

# Bearing Arms for the Tsar: The Songs of the Germans in Russia

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The songs a community sings, and the songs a community chooses to remember and preserve over many years and decades can reveal much about that community. Many songs, of course, deal with universal human themes like love and death and are usually passed down from generation to generation across wide social and geographic areas. Songs dealing with more concrete themes are usually present as well. They may convey facts about events in the life of the community, as in the case of ballads that tell of shipwrecks and other disasters, but more often they convey the feelings of the members of the community, their reactions to the events and forces they must contend with. Songs are an essential part of the myth-making apparatus of a community, attaching verse and melody to memories so that they can be more easily retained, and transforming and distilling these memories into artifacts that often transcend the original inspiration. Furthermore, by allowing future members of the community to enter into the memories communicated by the songs, they unite future with past generations in a concrete, visceral way that recitations of facts cannot do. Finally, such songs provide indirect evidence about the importance of events in the history of a community in at least two ways: the fact that a song is produced suggests that the event was important, and the fact that a song is remembered in an oral tradition serves to confirm the original importance of the event.

James Urry has recently issued a challenge to Mennonite scholars. "Mennonites, even their scholars trained in academic scholarship, tend to view the world

through distinctive Mennonite eyes which judge events, people, and institutions on Mennonite terms.”<sup>1</sup> His criticism of “the highly teleological nature of much Mennonite interpretation of the early Soviet period” (27) suggests the need for a broader perspective on this and other periods of Mennonite history in Russia. The final sentence of Urry’s article is a challenge for future research and interpretation and the essay that follows is in part a response to that challenge. It is an attempt to place a crucial turning point in the history of Mennonite colonists in Russia—the withdrawal in the 1870s of privileges granted to them by Catherine the Great—in the context of the responses to these events of the large, diverse, and widely-scattered communities of German-speaking colonists in Russia, a group of which Mennonites formed a relatively small part. After reviewing briefly some aspects of Russian Mennonite and Russian German history and historiography, I intend to do this by examining the texts of a number of songs collected from Russian German prisoners of war during World War I.<sup>2</sup> These songs, some of which had been sung in Russian German communities for many decades, reveal many of their thoughts and feelings about the changes they were forced to undergo in their life in the Russian Empire.

The songs I shall consider in this essay fall into two main categories: songs about events that affected all German-speaking colonists more or less equally, and songs growing out of the withdrawal of exemption from military service that show how different the Mennonite experience was from that of most German colonists. The first category of songs will demonstrate that Mennonites were not alone in their resistance to and anguish resulting from the reforms of the 1870s. The discussion of the second category will place the story of Mennonite young men serving in the forestry and medical services in the larger context of the service to the state required of all German-speaking colonists.

Mennonites living in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century constituted a relatively small portion of the large group of German-speaking colonists descended from the Europeans who had responded to Catherine the Great’s manifestoes of 1762, 1763 and 1785 inviting foreign settlers to fill the empty spaces of southern Russia.<sup>3</sup> According to the first universal Russian census of 1897 there were 1,790,489 people of German origin in the vast country: 76.01 % Lutheran (1,362,562), 13.53 % Catholic (242,253), 3.68 % Mennonite (65,890), 3.57 % Reformed (63,920), 1.27% Jewish (22,739) and 1.12 % other Protestant (20,053).<sup>4</sup> The ancestors of these other colonists had been granted the same privileges as the Mennonites, among the most important of which were the possibility of settling in self-contained colonies on large areas of land, the right to a large measure of internal self-government in their colonies, and freedom from military service.<sup>5</sup> But it is sometimes difficult when reading the work of Mennonite scholars dealing with this period to realize that Mennonites were in fact part of this much larger story.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars telling the story of Germans in Russia usually do include Mennonites.<sup>7</sup> The degree to which the Mennonite story is separated from that of the larger German story varies. In *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, Fleischhauer

describes the Mennonite immigration in some detail, and distinguishes Mennonite from German colonists in two main ways, their agricultural and economic success (228, 232, 326), and the pacifism that made their reaction to the withdrawal of freedom from military service in 1874 quite different from that of most German colonists (310-11). In less comprehensive studies Mennonites are grouped together with the German majority and cited as a specific instance of the larger German story.<sup>8</sup>

Other scholars have begun to make finer distinctions in the history of Germans in Russia. James Long has argued that Fleischhauer's division of Germans in Russia into three categories—Baltic Germans, rural colonists, and urban Germans—is too simplistic. He suggests that in fact the Volga Germans were more similar to their Russian peasant neighbours than they were to German colonists cultivating the more productive soils of Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> He cites a zemstvo survey of 1895 describing the agricultural practices of the Volga region to make this point:

