

The Cost of Community: The Funding and Economic Management of the Russian Mennonite Commonwealth Before 1914

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Late in 1913 a document from the early years of Mennonite settlement in Russia was published in the *Botschafter*. Dated 1798, it detailed the building costs of the first meeting house of the Flemish congregation in Khortitsa. Nearly all the money had been raised by the 195 members of the congregation and the building constructed within budget ("Aus vergilbten Papieren" 1913). Mennonite readers of the newspaper no doubt reflected on the contrast between this early balance sheet and the numerous accounts which regularly appeared in current publications detailing the extensive costs involved in maintaining the Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia. Whereas in 1798 the congregation had represented the only major Mennonite community organisation, by 1913 the Mennonite world was considerably more varied and complex, requiring massive financial input and careful management. The aim of this paper is to examine the nature of this Mennonite world in late Imperial Russia, the range of Mennonite institutions which made up the Mennonite Commonwealth, their costs and how these costs were met and managed.

1. The development of the Mennonite Commonwealth

At about the time the Khortitsa meeting house was built for the congregational-community, a secular system of civil government was imposed upon the Mennonite colonists which would herald the emergence of the colony-community (see Urry 1988 for a discussion of these different forms of community). This system of village and colony government was connected to newly formed Russian state agencies. Throughout the nineteenth century, as the Russian state developed central ministries and regional and local government agencies, Mennonite District Offices were forced to increase the scope of their operations. Although there was often conflict between the religious leaders of the congregational-community and the civil leaders of the colony-community during the first half of the nineteenth century (Urry 1989a), separate spheres of influence of power and responsibility eventually were recognised and the economic and social development of Mennonite life was largely directed by the civil government. After 1865 when Mennonites assumed responsibility for the settlement of their landless, the work of the District Offices included the management of the funds required to establish daughter colonies. Following the Great Reforms in Russia (1861-1880) many aspects of Mennonite life changed. In local government the District Offices were more integrated into the Russian bureaucratic structure. The special agency through which Mennonites had dealt with the Russian state was abolished and a variety of ministries and agencies, often unsympathetic to Mennonite ways, now handled Mennonite affairs. The introduction of the Forestry Service, a form of alternative service to military conscription open solely to Mennonites and for which they had to bear the major costs, forced Mennonites, separated by different settlements, customs and religious allegiances, to cooperate as never before (Rempel 1974, Urry 1989a). By 1880 the Mennonite sense of community involved membership of a religious congregation, a village, a regional administrative area and an ethnic group with special legal rights.

The old congregational structures had tended to divide rather than to unite Mennonites. In the changing social and political situation in Russia after 1880, congregations developed ties established by the Church Council of Elders into a General Conference of "Church" Mennonites. Only the Mennonite Brethren, formed after 1860, refused to join this Conference, and instead formed their own. The leaders of the Church Conference increasingly became involved with the expanded District Offices particularly in decisions affecting the Forestry Service and education. Eventually, even the old welfare services, once provided by the congregations such as care for the ill, orphans and the aged, became a responsibility shared with the organs of Mennonite civil government.

The complex Mennonite religious and secular institutions established after 1880 became part of an emerging Mennonite Commonwealth. In the Commonwealth, Mennonites, linked in a federated community, united to preserve Mennonite rights and privileges and to face the challenges of the Russian state at both the local and central levels of government. As well as these "external" objectives, the leaders of the Commonwealth also hoped to use their conferences and administrative bodies established to deal with the outside world to further the "internal" develop-

ment of Mennonite community life. In particular they encouraged the formation of distinctive Mennonite social and cultural institutions (Urry 1989a: 242-64). Such developments must be viewed against the increasing complexity of the economic world within and beyond the Mennonite settlements. Following the Great Reforms, Mennonites expanded the agricultural and industrial bases of their communities and founded new settlements in European and later Asiatic Russia. Social and cultural life became increasingly complex. These changes were in direct response to increasing industrialisation and social change in Russia in the years up to 1914.

By 1914 great demands were placed on the institutional structures of the Mennonite Commonwealth. Particularly after 1905 as the Russian government embarked on a new era of reforms, Mennonites were challenged by an external threat to the continuation of their privileges and their social and cultural institutions. They responded by strengthening old institutions and establishing new organisations to develop an even stronger Mennonite community and sense of identity (Urry 1990).

While by 1914 Mennonite life was still highly localised and the Commonwealth remained a loosely-knit federation, the Mennonite world had acquired many features of a quasi-state. Russia was still a very backward country and educational (Eklof 1986) and welfare services (Madison 1968: Chapter 1) were extremely rudimentary, especially in rural areas. Socially and culturally Mennonites were living far more complex lives than most of their neighbours and to support and sustain their community required the development of equally complex institutions. The discussion which follows will concentrate on this late period of development, particularly on the final years of the Mennonite Commonwealth before 1914.

2. Institutions and the cost of community

Economically Mennonite social and cultural institutions were financed and managed by a number of different bodies at different levels of the political and social structure. They also varied from settlement to settlement and at present it is impossible to detail or quantify them all.

(1) The District Office

Where Mennonites lived in colonies they usually were in control of their own civil government in the form of the District Office. At present financial figures for only the Khortitsa and Molochnaia (Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld) District Offices are available for the period shortly before 1914. These appear in the Mennonite press as annual financial statements, proposed budgets and reports on decisions reached at public meetings of the District during the year. Unfortunately the forms of accounting vary from Office to Office and even accounts from the same Office differ from year to year. This makes comparison extremely difficult.

The accounts for the Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld Offices for 1913 can be compared (Table 1) and that for Halbstadt presented in detail (Table 2). The District Office was responsible for collecting taxes for the central and regional Russian government but did not control these funds. It was also responsible for the Forestry Tax (The "Barrack's Tax") but again these were usually transferred directly to the commissioners who administered the service. The remaining major functions of the

Table 1
Income and expenditure for the Molochnia District Offices of
Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld 1913 (in Rubles)

Sources: Halbstadt, *Botsch.* 9(28)(11/23 April 1914), 3; Gnadenfeld, *Botsch.* 9(17)(28 Feb./13 March 1914), 3)

Halbstadt Office

Cash Transactions	Jan. 1, 1913	Receipts	Expenditure	Jan. 1, 1914
Community Costs	13,408	71,483	64,909	19,982
Fire Insurance	44,817	38,756	38,147	45,426
Forestry Taxes	297	23,966	23,856	407
Landless Capital	111,153	178,384	106,643	182,894
Central/Regional Taxes	327	88,726	88,870	183
Other sums	243	21,925	21,697	471
Securities	107,725			107,725
Total	277,970	423,240	344,122	357,088

Gnadenfeld Office

Cash Transactions	Jan. 1, 1913	Receipts	Expenditure	Jan. 1, 1914
Community Costs	7,406	67,193	39,392	34,667
Fire Insurance	48,418	17,155	5,993	59,580
Forestry Taxes	10,871	19,893	18,367	12,397
Landless Capital	73,549	53,161	24,650	102,060
Central/Regional Taxes		67,913	67,193	
Other sums	50	7,289	7,326	13
Securities	68,625	1,200	31,808	38,017
Total	208,918	233,804	195,989	264,734

Office involved the raising, investment and disbursement of funds concerned with local government, the funds collected for the District's landless and various cultural and welfare institutions which came under its jurisdiction.

The District Office in Halbstadt was responsible for local government but unfortunately exact details of these administrative duties and their costs are unavailable. However, it is known that they involved more than just overseeing government regulations and maintaining the accounts and correspondence of the Office. The District Office was the lowest level of a highly decentralised system of administration the Russians had developed in rural areas. The Office was responsible for the upkeep of roads and bridges, local law and order (local magistrates heard cases lodged with the Office), the postal service, basic medical services (for which trained staff were employed), veterinary services and a host of other responsibilities. The cost of secondary schools financed by the community was also handled by the District Office (see below). In such matters the Office resembled any Russian District Office although the demand for services was probably more developed and diverse than in many peasant districts.

Mennonite communities were usually wealthier than most peasant communities, the Office's income from taxes was greater and its population demanded more services.¹

Two long established Mennonite institutions were also managed by the District Office: fire insurance and the Orphan's Funds. Fire insurance was controlled directly by the Office and its costs included in the annual accounts (Tables 1 and 2). All property, including farm buildings, factories and businesses, was valued by the Office and payment of premiums was apparently compulsory. The Orphan's Funds were only indirectly managed by the Office and its costs do not appear in the accounts. This is because whereas fire insurance was covered by local government regulations, the care of orphans was subject to separate legislation which involved the congregations and separate elections for guardians of orphans. The Office appears merely to have handled the everyday affairs of the funds.

One area of responsibility unique to Mennonite District Offices, however, was control of Landless Funds. These were monies raised through the renting of designated areas of colony land and a head tax. The monies were invested until required to purchase land for the settlement of landless Mennonites registered with the District. The two Molochnaia offices often combined their funds when purchasing new lands and in one case, at Orenburg, they joined with Khortitsa. Extremely large sums needed to be raised, managed and disbursed. Between 1909 and 1914 the Halbstadt Office handled over one and a half million rubles (see Appendix for calculations of relative values) involved with its fund, a much higher sum than by either the Khortitsa or Gnadenfeld Offices. Gnadenfeld only handled 271,000 R in the same period (Ehrt 1932: 74-75 quoting figures in Bondar 1916). Landless Mennonites who settled in Siberia after 1906 were granted land by the government so the mother colonies paid sums from the funds directly to individuals as a form of support (Toews 1982:60-62 and contemporary newspaper reports).

