straps of leather had associated metal pieces, including a number of rivets and a buckle. These leather fragments strongly suggest harnessing equipment.

Eighty-six separate shoes and numerous leather shoe fragments were recovered from the bottom of the cellar units at depths of 150-165 cm below surface. This collection included adult male and female shoes, as well as children's shoes. The smallest shoe (Fig-

ure 9) has a sole length of 16 cm, indicating an age of the wearer of about four years. The soles are the best preserved sections of the shoes, while the uppers are in various states of deterioration.

The shoes may have been thrown into the cellar when the house was abandoned in 1906, or used as fill between 1906 and the mid-1940s when the house was razed. The shoes do not seem to have been 'worn out' by their owners: the soles are in good condition and there is no evidence to indicate excessive interior or exterior use-wear. It seems strange that Mennonites, who were known to re-use and pass down clothing, simply discarded decent shoes. The most likely possibility is that this hoard of shoes was somehow merely forgotten somewhere, and after some deterioration they were thrown away in the cellar.



Figure 9. Child's shoe. MHV Acc. No. 2009.20.463

Once removed from the moist ground the shoes began to disintegrate. A number were chosen for conservation treatment by Parks Canada and the Canadian Conservation Institute to facilitate long term preservation, research and exhibition. This work is ongoing at the time of publication.

Slate and Pencils

A fragment of a writing slate was recovered, as well as two slate pencil fragments, including one with sharpening marks at the tip (Figure 10, next page). Slate and slate pencils were commonly used in Mennonite communities as a practice board for children's writing exercises in school. These pieces reflect the presence of

school-aged children at the site, and the slates probably belonged to Cornelius S. Plett's children, David and Jacob, or his grandchildren, Helena and Cornelius, since they all lived at the site at various times.



Figure 10. Left to right: sharpened slate pencil, MHV Acc. No. 2009.20.408; slate pencil fragment, MHV Acc. No. 2009.20.860; Slate fragment, MHV Acc. No. 2008.14.418.

1844 Halfpenny Token

One degraded 1844 halfpenny Bank of Montreal token was found at the site (see Cross 1990: 172). These tokens (Figure 11) were made by the Bank of Montreal during a period when physical currency was scarce. It is unknown how long these tokens may have been in circulation, but it seems one may have been picked up by the Pletts as they passed through Montreal in 1875, or in Manitoba afterwards.



Figure 11. Bank of Montreal half penny token of the type found at site (1844).³

Summary of the Plett Site

The 2008, 2009 and 2011 excavations at the Plett site in Blumenhof (DjLd-3) provided clear evidence of an early Manitoban Mennonite household settlement. The habitation period of 1875-1906 was confirmed, the dwelling dimensions and orientation secured, and the cellar and a refuse pit were found and fully excavated. Domestic dwelling and agricultural artefacts were found in abundance in fragmentary states.

Peter Unger Family

Peter H. and Justina (Friesen) Unger left Rosenfeld, Borozenko Colony, New Russia and arrived with their children in Canada in 1874. Peter (1841-1896) and Justina (1836-1905), had settled in Blumenort but moved to Blumenhof at the end of 1875, where they built a farmstead at the furthest east end of the village near the schoolhouse. They were one of the last couples to settle in the village.

The Ungers lived in the house until about 1889 (after the village was dissolved) and then moved to a different quarter section. Judging by the lack of architectural remains or ashes, they moved the house with them, which was a common practice at the time.

During their time in the house, all eight of their children were living with them, overlapping entirely for a two year period from 1880-1882. The youngest six would have lived there until the family moved in 1889.

Little is known about the life of the Ungers at Blumenhof. Peter travelled to Winnipeg several times in the fall of 1875 to make purchases for the Blumenhof settlers (Loewen 1983:50). In 1883 the Ungers' total tax assessment was \$552, one of the lowest in the village, and they owned neither horses nor a share in a threshing machine or feed crusher (R.M. of Hespeler Tax Assessment, 1883). Peter Unger taught at the Blumenhof School beginning sometime in the 1880s until 1889. They left the village of Blumenhof in 1889 after it was disbanded, and Peter continued to farm. In essence, Peter was a small-time farmer who did odd jobs and taught for a few years, which was a poorly paid, low status job. Justina would have been very busy looking after a household with six to eight children at any given time, although she would have had help from her older girls, Maria and Justina.