The only smallholders singled out for exemplary fieldwork were the approximately 1000 Mennonites settled in nine colonies in Samara Province, who carefully plowed and harrowed their lands, achieving yields in the 1880s double those of neighbouring Volga colonies and peasant villages. A writer quite familiar with the Lower Volga region called the Mennonite colonies 'an oasis in the desert,' strikingly contrasting them with the 'unattractive and unimpressive Russian settlements and German colonies.'<sup>10</sup>

Meir Buchsweiler seeks to place the mistreatment of Germans in the period between the two World Wars in the context of the experience of other minority groups. He argues against the view that Germans were singled out for especially harsh treatment because they were German by suggesting that the mistreatment of other minorities in the former Soviet Union began earlier and was harsher, at least until 1938. When Germans were treated more harshly, such treatment could be attributed at least in part to characteristics other than their German origins; that is, their economic prosperity, their religiousness, their isolation, and the resistance to the Soviet system that these characteristics engendered.<sup>11</sup> The usefulness and necessity of a more comprehensive view of the experiences of minorities in the Soviet Union was impressed on Buchsweiler by his observation that the actual treatment of Jews in the 1930s had also not corresponded to the common wisdom that they had been treated more harshly than other minorities.<sup>12</sup> He is quick to point out that these observations are not intended to diminish the value of accounts of individual groups or to trivialize the tragedies that took place. That a scholar from one of these minorities would be interested in trying to understand the history of his or her people is also very understandable. Nevertheless, he suggests that it is necessary for the scholar to achieve some distance if a proper perspective is to be maintained. "Although the Soviet Germans may have fallen into the cogged wheels of events and may have been at least partially crushed in the process, one cannot therefore avoid an analysis of the operations of those same cogged wheels."<sup>13</sup>

The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 marked the beginning of a series of sweeping reforms in Imperial Russia. The status of state peasants was redefined in 1866 and that of foreign colonists in 1871. Mennonite and German colonists were removed from the special administrative structures within which they had previously been governed and became a part of the general Russian administrative apparatus. Among the threats this change represented was the possibility that the education of their children would be taken from their control and that Russian would become the language of instruction in schools.<sup>14</sup>

The most disturbing announcement for both Mennonites and German colonists came in 1870, when the Imperial government stated its intention to institute radical changes in the military arm of the government, including the introduction of universal compulsory conscription. There was to be a ten-year grace period, after which conscription would begin. The Mennonite reaction to this announcement has been well documented.<sup>15</sup> Delegations to the Imperial government attempted to negotiate an exception to the decree. Failing that, 18,000 or about one-third of the Russian Mennonites emigrated to North America beginning in 1874, while those who remained attempted to negotiate more favourable terms. This was accomplished when Mennonites were exempted from carrying arms in the law proclaiming universal compulsory conscription in 1874. In 1875 they gained the further concession that their young men would be allowed to serve in civil roles, primarily the forestry service, with administrative control in the hands of the colonies.

References by Mennonite scholars to the reactions of German colonists to the reforms are fleeting. Frank Epp suggests that the "Lutheran and Catholic German colonists were not as seriously affected by the military law. Yet, general loss of privileges and autonomy caused thousands of them to migrate during the 1870s as well."<sup>16</sup> A similar assessment is found in C. Henry Smith's history of the Mennonites.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere references to the larger German population are almost non-existent.

Both Long and Fleischhauer agree that the new military law did not cause the same kind of consternation among the German colonists as it did among the Mennonites. Fleischhauer states that "most of the German colonists took the withdrawal of the old privileges with calmness (*Gelassenheit*)."<sup>18</sup> She goes on to cite General Totleben's analysis of the underlying reasons, in addition to conscription, for the emigration of German colonists that did occur: 1) the spreading of rumours of the impending russification of the colonies, 2) fear of the introduction into schools of Russian as the compulsory language of instruction, and 3) the unification of German and Russian villages into a single volost.<sup>19</sup>