Purchasing daughter colonies often involved careful and confidential negotiations, complex financial dealing and large expenditures. In 1913 the Khortitsa colony made an agreement with Prince Volonsky to purchase 4,546 desiati of land in Tambov Province for a total of 1,545,640R. 200,000R was paid as a deposit and the Khortitsa Office assumed the prince's mortgage of 900,000R held by the noble's bank. The agent who arranged the deal, an Ekaterinoslav merchant named Parchomenko, received a 159,640R fee and the prince was to receive the remaining 286,000R over the next four years at 5% interest per annum (*Frdst.*, 80 (12 Oct. 1913), 4. cf. *Botsch.*, 82 (15/28 Oct. 1913), 3; 94 (26 Nov./1 Dec. 1913), 3). Later the livestock and other chattels on the estate were purchased in separate deals. When land at Arkadak in Tambov Province had been purchased in 1910 a similar pattern had been followed ("Bestimmungen der Chortitzer Wolostversammlung..." 1910).

(2) The Forestry Service

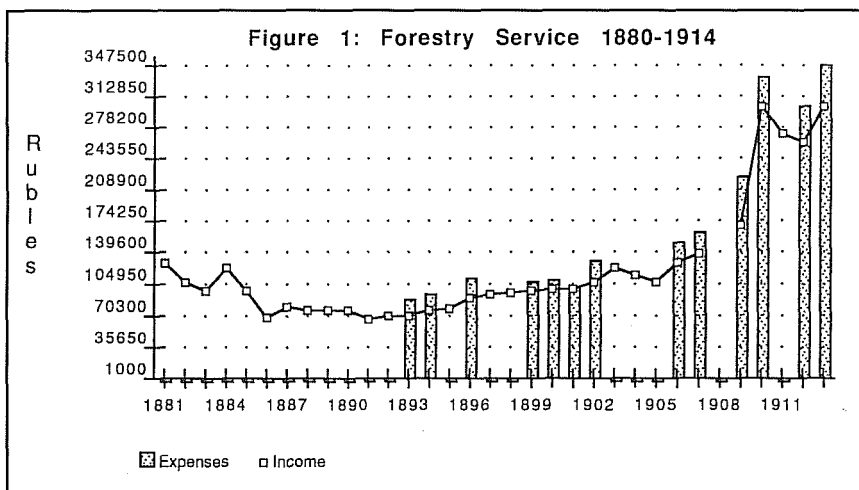
The Forestry Service established in the 1880s was the one institution managed at the level of the Commonwealth. It was also a major financial burden. Although conscripts were paid a small wage by the Russian government (nine R a month in 1913, Claassen 1914: 5), most of the costs of building, maintaining and expanding

Table 2
Accounts for the Halbstadt District Office 1913

Source: *Botsch*. 28(11/24 April 1914), 3)

	Securities (R)	Cash (R)
1. Community sums		
Income		
Position as of 1/1/1913	38,600	13,408
In 1913		71,484
Total	38,600	84,892
Expenditure		
District Office		14,133
High School		17,815
Model Class		3,461
School Board & village school libraries		1,015
Medical Services		2,714
Building of Post Office		2,755
Various		23,017
Total		64,909
Position as of 1/1/1914	38,600	19,983
2. Fire Insurance funds		
As of 1/1/1913	50,000	44,817
Income for 1913		38,756
Total	50,000	83,547
Expenditure for 1913		38,147
Position as of 1/1/1914	50,000	45,427
3. Landless funds		
As of 1/1/1913		111,153
Income for 1913		178,384
Total		289,536
Expenditure for 1913		106,643
Position as of 1/1/1914		182,893
4. Forestry Barracks Tax		
As of 1/1/1913		297
Receipts for 1913		23,966
Total		24,263
Expenditure for 1913		23,856
Position as of 1/1/1914		407
5. Old Peoples' Home		
Income from villages & estate owners		6,578
Income from community funds		2,429
Total		9,007
Expenditure for 1913		8,981
Position as of 1/1/1914		26
6. Central and Regional Taxes		
As of 1/1/1913		327
Receipts 1913		88,726
Total		89,053
Expenditure for 1913		88,867
As of 1/1/1914		184
7. Sums in Process		
As of 1/1/1913	19,125	243
Receipts 1913		12,918
Total		13,161
Expenditure for 1913		12,716
As of 1/1/1914		446
Total Balance for 1913	107,725	593,486

the barracks, administration, food, clothing, medical services and religious ministering (for extensive details of costs in 1907-08 see *Jahresbericht...der Forstkommandos im Jahre 1908*: 54-59). Fairly extensive figures for the income of the Forestry Service exist ("Auszug..." 1908; *Jahresbericht...der Forstkommandos im Jahre 1908*:68; Klippenstein 1984:151), but details of expenditure are available only for the years of deficit (Figure 1) and the above mentioned annual report for 1907-08. By 1914, however, there were nine Forestry camps, one newly established in Siberia and a detachment to counter the ravages of the phylloxera mite in Crimean vineyards. In 1913 the annual cost of the Service was almost 350,000R, slightly more than income of just over 300,000R ("Der Rechenschaftsbericht..." 1914: 4). In 1912 the most expensive camp cost almost 15,000R to run, while the cheapest was only 6000R; although 61,000R had been budgeted for clothing, only just over 31,000R had been spent. Almost 6000R were spent on the renovation of barracks and new buildings, but again costs were under budget ("Zahlensprache" 1913; cf. Löwen 1913 for corrections). Expenditures included the salaries of camp overseers which increased from 300 R to 1500 R a year after six years, and an allowance was provided for each school-aged child of the overseer ("Die Abgeordnetenversammlung...", 1913).



(3) Education

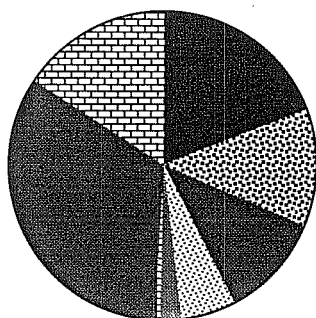
The provision of schooling was a major concern of Russian Mennonites. By 1914 there were over 400 Mennonite elementary schools funded by local village communities although some District Offices provided funds for village school libraries and special programmes.² Little otherwise is known about the costs of these schools. Higher education was provided either by the District Office or by private foundations. The number and range of these schools increased greatly after 1890 to include not only boys' but also girls' high schools.

Between 1905 and 1914 ten new boys', four new girls' and two mixed schools were established in various Mennonite settlements from southern Russia to Siberia (Ens 1989: 86-87, 92). Halbstadt and Khortitsa also had teachers' colleges. After 1900 a range of middle schools and even private Realschulen which prepared students for tertiary education were established. In 1909 "Morija," a training centre for nurses, was founded in Molochnaia (Tavonius 1909; Friesen 1913, 1-2; *MJ* 1913: 185-87). Students also received community stipends to attend centres of higher education in Russia and Europe in the expectation that they would return and assist in the further development of their communities.

No figures for the capital costs of building the new educational institutions are available. However, the building of a four room boys' high school in New York, Ekaterinoslav, cost 28,000R in 1909 (*Botsch.*, 28 (9/22 April 1910), 3) and the Khortitsa Teachers' College, also planned in 1909, was budgeted at 30,000R ("Die Mennoniten in Jekaterinoslaw..." 1908). Building the nurses training centre Morija cost 17,000R in the same year (*CFK*, 1911, 61; 1914, 130) and in 1914 the Halbstadt Commerce School planned new buildings budgeted up to 200,000R ("Jahresbericht des Fürsogerats..." 1913). When the Alexanderkrone High School was founded in 1906, 9500R was pledged and a further 30,000 in government bonds promised to establish the school (Regehr & Regehr 1988: 19). Even using conservative figures the capital costs involved in the post-1905 expansion of higher education must have been between 750,000 and a million rubles, even before classrooms were equipped and staffed.

The cost of running a school varied enormously depending on the size and type of the school, how long it had been established and the number of teachers employed and classes offered. In 1912/13 the annual cost of the Halbstadt Commerce School was almost 40,000R ("Jahresbericht des Fürsogerats..." 1913); the Khortitsa Teachers' College in 1913/14 cost over 11,500R (*Botsch.*, 40 (20 May/2 June 1914) 3), the Khortitsa Boys' School was budgeted at almost 18,000R in 1914/15 (*Botsch.*, 51 (27 June/10 July 1914) 3) and the running of the Khortitsa Girls' School cost 6,638R in 1913/14 (*Botsch.*, 26 (1/14 April 1914): 3). The Commerce School's costs were high because it was newly founded, still carrying debts and was paying for various building renovations. Similar problems faced many newly founded high schools. That at Pretoria in the Orenburg settlement had to pay out more to service debts than in teachers' salaries in 1910 (Figure 2) (*Botsch.*, 29 (13/26 April 1910) 4). Contrast these costs with those of the Khortitsa Girls' School for the first eighteen years of its existence (Figure 3 and Table 3) which reveal that capital costs for building and land were roughly the same as running costs (salaries and upkeep) (Epp 1913: 101-02).