Architectural Elements

No cellar was found at the site, which was unexpected. A distinct layer of hard yellow clay (combined with sand and lime) was found, however, about 15 m running north to south, and 10 m east to west, and roughly 10-20 cm below the surface. In many cases, a very thin but distinct layer of wood shavings was found beneath the hard layer of clay or lime. Culturally sterile soil was found under these layers. The wood shavings definitely represent a building episode, probably the first dwelling constructed at the site, as timber and boards were prepared for the building. The clay-lime layer may be a floor, and was found directly overlying wood shavings when the two were associated in the same 1 x 1 m excavation unit. According to one source, lime was locally produced for flooring and walls: "White limestone was collected in the fields and thrown into a pit in which a hot fire was going for about a week. After the rock started crumbling, it was removed and mixed with stones and sand to make a strong, concrete like base" (Loewen, 1983: 73).

Wood beams and planks were also found at the site, in four different areas. While the location of wood members did not reveal a distinct pattern, the clay layer was grouped in a particular area of the site and probably represents a clay floor. It would seem the timber and wood members were formed and hewn first (producing the shavings), then the clay floor was laid down after the structure was built.

Despite a number of items indicating an architectural site, the plan of the building could not be determined. It seems likely, given the lack of large amounts of wood planking, nails, or glass, that the house was moved around 1889 rather than abandoned and later torn down, as was the case with the Plett housebarn.

Artefact Types

By far the largest quantity of ceramics at the site was white glazed stoneware fragments, many indicating the "Ceres" or wheat pattern. The only porcelain found at the site includes three small doll head fragments. Nine pieces of what seems to be reddish or yellow terra cotta potsherds resembling plant pot ceramics were also found.

Some potsherds with maker's marks were recovered from the site, which roughly corresponded to the date of habitation, including: J. G. Meakin, UK, circa 1890; Stone Chinaware Co., St. John's Quebec, 1873-1899; and Johnson Bros., UK, 1883-1960. Another

white earthenware group of ceramics may represent a set of shallow, thin-walled bowls. The rims exhibit a hand painted linear border, with a stencilled or stamped repetitive print running horizontally beneath it. The “set” includes four different colours (red, pink, blue, violet), each with its own pattern (Figure 12, next page, and Cover, top right).

Glass at the site consisted of medicine bottle glass, plate glass, an ink well, green bottle glass and a few pieces of tableware (drinking glass).

Metal artefacts were represented by a large number of machine-cut square nails (carpentry and finishing) as well as an ox shoe nail (2012.14.0271) were found throughout the site in almost all units, indicating the presence of a wooden structure with finish carpentry. Harness rivets and a copper button were also found, as well as a two-kopeck piece, undoubtedly brought from Russia. No agricultural implements were found.

No bricks were found at the Unger site, in contrast to the Plett site, where twenty-four bricks and brick fragments were found. This may indicate that the bricks of the chimney at the Unger site were transported when the house was moved and that the remains at the Plett site indicate demolition.

Bone was only found as fragmentary remains at the site. Much of this was undoubtedly used as mulched fertilizer. Diagnostic remains indicate the presence of pig, chicken and fish.



Figure 12. Violet pattern MHV Acc. Nos. (clockwise) 2012.14.651; 2012.14.406a; 2012.14.463; 2012.14.17; 2012.14.412 a & b, 2012.14.406b (see Cover); 2012.14.277; 2012.14.201; 2012.14.488; 2012.14.406c

With regard to leather and textiles, one partial sole of a shoe was found at the site (near the surface); but no leather or textiles besides this were recovered.

Summary of Unger Site

Based on architectural remains at the site, the Unger house had a clay/dirt floor with wood construction. The widespread, but thin, and well-defined layer of wood shavings indicated smoothing of logs or planks on-site. Numerous plate glass, nail and household ceramic artefacts also indicate the presence of a home. The largest concentration of artefacts, including ceramics, glass, nails, etc., was found in the northern portion of the site. These artefacts were mixed with a red woody soil matrix similar to that found in trash pits at the Plett site. This may indicate the site of a small, shallow trash deposit.

The size of the building at the site cannot be determined, but the general size of the clay floor area and wood shavings deposit is 11 x 6 m, with a north-south orientation.