According to Long, "despite their initial fears and concerns, the Volga Germans obediently but resignedly accepted military conscription."<sup>20</sup> The German colonists had neither the tradition of pacifism present in the Mennonite heritage, nor a history of approaching the government on behalf of an entire group that might have gained them the kinds of alternative forms of service granted the Mennonites. He goes on to state that the emigration that took place in

the ten-year grace period following the announcement of 1870 was insignificant in terms of the general population in the Volga region. Military service did become an incentive to illegal emigration among the Volga Germans during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, however, when reservists were mobilized. The 1874 law had established a six-year term of active service and a nine-year term in the reserves, but in 1888 active service was reduced to five years while the reserve obligation was increased to eighteen years. Rather than calling up young recruits through the conscription process to fight the Japanese, men in the reserves aged twenty-five to forty-three were mobilized, causing understandable consternation when a father might be sent to the front while his twenty-one-year-old son stayed at home.<sup>21</sup>

Although Long and Fleischhauer play down the reaction of the German colonists to the requirement that their sons would now have to serve in the Russian army, and there is no reason to doubt the validity of their analysis of the general situation, the songs of the colonists provide evidence of the anguish that in particular instances must inevitably have prevailed. There may not have been significant German emigration because of the 1874 law, but several songs contain pointed references to the events surrounding passage of the law and at least one of them, "Kommt, Gebrüder," grew directly out of the emigration movement of the 1870s.

Kommt Gebrüder, wollen ziehen  
Unsre Päss sind schon geschrieben,  
hin nach dem brasilischen Ort—  
keinen Winter gibt es dort.

Come brothers, let us travel  
Our passports are ready  
Onwards to Brazil  
There will be no winter there.

In Russland können wir auch nicht leben,  
weil wir müssen Soldaten geben  
und als Ratnik müssen wir stehen  
drum wollen wir aus Russland gehn.<sup>22</sup>

In Russia we can no longer live,  
because we must become soldiers  
and join the militia,  
so we want to leave Russia.

Another very common song, found in a number of variants, was the so-called "Katherinenlied," which remembers both the initial call to Russia and the subsequent changes in Imperial policy.

Katherine, die war die Kaiserin,  
Die zog uns Deutschen zu sich hin,  
Auf hundert Jahr gab sie uns frei  
Die hundert Jahr, die sind vorbei.

Catherine was the Empress,  
She called the Germans to her,  
For one hundred years we were free  
The hundred years have gone by,

Wir verliessen unser Vaterland  
Und zogen in das Russenland  
Die Russen waren uns sehr beneidt  
Und weil wir waren so lang befreidt.

We left our fatherland  
And moved to Russia  
The Russians were very envious  
Because we had been free so long.

So brachten sie's dahin mit List  
Dass wir nicht mehr sollten sein Kolonist,  
Ei, keine Kolonisten sind wir mehr  
Und müssen tragen das Gewehr.<sup>23</sup>

So, with great cunning, it came to be  
That we would be colonists no more  
Yes, we are colonists no more  
And have to bear arms.

These verses preserve the feeling of shock and betrayal that the colonists, both German and Mennonite, must have felt when their privileges were revoked. Several other stanzas suggest the reasons the German colonists gave for the acts of the government, and also reveal their feelings about the fact that they had lost their special colonial administrative status in addition to being forced to join the army.

Ja, was doch durch den Neid geschieht, Hat man das Manifest vernicht. Wir stammen aus dem Deutschen Reich Und jetzt sind wir den Russen gleich.	Yes, what envy cannot do, The manifesto has been destroyed. We hail from the German Empire And now we're the same as Russians.
Und schliesst man uns in Ketten ein wir wollen sie zerreiben, Wir wollen keine Russen sein Wir wollen Deutschen bleiben.	And if we are put in chains We will pulverize them, We don't want to be Russians We want to remain Germans.

The last two stanzas of the "Katherinenlied" given above have something to say about the ways in which the colonists, both German and Mennonite, viewed themselves and their neighbours. On the one hand they knew only one emperor, the one resident in St. Petersburg. On the other hand they still regarded themselves in some fundamental way as Germans, even though the idea of a unified German state had just begun to develop and had certainly not been in existence when they left their homelands.

A variant of this song contains a verse that reveals more of the ambivalence present in relations between Germans, Mennonites and Russians.

Die Deutschen sind getreu Die Russen han die Läuse Drum hat er uns gezogen Zu seiner Reiterei. <sup>24</sup>	The Germans are loyal The Russians have lice That is why he has called us To join his cavalry.
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The previous stanzas suggested that the Germans saw themselves as powerless victims of envious Russians. This verse also betrays some of the feelings of superiority and contempt that some writers have referred to in discussing the relations between Mennonites and their Russian neighbours.<sup>25</sup>

While the previous songs are relevant to the experiences of all German-speaking colonists in Russia, the soldier songs found in the Schünemann and Klein collections speak of a different world of experiences. The conscription levy was the same for the sons of all Russian citizens, but the outcome was not the same for Mennonites as it was for Germans and Russians. Thanks to the exemptions of 1874 and 1875, almost all Mennonite young men remained under Mennonite administrative control, serving in civil roles like the forestry service, while the young men of German and Russian families joined the armed forces.