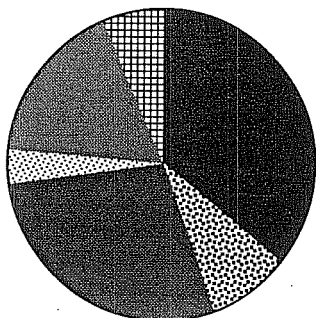
The cost of education to the community, however, involved more than just the annual funding of schools. Throughout the year District Offices in various settlements received requests to support various special needs or activities from its funds. In December 1912 the Halbstadt Office awarded money to the local commerce and high school to celebrate the Tercentenary of the Romanov

Fig. 2: Orenburg School costs 1910

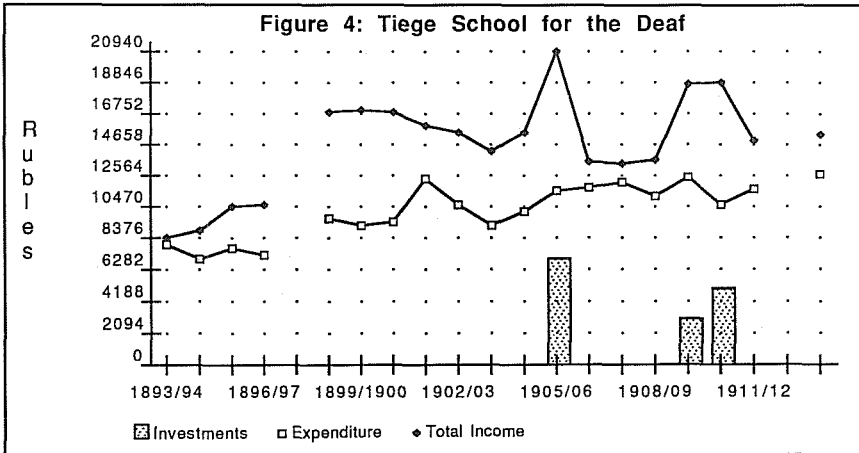
Salaries	19.1%
Collector's travel costs	12.2%
Building	11.0%
Firewood and heating	5.7%
Library and physics cabinets	2.4%
Women's Union contribution	0.3%
Debt payments	33.5%
To reserve funds	15.8%

Table 3
Khortitsa Girls' School costs

Salaries	49,203
Upkeep of the School	11,829
New buildings and remodeling	39,097
Furniture, equipment and library	4,971
Purchase of two pieces of land	23,800
Various	8,643
Total	137,543

Fig. 3: Khortitsa Girls' School costs

Salaries	35.8%
Upkeep of the school	8.6%
New buildings and remodeling	28.4%
Furniture, equipment and library	3.6%
Purchase of two pieces of land	17.3%
Various	6.3%



Dynasty but declined a request for 300R to support a school orchestra (D.R. 1913: 5). The stipends awarded to talented students for further education were handled by the Offices. In February 1914 the Gnadenfeld District Office awarded grants of 500R and 400R to two students to study at university (“Gnadenfeld S’chodbeschlüsse...” 1914) and in March the Halbstadt Office loaned 500R without interest payments to a student to study at Moscow University, the loan being guarantied by his mother (*Botsch.*, 28 (11/24 April 1914) 3). Such support was more available in the wealthier, well established settlements than in daughter colonies, particularly those newly settled whose population and office were usually poorer.

The community also had to deal with an increasingly organised teachers profession. Since the 1860s teachers met to discuss educational issues and later summer courses were arranged so that teachers from more remote areas could improve their skills. Often the costs of these meetings and training were supported by the District Office through local school boards. The Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld District Offices each contributed 450R towards the cost of the 1913 summer courses in Halbstadt (“Beschlüsse der Wolostversammlung...” 1913; “Gnadenfeld. Beschlüsse...” 1913). A major issue discussed since 1887 involved community support for retired teachers but the pension plan remained a matter for debate (“Resultate der Beratung...” 1908; Ens 1989: 91). In 1913 a teachers’ retreat for Molochnaia teachers was established in the Crimea at a cost of just over 3000R (Braun 1913; Wiens 1935).

(4) Welfare and charity.

The first major welfare institution to be established in Russia, disregarding the Orphans’ Office, was the School for the Deaf at Tiege, Molochnaia named after the wife of Tsar Alexander II, Maria. Founded in 1885 with the support of the congregations and the District Office, the school combined Mennonite educational

and charitable concerns (Görz 1888: 143-47; 1910; Friesen 1978: 810-15; Janzen 1983). The annual accounts of the school were published from 1890 onwards (see Figure 4). The costs of the school were moderate with the specialist teacher's salaries accounting for over 54% of expenses in 1913-14 (*Botsch.*, 83 (17/30 Oct. 1914) 5). Up to 1914 the school's expenses never exceeded its income and it even managed to build up a reserve capital.

Table 4
Molochnaia Welfare Institutions

Institution	Year	Capital	Income	Expenditure
	Founded	Costs		
School for the Deaf, Tiege	1885/90	?	15,537a	12,685a
Grossweide Orphanage	1906	over 40,000	?	?
Kurushan Old Peoples' Home	1904/07	41,000	9007b	8981b
Muntau Hospital	1887/89	29,000c	22,048a	22,091a
Ohrloff Hospital	1908/10	3,050d	1,362e	?
Waldheim Hospital	1908	?	?	?