Most of the artefacts at the site are small fragments of household items. Very few agricultural artefacts were recovered besides ox shoe nails and harness rivets, which may indicate that agricultural implements were taken by the Ungers when they moved or cleaned up at some point after abandonment. This is in contrast to the Plett site.

Discussion

Some artefact types and features show major differences between the Plett and Unger household sites.

- *Ceramics*: Of the 611 ceramic shards found at the Plett site, five per cent (n=31) were porcelain. Of the 164 sherds found at the Unger site, less than one per cent (n=1) were porcelain. Given that porcelain was both slightly more expensive and less durable than stoneware (ironstone) or earthenware ceramics at the time, this finding is an indication of the relative financial status of the two households.
- *Bricks and Agricultural Implements*: Both types were absent at the Unger site, indicating these features were removed for re-use at the new household site, or were cleaned up later by farmers.

- *House size*: The Plett house is known to have been 8 x 12.2 m (97.6 m²), while the Unger house may have been around 6 x 11 m (66 m²). These are respectively at the upper range and lower range of Mennonite house sizes (45-123 m²) in Manitoba in the period (1874-1900) (Sawatzky 2005; Sawatzky 2014).
- *Cellar*: No cellar was discovered at the Unger site. It may simply mean none was present, which corresponds to houses with dirt rather than wooden floors, or that it was missed during excavation.

Through the recovery of artefacts at the Plett and Unger sites we are provided a view of the materiality of daily life in a Mennonite village. Patterns emerge of family life centred on the daily rhythms of domestic activity. We see the physical possessions of women and children and farming men that speak of a living space – a setting for kitchen work, education, play, and agricultural toil on the field and in the garden. Their animals are also represented, including cattle, horses, chickens and pigs (and fish). While much of the recovered material is to be expected, such as the evidence of agriculture at the Pletts and the plates and cups for daily use, there are surprises, such as an immense cache of discarded shoes, fine porcelain, a Bank of Montreal 1844 token, and figurines, to name a few.

Some of these patterns of family life and household economy emerge clearly, while others remain vague. One pattern that emerges clearly is that the *Kleine Gemeinde* people of Blumenhof, and presumably Steinbach and Blumenort as well, were fully involved in purchasing of goods mass produced in other parts of North America or the United Kingdom. From the earliest stage of settlement, they linked into trade networks via Winnipeg that provided them with affordable British, Canadian and American goods. The ceramics, glass, machine-cut nails, barbed wire and implements are products of an international industrial economy and were not made in a village setting. Only a few items, such as the woman's shirt, the shoes, and the Ukrainian and low-grade earthenware ceramics, were potentially fabricated or constructed in the home, and, in the case of the Ukrainian style ceramics, it was probably not a Mennonite who produced this pottery.⁴

Gender specific patterns also present themselves. It is known that Mennonite women were the purchasers, receivers and presenters of gifts of ceramics. Evidence from both sites is abundant. Male activities such as field work are also visible in hay mower teeth and horse harness fragments, although these are largely ab-

sent from the Unger site. Children, often missing from the archaeological record, are also present in the form of educational artefacts (slate pencils and slates), toys (ceramic doll heads) and clothing (shoes).

The presence of liquor bottle fragments is not surprising. Alcoholic consumption among Mennonites was not uncommon and it is clearly evident in the case of the Plett household. This complicates the stereotype of alcohol abstinence among Mennonites, particularly those in the Steinbach area.

Based on the archival evidence of financial differences between the Plett and Unger families, combined with the meaning attached to material culture studied through oral history and museum collections, it is reasonable to view the objects owned by these Mennonites as potential status signifiers. 'Status' can refer to financial success, but not exclusively – it can also refer to 'taste,' 'refinement,' social power, or the possession of cultural capital (as in the case of a successful artist or respected clergy) and can be displayed in a large variety of methods depending on cultural background (Bourdieu 1998:1-13; Daloz 2010). For nineteenth century Russian Mennonites, status was generally not displayed at the level of the individual. The household was the economic unit and it is at this level that financial competition, as well as cooperation, was undertaken. The household, which was often but not exclusively multi-generational and comprised of immediate family members, was the arena in which status was contested. Objects, from farm implements and livestock to the house itself and the artefacts presented within it, were a primary source for displaying status while at the same time proving conformity. For Mennonites at least, the two were not mutually exclusive.