Outright exemptions were granted to sole surviving sons, married men, or sons and grandsons who were the only workers in their household. Young men, Mennonite, German and Russian, who had turned twenty by January 1 of that year gathered in a village designated as a draft centre where they drew their lottery numbers and learned who would be chosen. Arnold Dyck, the Russian

Mennonite author best known for his novel, *Verloren in der Steppe*, the story of a young boy growing up in a Russian Mennonite village, and his Low German tales of the adventures of Koop and Bua, has provided a detailed and often hilarious account of such a day in the life of a prospective forestry commando, including a vivid description of the obligatory night of carousing that followed.<sup>26</sup>

The new order had significant consequences for the recruits and for the life of the colonies. Military service served to foster the russification process in the German colonies in two important ways. Recruits were dispersed among units that were usually stationed far from home, in mixed ethnic units composed predominantly of Russians. There were therefore opportunities and incentives to learn Russian within the unit. Parents also soon realized that it would be prudent to have their sons learn Russian before enlisting in order to make their time in the service more tolerable. Furthermore, shortening the length of service became a powerful incentive to achieve literacy; a certificate testifying to the successful completion of three years of primary education resulted in a term of only four years, with a further reduction to three years for the next school level.<sup>27</sup> The soldiers returned to their colonies hardened and broadened by their experiences, having become accustomed to accepting and dispensing discipline and ready to take up leadership roles in the colonies.<sup>28</sup>

Mennonites had the same incentives to go to school. In "Dee Scheewe Kome!," one of Arnold Dyck's stories of the forestry service, we learn that for the *Jegromde*, the educated ones, it was possible to serve as little as twenty months.<sup>29</sup> Because the curriculum now had to include the study of Russian, this will undoubtedly have hastened the acquisition of Russian by many potential recruits. In the forestry camps, of course, the everyday language was *Plautdietsch*. "Wie opp'e Forstei weare plautdietsche Mensche," (We in the forestry service were Low German folks) according to Arnold Dyck.<sup>30</sup> The camps were organized along quasi-military lines, although the discipline necessary for clearing forests and planting trees was not the same as that necessary for doing battle on the front lines. The *Kjiedels* (chaps), as they called themselves, were mostly left to do their own disciplining, accomplished, according to Al Reimer, mainly through a combination of the ironic, often exaggerated ritual language known as "derche Bloom Råde" and its opposite, the straight from the shoulder manner of speaking, with its abhorrence of affectation, hypocrisy or lying, known as "fresch fonn'e Plüts råde."<sup>31</sup> Thus, while not exposed to the same wide range of experiences, places, and comrades from different ethnic groups as the German colonist recruit would have been, Mennonite foresters did experience several years of regimented life and hard work, exposure to comrades from other colonies, and a time away from the relative isolation of his home colony.

Needless to say, life in the forestry service was not as idyllic as Dyck sometimes seems to suggest; he himself refers to the people both in Russia and Canada to whose criticism his stories and plays were at least in part a response. They were critical not, he said, because the young men were serving their

country, but because they thought they were “fedorwe,” by which he clearly means not that they were spoiled like brats but that their souls were lost.<sup>32</sup> To this he responded, “No, our foresters were not worse than their critics then and now, they were only less hypocritical.”<sup>33</sup> Writing in the first decade of this century, P.M. Friesen suggested that on the whole the conduct of the young men in the forestry service was in keeping with that in their families and their colonies; that is, there were some who gave their ministers and families grief, but most were decent and doing as well as could be expected under the circumstances.<sup>34</sup> John B. Toews’s more recent assessment seems to be critical of the underlying philosophy of the forestry service, suggesting that the quality of nonresistance was diluted by basing participation in the service on membership in a Mennonite colony rather than conviction, and that the broadening of the recruits’ horizons was a relatively limited one, since they simply substituted one closed community for another.<sup>35</sup> The alternative, of course, was participation in the regular military forces by many more Mennonite young men, which would presumably have had even more harmful consequences.