a. = 1914

c. = new building

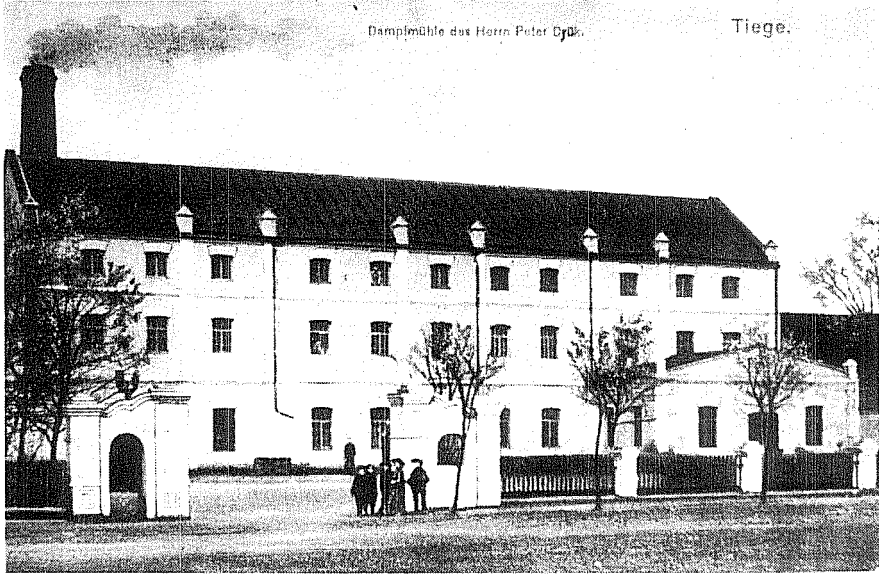
e. = 1912

b. = 1913

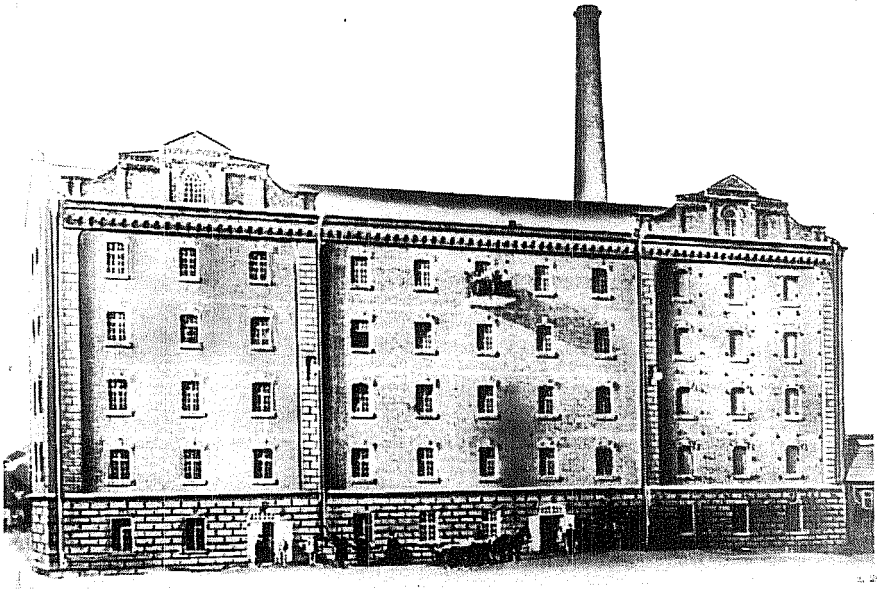
d. = isolation ward

The Molochnaia colony established a number of welfare institutions before 1914 (see Table 4). At first many were private ventures, but later congregations, the Church General Conference and eventually the District Office became involved in their administration and funding. While after 1875 basic medical services were provided by the District Office, Mennonites requiring hospitalization had to go elsewhere, for instance to the Evangelical Hospital in Odessa. In 1887/88 a wealthy minister, Franz Wall, donated land and money for the establishment of a private hospital in Muntau, Molochnaia. Gradually the hospital was expanded, new buildings were erected in 1910/11 at a cost of 29,000R and a professional staff was employed, with doctors trained in Russian Baltic Universities ("Kurzgefasste Geschichte..." 1902; Janzen 1903; "Darum in diesen Tagen..." 1912; Unger 1916). Another hospital was built at Ohrloff in 1910, funded by a bequest by the estate owner H.H. Reimer (Harder 1908: 84; "Jahresberichte..." 1909: 981-84). Both Muntau and Ohrloff hospital were supported by the Church General Conference and here young women from Morija received their practical training as nurses. A private hospital was established in 1907 at Waldheim by the Mennonite Brethren Kornelius Warkentin (Harder 1907: 26-27) although in 1911 P.M. Friesen noted it had experienced financial difficulties (1978: 816; cf. Kroeker 1931; Toews 1982: 27, 189n34).

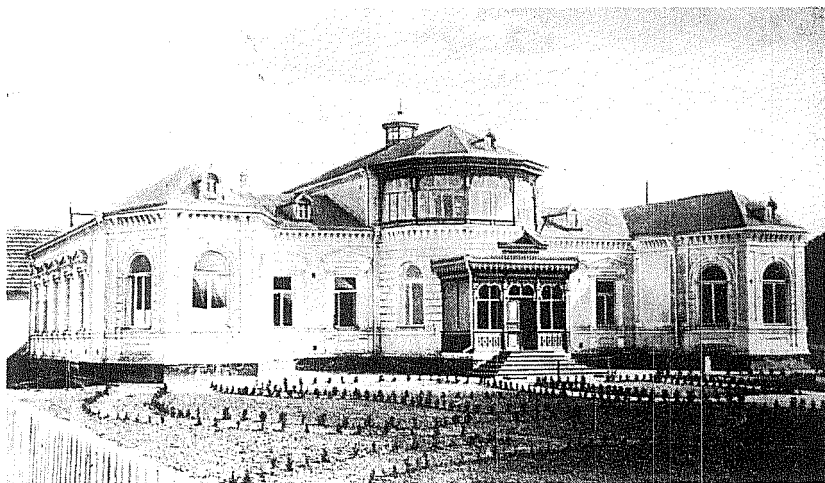
In 1904 Khortitsa had a twelve-bed hospital with a doctor and two feldshers (medics trained in basic health care) whose 7000R salaries were paid for by the zemstvo; the hospital cost the community only 1800R to run ("Die Chortitzer Wolost" 1904: 3). This hospital was later expanded (Kroeker 1981: 135) but being closely situated to the Russian cities of Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, Khortitsa had less need to develop local hospitals which were essential for "rural" Molochnaia.



Steam mill of Peter Dyck, Tiede, South Russia
(Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)



Siemens Mill in Nikopol, South Russia
(Photo credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)



Hospital in Orloff, South Russia

(Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)



Hospital in Muntau, South Russia

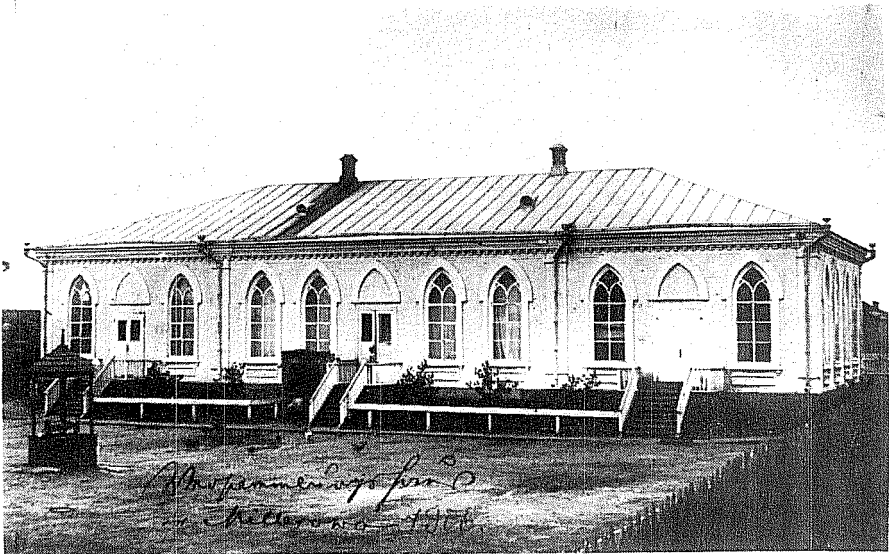
(Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)



3. Modernes mennonitisches Oekonomiegebäude in Süd-Russland (Steinbach).

Administration building of the Steinbach estate, South Russia

(Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)

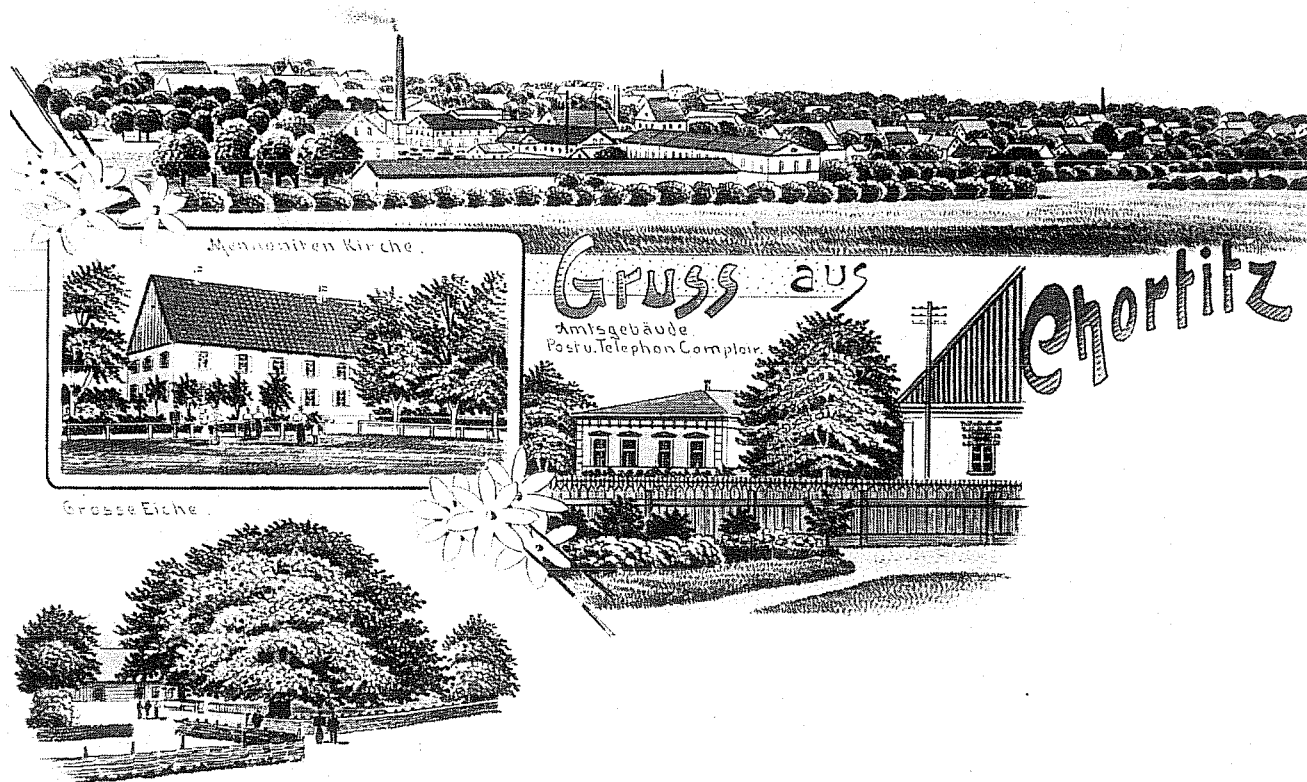


Menonite Brethren Church in Millerovo, South Russia

(Photo credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)

Total-Ansicht.

Хормица



Postcard: "Greetings from Chortitz"

(Photo credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives)

A "refuge for the sick" was also established at Pleshanov in Samara near the Volga, but little is known about this institution (Kroeker 1931:4).