Historical documents indicate that the Pletts were a well-to-do, land-owning Mennonite family who exerted considerable influence in their community and came to Canada with relative wealth. Preliminary analysis of archaeological remains suggests that the Pletts' display of their elevated status through the use of material objects was confined by the community norms of the *Kleine Gemeinde* to the use or presentation of fine ceramics and size of dwelling.

The archaeological remains from Blumenhof indicate a subtle difference between sub-sets from the two households. The Plett household contained a much larger variety of artefacts, including fine porcelain ceramics, while the Unger household (with a larger family) included only the most basic of white "stoneware" available in North American markets and some decorative earthenware. The Plett site also included numerous industry-produced farm im-

plement fragments, a type of artefact that was all but missing in the Unger site. Architectural evidence shows a large and substantial dwelling at the Plett site and something more rudimentary at the Ungers. The dwellings are also significantly located in terms of status, relative to one another and to the village as a whole. Wealthier homes tended to be located close to the centre of the village, while poorer families were located on the edges. Other status signifiers not visible in the archaeological record but available in archival sources include business participation, livestock ownership and land ownership, the latter being by far the most important. In each of these categories of evidence, the Pletts far outweighed the Ungers in economic power.

Mennonites in Manitoba at the end of the nineteenth century adhered to *orthopraxis* (correct practice) in the name of community, peace and equality, yet they also took part in status signification through material means. Inequality between households existed, but the level of inequality was dampened by *orthopraxis* represented in both material culture and the built landscape. Housebarn design was similar; spatial proximity was tight and interpersonal contact was pervasive; everyone used ceramic vessels for daily purposes *and* for display. The differences between households were not masked, however, but subtly displayed: village residents, and those from other villages, were well aware of the economic standing of their neighbours – by reputation, but also by sight.

Conclusion

By excavating the tangible, if fragmentary, culture of past Mennonite society, instead of depending only on museum artefacts rescued by sentimentality, we are able to glimpse some of the underlying structures of that society. The artefacts reflect capital, gender, spatial use and domestic activity that existed in a setting that repetitively structured social life. The Mennonite village setting was regulated by unwritten but important rules of behaviour, or *orthopraxis*, that helped dampen the appearance of status differences. The material recovered from archaeological excavations assists in understanding the nature of material culture dynamics in a society that experienced tensions between status signification and an egalitarian ideology. In further studies of Mennonite material culture, either modern or historical, differences in sets of artefacts should be sought out and analyzed as physical markers of social difference in a society that may otherwise be seen as homogeneous.

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Notes

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- ¹ Four excavations (2008, 2009, 2011, 2012) took place on land owned by Royden and Mary Ann Loewen, whose permission and patience is greatly appreciated. All excavations were directed by the author and Valerie McKinley, Curator of the Anthropology Museum, University of Winnipeg, with assistance from Jodi Schmidt. Excavations in 2008 and 2012 were part of University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba archaeology field school courses, in partnership with the Mennonite Heritage Village. Support was provided by The Manitoba Museum, with financial assistance for two seasons provided by the Province of Manitoba (Heritage Grants Program and Historic Resources Branch). Archaeological materials from Blumenhof are currently stored at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, MB.
- ² “Folk art” by Mennonite artists also illuminates in great detail the importance of material culture in structuring daily life. This is exemplified in the fascinating works of Sarah Unger de Peters (1996), Henry B. Pauls (found in collections at the National Archives Canada, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg and Conrad Grebel University College; see also Einarsson and Taylor [eds.], 1993: 95-99; Tiessen and Tiessen [eds.], 1991), and the makers of village models and maps found in archives and museums around North America (Sawatzky, 2011 “Landscape and Memory: Mennonites and Maps,” temporary exhibit at Mennonite Heritage Village, February – July, 2011).
- ³ Image used with permission from www.coinsandcanada.com.
- ⁴ Mennonites were purchasing mass market items in the first stage of settlement. By the first decade of the twentieth century the general wealth of many Mennonites in Manitoba, combined with the increased availability of material goods streaming into Winnipeg and rural regions, seems to have affected the very nature of Mennonite material culture. In particular the concept of the ‘worth’ of gifts and display items changed. Whereas previous to 1900-1910, there was a clear emphasis on the time and effort of hand-made items as gifts, this is replaced by the 1920s with store-purchased items, where money replaces time as an indication of value. This is particularly evident in museum collections, where hand-made furniture and *Fraktur* art were replaced by purchased furniture and store-bought cards.