Arnold Dyck’s stories provide a vivid snapshot of the Mennonite experience of the *Forstei*, but what of the experiences of a young man from a German colony? The experience of becoming a soldier has common elements in whatever jurisdiction it takes place. Regimented living and training as a pathway to regimented thinking in the service of unquestioning obedience in battle is the norm for most boot camps. Given the number of German soldiers who entered the Russian army—Long estimates that by 1914 some 50,000 Volga Germans had spent time in the ranks—it would be difficult to provide a comprehensive view of how individual Germans reacted to their military experiences.<sup>36</sup> But thanks to the Schünemann and Klein collections, the Russian-German reaction to conscription and military service can be approached through their folk songs, the artistic vision of the people distilled, crystallized and preserved in poetry and melody.<sup>37</sup>

Here one can find songs that record the more intimate anxieties and anguish associated with sons leaving their families and fathers saying farewell to their sons as they left for what must have seemed an unbearably long stint in the armed forces. There is a song that makes it possible for all to contemplate the feelings a recruit might have felt after being selected in the lottery

Das traurige Schicksal hat uns übernommen  
(Sad fate has overtaken us)  
das der russische Kaiser uns zu Soldat hat genommen  
(That the Russian Emperor has made us soldiers)  
die Reih die war an mir sonst könnt ich bleiben hier  
(The lot has fallen to me or I could have stayed at home)  
Aber ich muss scheiden, und ihr bleibet hier.  
(Therefore I must depart while you stay here.)<sup>38</sup>

The anguish felt by the recruit as he leaves loved ones at home is expressed in these stanzas.



Traurig, traurig ist die Stunde,  
O, es muss geschieden sein!  
Schwer ist diese neue Kunde...  
Lebet wohl, ihr Eltern mein!

Nun ade, herzlichster Vater!  
Gib mir jetzt den Abschiedskuss,  
weil ich nicht mehr da kann bleiben,  
weil ich zum Soldat fort muss.

Nun ade, herzlichster Schwester!  
Weine, weine nicht so sehr!  
Du hast's ja am allerbesten:  
Du brauchst tragen kein Gewehr.

Hört! Die Trommel schlägt zum Scheiden!  
Ich muss für die Ehre streiten,  
für die Ehr', fürs Vaterland  
reich ich dir die treue Hand.<sup>39</sup>

Sad, sad is the hour,  
When we must part!  
This news has been bitter...  
Farewell, my parents!

Now, farewell, dear father!  
Give me a farewell kiss,  
I can no longer stay,  
Because I must go become a soldier.

Now farewell, my dearest sister!  
Do not weep so hard!  
Your lot is so much better:  
You don't have to carry a rifle.

Listen! The drums sound departure!  
I must fight for honour,  
For honour, for the Fatherland  
I give you my faithful hand.

New recruits looked forward to their return in this way:

Wenn wir nach sechs Jahren wiederkehren  
Gesund und froh ins Vaterhaus,  
Dann sollen fließen Freudentränen,  
da ist ja aller Kummer aus.  
Drum lebet wohl, auf Wiedersehn!  
Ade! Lebt wohl! Wir müssen gehn!<sup>40</sup>

When we return after six years  
Happy and healthy in our father's house,  
Tears of joy will flow,  
For then all sorrow will be past.  
So fare you well, until we meet again!  
Goodbye! Farewell! We must go!

Needless to say, parents experienced the anguish of separation as well. Schünemann's collection includes a song that expresses the sorrow and feeling of loss felt by parents saying farewell to a son leaving for a six-year term of service somewhere in the vast Empire.

Jetzt fangen an die schwere Stunden,  
die Trübsal bricht mit Macht herein.  
Der Vater muss den Schmerz erdulden,  
der Sohn muss in den Krieg hinein.  
Lasst uns alle insgemein  
recht herzlich um Vergebung schrein.<sup>41</sup>

Now begin the awful hours,  
Affliction bears down mightily.  
The father must endure suffering,  
His son must go to war.  
Let us all with one voice  
Cry out for forgiveness.

Although the focus of this essay is on the texts of the songs, the melodies to which "Jetzt fangen an" was sung are also interesting and can serve as examples of the kinds of melodies to which these songs were sung.<sup>42</sup> The melody of one version is based on the chorale "Mir ist Erbarmung widerfahren," with added melismas, ornaments and deviations from the original tune characteristic of melodies preserved in an oral tradition. Schünemann gives two other versions, one to the chorale tune "Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten" and the other to the tune "O dass ich tausend Zungen hätte." Like the melodies in Doreen Klassen's collection of Mennonite songs, the melodies used by the Russian Germans when setting a new text to music were almost always pre-existing melodies adapted and

sometimes distorted to fit the new text and then subjected to the variations and vicissitudes melodies in an oral tradition invariably had to undergo.