Although orphans' offices had been established from the early days of settlement, the actual care of orphans fell to relatives and friends. The Mennonite Brethren Abraham Harder established the first institutional orphanage at Grossweide in 1906. Although he failed to gain the support of the District Office, Harder succeeded in his plans. In 1912 the orphanage expanded with new buildings costing 12,000R and in 1914 for 21,000R a farm was purchased at Kurushan to train older children in agriculture ("A.A. Harders Tagebuch" 1965; Giesbrecht 1988). The District Office eventually recognised the need for orphanages and another was built in 1915 at Schoenau with money left to the community in a bequest (*Botsch.*, 28 (11/24 April 1914) 3). Kroeker (1931:3) claims this orphanage was for Russian children but this is unclear. Two old peoples' homes were established before 1914, a small private home at Rückenau and another at Kurushan (proposed in 1903/04 and opened in 1906), the latter controlled by the District Office which covered 86% of its costs in 1912/13 (Epp & Willms, 1911/12; "Jahresbericht über das Altenheim..." 1913). A home for the poor and destitute was also founded at Beresovka near Davlekanovo in Ufa, close to the Urals (Friesen 1978: 826-27; Hein 1977: 20-25).

The establishment of these institutions was a recognition that old forms of care, dependent upon kinship and local congregations, were no longer sufficient in the complex world the Mennonites had developed in Russia (Urry 1990). The community would have to act. But individuals also recognised that they could no longer depend on family, friends or the community to look after all their needs. Some started to provide for themselves in their old age and membership of a burial society removed the burden of funerals from one's descendants ("X" 1903; "Jahresbericht der Halbstädter Beerdigungskasse..." 1913). Most of these private and community welfare institutions, however, were still locally based by 1914. In 1909, however, the Mennonites began what was to become their most ambitious welfare project and one which would involve all the scattered communities which made up the Mennonite Commonwealth. This was the mental institution named "Bethania".

For some years leaders of the business community in Khortitsa and the city of Alexandrovsk had been involved with other Christians in supporting a home for psychiatric patients in Alexandrovsk (W.N. 1903; "Evangelische Anstalt...in Alexandrowsk" 1907; Lepp 1908). Out of this involvement grew plans to build a more complex Mennonite institution. The site chosen was close to the Dnieper River near Kitshkas. Building began in 1910 and continued until war broke out in 1914 ("'Bethania'. Eben'Ezer!" 1910; Epp 1941). A professional staff of doctors and orderlies was employed from 1911 and the number of patients steadily increased (Lepp 1911/12; *Frdst.*, 92 (12 Dec. 1912), 2-3). By 1912 over 262,000R had been raised for Bethania and over 146,600R spent on land and buildings. There were also considerable costs involved in equipping the hospital and no expense was spared in obtaining the latest equipment from Western Europe. Running costs for 1911/12 alone were almost 40,000R. Bethania was easily the most costly welfare institution established by the Russian Mennonites before 1914.

Mennonites also gave large charitable donations to causes within and outside the community. Many of these occurred on an ad-hoc basis, but sometimes special organizations were established to collect and distribute funds or the District Office contributed monies on behalf of the community. For instance in the 1890s Mennonites gave aid to famine victims on the Volga and in 1907 a special aid fund was set up in Halbstadt to raise funds for famine victims in central Russia (Unruh et.al., 1907; Wiens 1907; Friesen 1978: 832-32; Toews 1982:28-30). Closer to home Mennonites newly settled in central Asia and Siberia often required assistance when crops failed. Money was sent to Siberia even by North American Mennonites and the District Offices in southern Russia often gave aid in the form of grants or loans ("Bericht der Kommission..." 1910; Toews 1982:30 and contemporary reports in North American newspapers). During the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) Mennonites, individually and through the congregations and District Offices, contributed well over 200,000R to the Red Cross and to assist soldiers' families (Friesen 1978: 829-30 and contemporary reports such as "Jahresbericht der Nikolaipoler Wolost..." 1904/05). Financial aid for a sanatorium and research into tuberculosis was given by Mennonites who organised "White Flower Days" to raise funds (Peters & Andres 1914; *Botsch.*, 29 (15/28 April 1914) 3; 34 (29 April/12 May 1914) 3).

(5) Religious congregations and conferences

The welfare institutions were often described in reports as part of the activity of the Mennonite "inner-mission" (building the faith inside Russia) in contrast to the "outer-missions" (mission work among pagans outside Russia) ("Wohlthätigkeitsanstalten..." 1901; annual reports of "inner mission" in *MJ* from 1903 onwards).³ In fact most of the institutional structures of the Mennonite Commonwealth had some kind of religious rationale, the welfare activities in particular were seen as "charity" and congregations and religious conferences were often involved in their promotion and management (Toews 1982:27-29). In 1911 P.M. Friesen stated that for Mennonites the welfare institutions provided a "counter balance to gross materialism, [and] the mania for riches" (1978: 828).

Little is known about the costs of running local congregations or the main conferences. Local congregations by 1914 functioned more as parishes than as distinct congregations and although there was still no paid clergy some ministers did receive allowances to cover the costs of their onerous duties. Expenses concerned with the construction and maintenance of buildings also had to be met and a number of congregations rebuilt their meeting houses either to accommodate a larger congregation, to modernize the facilities to meet the wider range of religious activities (Sunday schools, womens' groups, missionary societies, choirs etc.) or to satisfy the more affluent tastes of their members. Neither the Church or Brethren Mennonites possessed a central office.

The Church General Conference met annually and was responsible for a number of activities requiring funding (Ediger 1914). Many welfare institutions such as the School for the Deaf and Bethania reported directly to the Conference. The Conference also supported itinerant ministers who served isolated communities and the Forestry Camps and had a special ministerial to serve the needs of the young

men in service. In 1912/13 855R was spent in support of itinerant ministers ("Reisepredigtkasse" 1913). The newspaper *Botschafter* and later the annual *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* were adopted as organs of the Conference and this involved additional costs. Periodically the Conference appointed special committees to review developments and their cost. This included producing a new hymnal and in 1912 the issue of teaching Mennonite history in village elementary schools was raised at the annual Conference. A committee to investigate the cost of a textbook was established. The following year the Conference was presented with a range of prices from 200-500R and this was referred to the Commission for Church Affairs (*Botsch.*, 84 (26 Oct. /8 Nov. 1912), 3; *Frd.*, 65 (21 Aug. 1913), 4; "Preisausschreiben" 1913).

3. Community Funding

The funding of the Mennonite Commonwealth was dependent upon the continued growth of the Mennonite economy in different regions of Russia, but especially in the core areas of southern Russia. This economy was based upon commercial agricultural production on colony farms and private estates and the continued development of related industries, particularly light engineering associated with agricultural machine production and flour milling. Ultimately this growing prosperity was based upon the economic development of the Russian economy, especially in southern Russia (Urry 1989b).

(1) Taxation, loans and interest from capital accumulation

From the outset of settlement in Russia Mennonites had paid taxes to local authorities and to the central government. Taxation was based mainly on the area of landholding, the value of property and a poll-tax and not on income or goods and services. Figures for the Khortitsa District Office for 1914 reveal clearly these forms of taxation. There was a land tax on 28,263 desiatini of land at 20K per desiatina and a poll-tax of all able-bodied persons aged 14 to 60 at 1.03R a head for those resident in the District Office area and 67K a head for those living outside who did not receive medical and other services. These taxes raised 11,449R. The Khortitsa fire-insurance levy was based upon the value of the property owned, but different rates applied depending on whether the property lay in or outside the colony. The rates were 52K per 1000R of property value in the colony and 38K outside. This raised 5,717R. The Khortitsa Office also had a school tax for the support of its high schools which covered not only Khortitsa but also Nikolaipol and New York. This again was calculated on the value of property with a charge of 40K per 1000R value. This raised 9,791R making the running of the colony high schools the most expensive part of a budget of almost 27,000R ("Chortitza S'chodbeschlüsse...1913" 1913). In Molochnaia the local school board also raised money through a property tax which was increased to 50K per 1000R of property in 1913, and the old peoples' home at Kurushan was funded by a land tax of 3K per desiatina ("Protokoll...des Mennonitischen Schulvereins" 1913; Friesen 1978: 822).

Since 1866 the forestry tax had been based upon a poll tax and a land tax although by 1906 the rates for the land tax distinguished between colony and private

land, the latter being taxed at a lower rate. There was also a small property tax (10K per 100R of property value) on merchants and craftsmen ("e" 1906). However, this form of taxation not only failed to produce sufficient income, but also proved inequitable. Poor Mennonites paid a much higher proportion of the tax than the wealthy as the poll tax was 62K per head compared with only 12K a desiatina for colony and 8K a desiatina for private land ("e" 1906; Penner 1908; "Steuerprojekt", 1911 cf. Toews 1982: 55-57). After a major enquiry in 1907-08 a new form of taxation was introduced for 1909 based on property valuation and a reduced poll tax (see figures in *Jahresbericht...der Forstkommandos im Jahre 1908*). In 1912 the tax was 50K per head of the able-bodied population aged 14 to 60 and 80K per 1000R of property as valued by an independent survey. In Khortitsa the latter tax raised almost 26,000R in 1913 on property valued at almost 30 million R. Through the new rates large estate and factory owners, not colony farmers, paid for the upkeep of the Forestry Service (Urry 1985: 8-10). By 1914 the Forestry Commissioners valued Mennonite property for taxation purposes at 276 millionR (Ehrt 1932:70). The Forestry Service never appears to have built up capital reserves and operated in debt for a number of years (see below).