Most of the songs cited above grew out of the consequences of the events of the 1870s. As significant and traumatic as these events were, there is almost always a larger context within which to frame them, and in this case a frame is provided by the Crimean War of 1854–56 on the one hand and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 and the First World War on the other. The Crimean War was significant in a number of ways. Most importantly, it demonstrated the need for change if Russia hoped to compete with other world powers, hence the series of reforms beginning with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the administrative reforms beginning in 1864 integrating all segments of society, including the colonies, into self-governing municipal units, and the military reforms announced in 1870 and put into legislation in 1874.<sup>43</sup> More immediately, it brought German and Mennonite colonists into close proximity to a major war, in which they became involved in a number of ways.<sup>44</sup> They provided transportation for troops and supplies, and cared for sick and wounded soldiers. Many colonists were exposed to experiences outside the isolated colonies, and, in the case of the Mennonites, the experience of coping with the effects of a major war sharpened their sense of alarm and their determination when the issue of universal conscription arose in the 1870s.<sup>45</sup> While Mennonite colonies were involved only indirectly in the actual fighting, some German colonists fought in the Russian army, and according to Klein it is these men and the inhabitants of the German villages in the war zone who must have produced the song entitled “Die taurische Festung.”<sup>46</sup>

Die taurische Festung bei Sewastopol...  
 Sie kamen herüber von Konstantinopel...  
 Die Franken, die Türken, die englische Schar,  
 das heilige Kreuz mit dem Halbmond gepaart.

(The Crimean fortress at Sevastopol... They came from Constantinople... The French, the Turks, the English hordes, The holy cross paired with the crescent.)

Sie wollten den Russen die Krim abstutzen,  
 sie taten sich alle die Ohren drauf spitzen;  
 sie meinten die Krim wär ein Frühstück für sie,  
 es gelohnte sich kaum der gewaltigen Müh.

(They wanted to take Crimea from Russia, They were all greedy to have it; The Crimea was to be their breakfast, It was hardly worth their enormous efforts.)

Sie dachten, mit ihren fünfhundert Schiffen  
 Sewastopol sei leicht in die Luft 'neingepiffen,  
 so leicht, wie ein Knabe die Feder, Feder schwenkt...  
 So leicht seid ihr wohl alle zum Kuckuck gesprengt.

(They thought, with their five hundred ships Sevastopol would easily be blown out of the water, As easily as a youth plays with a feather... That is how easily you were blown to the devil.)

Gravitätische Mahlzeit, ihr hungrige Schlucker!  
 Wie schmeckt euch der russische Blaubohnenzucker?  
 Wie schmeckt euch der lange Kosackensalat  
 Und die Gurkenschnaps, den man einschenken tat?

(Eat well, you hungry scoundrels! How does the Russian blue bean sugar taste?  
 How does the long cossack salad taste and the cucumber brandy you were  
 served?<sup>47</sup>)

Und wollt ihr es dennoch einmal versuchen,  
 wir wollen euch backen die taurische Kuchen  
 die wollen wir euch backen aus Marmor und Stein  
 die Rosinen, das sollen die Bomben, Bomben sein!

(And if you want to try it again We will bake you some Crimean cakes, We'll  
 bake them with marble and stone. The raisins shall be the bombs.)

The words of this song suggest that by the mid-nineteenth century German colonists had developed strong emotional ties to the Russian state and its emperor that emerged at least in times of crisis. According to Koch, "The Volga Germans not only bore a deep allegiance to their Romanov rulers, but they had also come to love Russia, the nation, as their own land."<sup>48</sup> It must be said that the ironic, often satirical tone of the text suggests that the colonists were still able to maintain considerable emotional distance. George K Epp has pointed out that many Mennonites were also filled with patriotism. Heinrich Heese expressed such feelings in verse during the Crimean War, although the extent to which the sentiments were shared by the general Mennonite population is not entirely clear.<sup>49</sup>

Just as the Crimean War can be seen as the catalyst for very significant changes in the conditions under which colonists in Russia lived, the wars of the early part of the twentieth century served as catalysts for the events that brought even greater changes to Russia and the colonists who had made Russia their home, changes that in many ways marked the end of an era. Again it is possible to look to the folk songs of the Russian Germans to gain an insight into their perspective on these events.

There are a number of songs that grew out of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05.<sup>50</sup> Here too we find songs that express the anguish of the soldier going off to war and leaving his loved ones behind. In "Das traurige Schicksal" discussed above there is a reference to the lottery by which young men were selected. Similar sentiments are expressed in a song of the Russo-Japanese War.

Die Losung ist mir zugefallen	The lot has fallen to me
Ich bin Soldat auf lange Zeit.	I'll be a soldier for a long time.
Abschied muss ich nehmen von euch allen,	I must part from all of you,
Es tut mir sehr von Hertenzen leid. <sup>51</sup>	I do so with a heavy heart.

Some songs were the expressions of more general views of the war, as in "Soldatenlied."<sup>52</sup>

Ach wie wird es doch noch kommen  
in dem ruschigen Vaterland!  
Wie der Krieg hat angefangen  
in dem gelben Morgenland.

Ah, and what is going to come to pass  
in our Russian fatherland!  
How a war has begun  
In the yellow Orient.

Ach, ihr Brüder, steht nur Feste  
Wie ein Fels am Ufer steht,  
Dass sich Japan nicht ergötze  
Und das ruschge Reich zerstört.

Ah, brothers, just stand firm,  
As a cliff stands at the shore,  
So that Japan cannot have its way  
And destroy the Russian empire.

Another song refers to a long period of peace, into which the war with Japan intruded in a particularly distressing way for those old soldiers called out of the reserves to go to war in a distant and threatening place.

Lange lebten wir in Frieden und in Russland,  
und wir wussten nichts vom Krieg.  
Doch der Japan hat uns herausgefordert  
und noch geht es um den Sieg..  
Draussen in der Mandschurei  
mussten wir uns schlagen frei  
bei dem Japan stolzen Mut<sup>53</sup>

Long lived we peacefully in Russia,  
And we knew nothing of war.  
But Japan has called us forth  
And now we strive for victory.  
There in Manchuria  
we had to fight for our freedom  
from Japan's proud spirit.

Other songs express the bravado and bluster necessary to sustain the spirits of soldiers going off to war.

Müssen jetzt in dem Schlachtfeld ziehen  
auf dem Meer nach Mandschurei,  
müssen bei dunklen Nächten fliehen  
vor dem Feind in heftigem Streit.

We must now go to the field of slaughter  
on the sea to Manchuria,  
must flee in the dark of night  
before the enemy in mighty battle.

Niemand darf an Heimat denken,  
An sein Vaterhaus zurück,  
Die Zeit ist zum Säbelschwenken,  
Japan ist schon nah gerückt.

No one dares think of home,  
of his father's house,  
The time has come to wield our sabres,  
Japan has already drawn near.

Nun adjes, herzlichster Brüder,  
Fürcht euch vor Japaner nicht,  
Schlagt auf ihre Häupter nieder,  
Schlagt sie gut und fürcht euch nicht.<sup>54</sup>

Now farewell, dear brothers,  
Don't be afraid of the Japanese,  
Hit at their heads  
Hit them hard and fear them not.

Creating caricatures of the enemy that render him less than human is another useful tactic in war, and songs that can be sung even while dancing are an effective vehicle for these kinds of sentiments.

Der Japan is'n klaaner Mann  
un hot so grosse Stiefel an;  
er denkt, er krächt die Mandschurei,  
doch geht's ihm an der Nas' vorbei.<sup>55</sup>

The Japanese is a tiny man  
but wears very big boots;  
he thinks he'll take Manchuria,  
Yet it slips out of his fingers.

Songs were also used to try to understand the events of the war, as in "Japanlied," found in Klein's collection. The final two verses are a grim testimony to the horrors of war, and the helplessness of soldiers whose lot it was not to reason why.

Jetzt ist der Krieg verspielt...  
 Und wer ist Schuld daran?  
 Dem Zar seine schlechten Führer,  
 die haben nicht recht getan.

Unsre Offiziere schrien hell;  
 "Sucharn kriegt ihr jetzt schnell"  
 Suchar und der war rot,  
 da frist man sich bald tot.

Sie machten sich Geld in die Säck'  
 von unserm Brot und Speck,  
 Ein mancher blieb da sitzen  
 So wie das Kind beim Dreck.<sup>56</sup>

Now the war has been lost..  
 And who is to blame?  
 The Tsar's bad advisers,  
 They have not behaved properly.

Our officers cried loudly;  
 Soon you will get bread (zwieback)  
 Suchar! and he was red,  
 A quick way to eat oneself to death.