Most income for the Landless Fund was derived from renting designated areas of colony land to the highest bidder. Before 1914 this land rented at 17R per desiatina in Khortitsa and 26R in Halbstadt. Halbstadt had the largest area of rent land, over 9400 desiatini compared with just under 3000 desiatini in Khortitsa and 2000 desiatini in Gnadenfeld. On average the Halbstadt fund received annually 250,000R from its rent land compared with only 50,000R in the Khortitsa and the Gnadenfeld District Office areas (Ehrt 1932: 74-76).

In the short term Landless Funds were invested or loaned with interest. In 1914 the Gnadenfeld Office lent 100R to farmers in four villages of the Siberian settlement of Barnaul at 6% interest with the capital costs to be repaid in two 50R payments in 1917 and 1918 ("Gnadenfeld S'chodbeschlüsse" 1914). In spite of the considerable income received by the Landless Funds, however, the purchase of new land was funded partially through loans from non-Mennonite financial institutions. In 1914 long and short term interest payments cost the Halbstadt Office almost 150,000R out of a total expenditure of almost 313,000R (Ehrt 1932:75).

The District Offices held considerable funds in reserve, funds often designated for particular purposes such as for orphans, schools, land purchases etc. The surviving accounts of District meetings often report small sums paid from these reserve funds towards worthy causes. For instance, Gnadenfeld had a capital reserve to support charitable institutions which contributed to the Grossweide Orphanage and the provision of a "free" bed in the Waldheim Hospital. Income from rent land was used to support the Orphanage's school library ("Gnadenfeld S'chodbeschlüsse" 1914; cf. "Gnadenfeld Beschlüsse" 1913). In Khortitsa large sums from the interest payments of the capital of the Orphan's Office had been used for many years to support schools in Khortitsa and its daughter colonies (*Botsch.*, 51 (28 June/11 July 1913) 2-3). The 1914/15 budget for education in Khortitsa voted 6000R from these interest payments

towards the 16,450R cost of the Teachers' College. The Khortitsa high school had its own reserve capital which was to pay 600R of interest towards estimated costs of 17,735R; over 10,000R, however, was to be raised through the property tax, the rest from fees and money carried over from the previous year (*Botsch.*, 40 (20 May/2 Jne 1914), 3; 51 (27 Jne/10 July 1914), 3).

(2) Fees and service charges

Many Mennonite institutions charged fees. All the hospitals had "free" beds for poor patients provided by the community or by private donations. Otherwise patients were charged the full cost of medical aid. A correspondent in 1913 reported his sons' two month stay in the Muntau hospital cost him 75R, or 2.50R a day (Bärg 1913:6).

The major fee charging institutions, however, were schools. Even so only a small proportion of their costs were covered by fees. Only 16% of the income of the Khortitsa Girls' School between 1895/6 and 1912/13 was derived from fees (Epp 1913:101) and 19% in the Orenburg High School in 1910 (*Botsch.*, 29 (13/26 April 1911) 4). 23% of the projected costs for the Khortitsa Boys' High School for 1914/15 was budgeted from fees, while fees were to account for only 7% of the Khortitsa Teachers' College's budgeted income (*Botsch.*, 40 (20 May/2 June 1914), 3; 51 (27 June/10 July 1914), 3). A Molochnaia writer reported in 1912 that village school fees were 60R a year (R[empel] 1912). Fees varied from school to school. High school fees also increased as the pupil progressed through the grades. A parent in 1913 complained that sending three children to school had cost 120-140R in fees, the school tax had to be paid to the District Office and the cost of the children's board and lodging also had to be met (Schulfreund III 1914; cf. R[empel] 1912; n.n. 1913). In middle schools such as the Halbstadt Commerce School fees were high; in 1914 fees were 125R for grades 3/4, 150R for 5/6 and 175R for 7/8 (*Botsch.*, 64(12/25 Aug. 1914)4; "Protokoll... Mennonitischen" 1913). Non-Mennonites attending Mennonite educational institutions had to pay higher rates and even an entrance fee.

Mennonite parents could reduce the cost of their children's schooling by joining a local school society and paying membership dues. As some high schools were private institutions and therefore not funded by the District Offices, membership dues were an essential source of revenue. The Khortitsa Girls' School for instance received 43% of its income between 1895/6 and 1912/13 from membership dues and donations (Epp 1913:101). The training of nurses at Morija reveals the value the community placed on nursing. Some young women received their education free, others were indentured, their costs were covered if they agreed to serve a certain period in the colony's hospitals after graduation. Finally full fees could be paid consisting of 250R for the first year (including board and lodging) and 100R for the next two years as they received instruction while working in the hospitals (Friesen 1913:1).

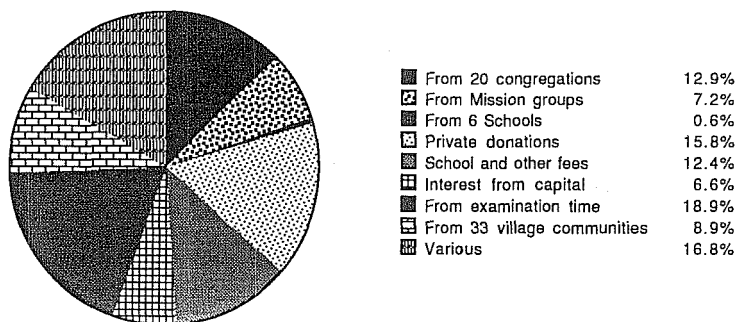
(3) Gifts and philanthropy

In 1910 a correspondent in the *Botschafter* suggested how Mennonites could

invest in "God's kingdom," detailing in order of importance five worthy causes: 1) Bethania, 2) the Deaf School, 3) the high schools, 4) village schools, 5) the poor school (Letkemann 1910: 3). Despite a certain propensity for parsimony disguised as careful household management, Mennonites proved generous gift givers when it came to supporting community ventures or fellow brethren in need. Many Mennonite institutions, especially welfare institutions, were heavily dependent on individual gift giving and large-scale philanthropy.

The School for the Deaf accounts clearly reveal this pattern of funding. Over 50% of its income in 1914 came directly or indirectly from benefactions. As well as private gifts made directly to the school, congregations, village communities, school pupils and mission groups gave money, often raised through special fund drives (Figure 5). Pupils of the school went on tour, visiting other colonies to exhibit their progress and to solicit funds. The annual "testing" (*Prüfungen*) of pupils also provided an opportunity to open the school to the public who could make contributions and purchase craft items the children had made (Janzen 1903: 89; "Jahresberichte...1909": 72). The numerous announcements of donations to various welfare institutions scattered through the pre-1914 Mennonite press, reveal that this manner of funding was common. Individuals usually made small donations of under 25R or gave money to elders and ministers to donate to appropriate causes. Various local groups (womens' groups, youth groups, Sunday school pupils etc.) also made contributions.⁴ Individuals often supplied items instead of money, particularly food. In some places, such as the old people's home at Kurushan, produce was obtained from gardens and livestock maintained by the residents.

Figure 5: Tiege Deaf School income 1914



Although the contributions of individual Mennonites and small groups provided continuous support, the large donations made by wealthy individuals proved essential for the establishment and major capital expenditures of most institutions. For instance the building of the Khortitsa Girls' School was largely

financed by a 10,000R gift by Katherine Wallman, widow of the joint owner of the engineering firm Lepp and Wallmann (N [Abram A. Neufeld?] 1901: 2; Epp 1913: 101). Other industrialists and millers in Khortitsa, Alexandrovsk and Ekaterinoslav, the Koops, Dycks, Niebuhrs and Thiessens, also contributed to the school and other educational institutions in Khortitsa and its daughter colonies. Estate owners were also large contributors. Two Molochnaia estate owners provided most of the capital for the Alexanderkrone Boys' School (Regehr & Regehr 1988: 19) and when in 1914 Khortitsa planned a new school building programme costing 18,000R, they looked to the estate owners to raise the necessary capital (*Botsch.*, 40 (20 May/2 June 1914), 3; 51 (27 June/10 July 1914), 3).

The establishment and funding of Bethania clearly reveals large-scale philanthropy of Mennonite industrialists, millers and estate owners. In fact, they originally conceived of the hospital, provided its initial funding and individually contributed tens of thousands of rubles to its development. Of the 21,000R the estate owner Kornelius Toews is reputed to have made to charitable institutions before 1914, 10,000R was given to Bethania (Urry 1985: 23 and announcement in *Frdst.*, 13 (13 Feb. 1913) 1-2). Contributions of 5000R and above were quite common with the Niebuhrs, Heinrichs and Katherine Wallmann being prominent benefactors. In the case of Bethania, some gave money expressly to establish a capital fund with the interest being used to run the institution or provide special services such as "free" beds for poor patients. In 1910 the estate owner Wilhelm Schröder gave 40,000R as a source of capital in memory of his mother and subsequently had the satisfaction of seeing his name regularly published in Bethania's accounts (*Botsch.*, 7 (26 Jan./8 Feb. 1910), 3; 87 (5/18 Nov. 1910) 4 and numerous subsequent issues). The firm of Lepp & Wallmann presented the hospital with a steam engine valued at between 8-9000R ("Bethania" 1910). Bethania was also supported by community groups and small gift givers. In 1907 the Church General Conference, which strongly endorsed the venture, proposed an annual house or congregational levy to assist Bethania (Ediger 1914: 120).

(4) Other

Small sums were received from the Russian authorities to support some programmes, including local services such as medicine and education. The progressive Berdiansk zemstvo gave grants to a number of such ventures in 1908 and the Khortitsa Girls' School received a contribution from the Ekaterinoslav zemstvo ("Kurze Auszüge...der Berdjansker Kreislandschaftsversammlung..." 1908); Epp 1913: 101). The same school also raised money through a lottery.

4. Financial management

(1) Administration and personnel

Except for the District Office which had a salaried staff, most Mennonite institutions were administered by boards of lay people who volunteered their time and expertise. Some members were elected to their roles, others coopted. As one correspondent complained in 1913, members of community institutions often were selected by undemocratic means and it was difficult to find out how financial

decisions were reached (R. 1913: 5). Committees often formed special sub-committees to handle financial affairs and for large capital expenditures sub-committees or commissions were established to investigate costs and negotiate with contractors. When land was to be purchased from the Landless Funds a special commission was established and school boards often had building commissions, as did Bethania (see reports of the Bethania Buildings Commission in *Botsch.*, 33 (30 April/13 May 1910), 2-3 and 34 (4/17 May 1910) 2-3).

Where membership of boards is recorded it is clear that leading community figures were involved, including congregational leaders, representatives of the District Office, estate owners and industrialists. Estate owners and industrialists sat on the boards not only because it was politic to have the wealthy involved when funds were solicited, but also because they brought special skills to decision making. These people had closer links with Russian society and a wider knowledge of the ways of government at the local, provincial and national level than any colony farmer. Also in their businesses or the management of their estates they knew how to handle money, how to deal with banks and other financial institutions or at least employed skilled staff to handle such matters.⁵ By 1914 many Mennonites took courses in bookkeeping, most working for Mennonite or non-Mennonite businesses so there were numerous clerks and accountants to assist with everyday financial affairs in the District Office and welfare institutions. Most balance sheets contain allowances for administrative costs which must have included the employment of such people, although no exact details are available.

Estate owners and industrialists were active on school boards and most members of Bethania's governing body and building commission came from similar backgrounds (see the lists of Bethania's governing and special committees in "Bethania'..." 1910: 2-3; *Botsch.*, 19 (9/22 March 1910) 2-3; "Erklärung des Verwaltungsrates..." 1913 etc.). The treasurer of Bethania, Johann Lepp, was a leading Khortitsa industrialist. Often the same people sat on different boards, committees and commissions of a number of institutions. The miller and businessman Johann Thiessen of Ekaterinoslav was involved with Khortitsa schools, the Forestry Commission, the financial Committee of Bethania in its early years and the District Office commission sent to negotiate land purchases at Arkadak (*Botsch.*, 1 (1/14 Jan 1910), 3). He also intervened on behalf of Mennonites with government agencies and gifted monies from his own fortune to assist a wide range of ventures (*Mennonitisches Lexicon*, 4, 316). After 1908 the onerous task of overseeing the Forestry Service fell to David Claassen, owner of the Felsental estate in Molochnaia.

Although there were few sources as to how financial affairs were managed, certain trends are apparent. One involves the establishment of capital reserves which would reduce the dependence of institutions on gifts and taxation. School boards attempted to create reserve funds as did the School for the Deaf (see Figure 4) but at Bethania this strategy was adopted from the outset. Bethania's accounts differentiated between "active" and "passive" funds, the latter being capital deposits from which interest payments were earmarked for specific operating expenses (free beds,

pension funds etc.) (*Botsch.*, 99 (18/31 Dec. 1912) 4).

Bethania's careful funding reflected the increasingly complex world of finance in Russia and the Mennonite community before 1914. As the country industrialised and the Mennonite economy became more diverse and complex, Mennonites became involved in a wide range of financial transactions with other businesses and credit institutions such as banks. Reports on interest rates, shares and market produce prices were regularly published in Mennonite newspapers. Industrialists and landowners had extensive dealings with financial institutions, as did some community organizations. The managers of the Landless Funds long had dealt with banks, mortgaging the land of daughter colonies as a strategy to force negligent colonists to repay their debts. Molochnaia did this in the case of Memrik (Urry 1989a: 224), and Khortitsa followed the same practice in the Ignatiev area (Hamm 1984:102). From the 1890s onwards Mennonite-owned financial institutions such as cooperatives, credit unions and private banks were founded in the main settlements (Urry 1989b: 117-18). Between 1900 and 1911 the Molochnaia Cooperative grew from 23 to 386 members and sales increased from over 7500R to almost 159,000R a year ("Zur Konsumvereinsfrage" 1912). The Khortitsa Credit Union in 1912 had 556 members, deposits of 115,655 R and an investment portfolio valued at almost 900,000R ("Chortiza Gesellschaft..." 1913). The Niebuhr milling family opened a private bank in Khortitsa in 1904, there was a bank owned by a Dyck and Unger in New York (Hamm 1984:104, 121) and in 1910 some estate owners proposed to found their own bank in Nikolaipol (see Peters 1910; P. 1910). The existence of these new financial agencies undoubtedly influenced the management of community funds in the final years before 1914.

Maintaining, let alone developing, the complex social and cultural world of the Mennonite Commonwealth by 1914 required massive investments of time and money. While many of the institutions of community were restricted to local communities, they all contributed towards the maintenance of the Commonwealth. The restructuring of the Forestry Service in the years prior to 1914 and the founding of Bethania clearly indicate that larger, more integrative institutions were being established. There were also attempts within the church congregations to rationalise and professionalise congregational life. David H. Epp was instrumental in getting the Church General Conference to standardise and improve its record keeping at the congregational level; spiritual bookkeeping was to be raised to the same standard as economic accounting ("Protokoll der Sitzung..." 1912; Ediger 1914). The Conference also attempted to cooperate with the Mennonite Brethren (Toews 1984; Dueck 1989: 174-75). The reorganisation of schooling, combined with a programme of cultural renewal, also point towards the increasing stress on the need to pursue strategies which united Mennonites rather than allowing widely scattered communities to lose contact with each other and individuals to drift away from the Mennonite world.

At the community level Khortitsa appears to have begun this process earlier than Molochnaia. Molochnaia may have developed elaborate welfare institutions, but these were restricted to the local community and to be divided between Church

and Brethren Mennonites. Kortitsa seems to have possessed a wider vision. Unlike Molochnaia, the Khortitsa District Office, the school board and other institutions appear to have operated beyond the mother colony. Molochnaia daughter colonies were left to their own devices once they had repaid their debts to the mother colony, and on occasion Molochnaia had to be forced to face up to its responsibilities (see below for the case of its Siberian settlers). Khortitsa, however, kept close ties with its scattered brethren and the mother colony provided advice and aid on community development.⁶ It is perhaps not insignificant that Bethania, although it served all Mennonites in Russia, was conceived of and managed mainly by Khortitsa Mennonites.

(2) Publicity, promotion and accountability

As many of the school and welfare institutions depended on voluntary gifts, it was essential that Mennonites be made aware of the work of the institutions they supported. The School for the Deaf published annual reports with accounts in the newspapers from the 1890s and separate, more detailed accounts in Russian and German listing all the names of contributors (see Wiebe 1905). Other institutions also published their accounts often including additional appeals for funds. In his memoirs the founder of the Grossweide Orphanage recorded his endless struggle to secure funds and how he viewed each gift as a sign of divine intervention ("A.A. Harders Tagebuch" 1965). In fact the financial well being of the Orphanage was secured through the support of the editor of the *Friedensstimme* who publicized its work and printed the names of benefactors in his paper. Once again, however, it was Bethania which raised publicity to a fine art. The Mennonite press is full of reports on its progress, appeals from its leaders and significantly not only long lists recording the names of gift givers published every few months, but also annual reports and accounts detailing how funds had grown and had been invested and expended (*Botsch.*, 38 (18/31 May 1910) 2-3 etc.). They also had a special Christmas drive which every year raised about 1000R.

After 1906 Mennonite newspapers increasingly carried information on local political affairs and the main District Offices began to publish their budgets, yearly accounts and summaries of their meetings. Suddenly many of the political and business operations of the Commonwealth were made public and officials more accountable for their actions. Undoubtedly this greater openness can be related to the changing political scene in Russia after the 1905 Revolution; more democratisation at the centre fostered similar moves in the Mennonite community.

Because the District Offices, the Landless Funds and the Forestry Service were financed through taxation rather than through gifts, there was little reason to publicize their financial operations. Of course ordinary Mennonites could attend meetings of the various bodies and hear about the state of finances and even be involved in decision making, but few did so. Few accounts are available in published form for most of the operations of the community organisations before 1905 when reforms, including greater freedom of the press, encouraged Mennonites to expand all their publishing ventures (Reimer 1989: 227-34.). Before this it was often difficult to secure clear details of many community affairs. For instance the purchase

of land at Terek in Central Asia in 1900 resulted in a bitter exchange in the *Odessaer Zeitung* between Mennonite colonists and officials of the Molochnaia District Offices over costs and how the land had been purchased and distributed. It was not until 1907 that the actual 1900 report of the commission set up to negotiate the purchase was made public ("Altes und Neues XIV" 1907). One reason for the public outcry was that the new settlement experienced many difficulties in its early years and required massive financial support from the Molochnaia community before it prospered (see Toews 1972).

In 1911 the district mayor of a Siberian settlement appealed to the Molochnaia managers of the Landless Funds to pay 400R from its reserves to each Siberian Mennonite settler in need. He published documents which clearly proved that legally the Molochnaia colony was responsible for its settlers in daughter colonies and in the past had been forced to pay sums from the Funds ("In Angelegenheiten..." 1911). His appeal succeeded and by 1914 the Halbstadt Office alone paid over 20,000R to Siberian settlers (Ehrt 1932:75).

This greater openness had positive and negative effects for community institutions based primarily upon taxation. Budgets were frequently criticized, decisions debated, increases objected to. Perhaps the fiercest debates were those over the cost and management of the Forestry Service⁴. The Service always operated on a limited budget but the situation became critical as expenditure exceeded income and debts increased. For twelve of the twenty years between 1891 and 1911 the accounts of the Service were in arrears ranging from 10,500R in 1900 to 40,900 in 1909 (Claassen 1911; 1912; cf. Figure 1). By 1907 the accumulated deficit was over 65,000R (Friesen 1978: 514-15; Klippenstein 1984: 152).

Funding the service through taxation had always been unpopular and individuals often evaded or delayed making payments (Friesen 1978: 616-22). In fact the entire service had been unpopular for a long time. It had been imposed upon the Mennonites and while parents disliked their sons being conscripted, many recruits loathed the boring work and mourned their lost youth. When the debt crisis loomed one of the leading Molochnaia elders, Abraham Görz, published a history of the Service emphasising the special privileges the Mennonites had been granted for reason of faith (Görz 1907). To highlight the issue the Commissioners also published past accounts and the reports of their investigation to find new ways to raise taxes. This, however, seemed merely to inflame the situation. Debates in the press over the Service were often heated. Faults were pointed out in the accounts and various individuals suggested improvements in the Service's funding and management. The announcement of the new property tax in 1908 and its implementation in 1909 further intensified debate. The new system of taxation vastly increased the Service's income, but in 1913 the annual deficit was almost 34,000R mainly caused by a tax revolt led by large property owners (Toews 1982:56). District Offices were made responsible for collecting outstanding debts in their areas and in 1914 the Khortitsa Office collected over 2600R in outstanding taxes (*Botsch.*, 51 (27 June/10 July 1914), 3). Because so many property owners refused to pay the new tax, the Imperial Senate passed legislation in 1913 to enforce payment (Claassen 1914a, 1914b; "Kasernangelegenheiten" 1914; Toews 1982:56-57).

Greater publicity therefore could promote the financial fortunes of some institutions and be a cause of conflict for others. Without a doubt, however, the greater publicity given to the cost of community before 1914 in the Mennonite press assisted in the integration of the Mennonite Commonwealth. The management of the Forestry Service was reorganised to provide better representation for the various settlement areas and groups of taxpayers. Overall the managers of the Mennonite Commonwealth had to operate more openly and be more accountable if the strategy of improving Mennonite cultural life, increasing Mennonite self-identification and maintaining Mennonite privileges, including the control of their own community, was to succeed.

Conclusion.

The Russian Mennonite Commonwealth was unique in Mennonite history. Its extensive institutional base exceeded in form and complexity any previous, and perhaps any subsequent, social and cultural system organised and managed by Mennonites. It could be argued that many of the institutions founded by North American Mennonites, particularly those in the mid-west of the USA during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Schlabach 1989; Juhnke 1989), equal any established in Russia. But as Juhnke has recently argued (1989: 28-30) American Mennonites built educational and welfare institutions in part as an adaptation to American religious denominationalism. Behind this lay a desire to integrate more closely with mainstream American society in part to take advantage of the economic advantages of that society. The Russian Mennonites were adapting more to shifting policies of the Russian state so their organizational strategies were as much political as religious. And while they wished to take advantage of economic opportunities, they were unwilling to integrate into Russian society except on their own terms. For the Russian Mennonites community institution building was part of an attempt to construct a political economy under their own control. North American Mennonites did not possess the political infrastructure of the Russian Mennonite Commonwealth (District Offices, Landless Funds and the Forestry Service) or its associated costs.

But there are parallels in the development of community institutions in the two communities. Many North American institutions were founded by immigrants from Russia and Prussia. Both North American and Russian Mennonites were influenced by developments in welfare institutions in Germany and in their own countries. There was also regular correspondence between Russian and North American Mennonites and ideas and influences flowed back and forth between both communities.

The years before 1914 saw the final flowering of the Mennonite Commonwealth. The First World War eroded the economic base of community life and most of the ambitious pre-war social programmes were curtailed. Revolution and civil war set back any plans the Mennonites may have had for the reestablishment of their Commonwealth in 1917. The emigrants to Canada during the 1920s managed to rebuild their congregations and establish some welfare institutions but it proved impossible to reconstruct anything resembling the pre-war Mennonite Common-

wealth. Between 1921 and 1928 the Mennonites who remained in the Soviet Union also attempted to reconstruct their economic and cultural life, including Mennonite community institutions,⁷ but after 1928 the drive for industrialization and the collectivization of farms accompanied by the harassment, persecution and arrest of Mennonite leaders finally destroyed the Mennonites' institutional base. Mennonite welfare institutions were taken over by the state (see Kroeker 1931 for their fate up to 1930). Mennonite social and cultural organizations were closed, congregations were left leaderless and the ability of Mennonites to control their own affairs disappeared. Only the Communist Party ruled. Mennonite life and faith were reduced to their basic, atomized forms, centred on the domestic unit, often consisting merely of mothers and their children. Congregations, colonies and Commonwealth, as well as their associated institutions, ceased to exist.

Appendix: Prices and Exchange Rates

It is extremely difficult to translate the pre-1914 Russian ruble into modern values. One way to assess the sums quoted in this paper is to consider incomes, wages and prices from the period discussed (see Urry 1985:13 and contemporary adverts for details).

Annual income from a full farm (65 desiatini) in an established south Russian colony: 5-8000R (low 3000R, high 10,000R).

Teachers' salaries: elementary: 600R to 1000R; high school: 1500R.

Peasant labourer employed for a season (May to October): 60R to 90R (plus food and board); day labourer in busy harvest season: 1R a day; Russian maid employed in a Mennonite household: 50R a year (plus food and board); factory worker in southern Russia: 2R a day; skilled smith or moulder 4-5 R a day.

Plough: 40-100R; harvester: 150-200R; steam thresher: 800R; piano 500R; Singer sewing machine: 25R; automobile: 2-3000R.

Subscription to *Botschafter* or *Friedensstimme*: 5 R a year; P.M. Friesen's *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Russland* : 6R.

Exchange rates (see CFK 1914:58):

1 silver ruble = 42 US cents; 1 gold ruble = 63 US cents.

All the figures in this account probably refer to silver rubles (1 gold ruble = 1.5 silver rubles).

Notes

In this paper the following abbreviations are used: *Botsch.* (*Der Botschafter*); *CFK* (*Christlicher Familienkalender*); *Frdst.* (*Die Friedensstimme*); *JMS* (*Journal of Mennonite Studies*); *MJ* (*Mennonitisches Jahrbuch*); *MQR* (*Mennonite Quarterly Review*); *MR* (*Die Mennonitische Rundschau*); *OZ* (*Odessaer Zeitung*); R (ruble/s); K (kopek/s).

¹This is why Mennonites were eager to have local administrative boundaries redrawn to include mostly Mennonite settlers and non-Mennonites were equally keen to have Mennonites included in their area, see comments in the New York settlement in Hamm (1984:103)

²High school libraries had been begun in the 1890s but it was not until after 1905 that village elementary schools received library funding. A private lending library existed in Khortitsa from 1902 and by 1913 it had over 2400 books, 161 members and a capital of 3521R, (*Botsch.*, 6(21 Jan./3 Feb. 1914), 2).

³The terms used to describe many of the institutions were *Wohlstand*, *Wohltätigkeit* and *Wohltätigkeitsanstalten*, cf *CFK*, 1914, 130, 136.

⁴Bethania, the Grossweide Orphanage and other institutions regularly published accounts in the Mennonite newspapers listing in minute detail the sources of contributions.

⁵Unfortunately we know as little about the everyday financial management of factories, mills and estates as we do about the civil government and community organisations.

⁶This suggestion needs to be confirmed by further research, but this is the impression one gets comparing and contrasting the reports of the two colonies and examining their relations with their daughter settlements.

⁷In 1921, after the Soviet government had regained control of southern Russia, the major educational and welfare bodies were asked to submit reports for the new Mennonite Verband der Bürger Holländischer Herkunft on the current state of their institutions. Copies of these reports are in the A.A. Friesen Papers, Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas with some duplicate copies in the B.B.Janz Papers, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, Canada.

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