They lined their pockets  
 with our bread and bacon,  
 Many a one stayed sitting there  
 Just like a child playing in the dirt.

The final song I wish to cite is a song that, like the previous one, provides an occasion for the community to assess events and to communicate that assessment in a communal form. This song was written in the Volga colonies after the October Revolution, the German colonist's dirge for the old Empire.

Selbst der Kaiser hat's verdorben,  
 Er mit seinem ganzen heer,  
 Darum ist er auch verworfen,  
 Und das Alte gilt nix mehr!

Alle, die am höchsten waren,  
 sind auf einmal hingericht't,  
 und der Kaiser Nikolaschke  
 kommt nicht mehr ans Tagelicht.<sup>57</sup>

The emperor has spoiled it for himself  
 He with his whole company,  
 Therefore he has been overthrown  
 And the old ways have passed away!

All who were on top,  
 have suddenly been deposed,  
 And the Emperor Nicholas  
 Will see the light of day no more.

I have tried to explore the ways in which folk songs can be used to gain an insight into the large, diverse, and widely scattered communities of Germans in Russia from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. I have argued that the songs of the Russian Germans demonstrate in a vivid and concrete way that Mennonites were not alone in their horror and dismay at the withdrawal of what had seemed like sacred privileges. I have also suggested that the songs of Russian German soldiers provide an interesting and useful counterpoint to the story of Mennonite young men serving in the forestry and medical services by demonstrating that there were very large numbers of German-speaking young men in Russia whose experience of the withdrawal of privileges was very different from that of the Mennonites. I have tried to put a face on the young men from the German colonies who went to war for Russia, and the families and friends they left behind. It may be that this will provide a slightly different context for the familiar accounts of the petitions, the emigrations, and the forestry camps, one that makes it possible to see this particular experience not just through Mennonite eyes.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> James Urry, "After the rooster crowed: Some issues concerning the interpretation of Mennonite/Bolshevik relations during the early Soviet period," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 13 (1995): 43.

<sup>2</sup> There are two main collections of folk songs that are helpful in this task. One is the pioneering work of Georg Schünemann, a prominent German ethnologist, who collected 434 songs in prisoner of war camps in 1917 and 1918. The second is Victor Klein's *Unversiegbarer Born*, a later collection containing a number of songs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Georg Schünemann, *Das Lied der deutschen Kolonisten in Russland: Mit 434 in deutschen Kriegsgefangenenlagern gesammelten Liedern*, Vol. 3 of *Sammelbände für vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* (Munich 1923); and Victor Klein, *Unversiegbarer Born: vom Wesen des Volkslied der Sowjetdeutschen* (Alma-Ata: Verlag 'Kasachstan,' 1974). Most of the songs are of course folk songs brought with them from the German territories they left behind. Lawrence Weigel, a collector of Russian German folk songs living in Kansas has published several collections of songs. The collections contain some songs that are also found in the Schünemann and Klein collections. Several others tell of various stages of immigration.

<sup>3</sup> Roger P Bartlett, *Human Capital: The settlement of foreigners in Russia 1762-1894*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 35–56, 121.

<sup>4</sup> Ingeborg Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich: Zwei Jahrhunderte deutsch-russische Kulturgemeinschaft* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1986), 277.

<sup>5</sup> Bartlett, *Human Capital*, 47–48.

<sup>6</sup> This observation is based on a survey of both general histories and more specialized publications. James Urry has done much to provide a broader context for the Mennonite experience in Russia. For a brief account of the relationship between German colonists and Mennonites see James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), 260–63.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*; James W. Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed: The Volga Germans, 1860–1917* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988); and Bartlett, *Human Capital*.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Andreas Kappeler, "Die Deutschen im Rahmen des zaristischen und sowjetischen Vielvölkerreiches: Kontinuitäten und Brüche," in Andreas Kappeler et al, *Die Deutschen im Russischen Reich und im Sowjetstadt* (Köln: Markus Verlag, 1987), 9–20; and Benjamin Pinkus, "From the October Revolution to the Second World War," in Ingeborg Fleischhauer and Benjamin Pinkus, *The Soviet Germans, Past and Present* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986), 31-65.

<sup>9</sup> Long, *From Privileged to Dispossessed*, xv.

<sup>10</sup> Long, 76. The author of the quotation was G.I Kolesnikov.

<sup>11</sup> Meir Buchsweiler, "Die Sowjetdeutschen—ausserhalb der Wolgarepublik—im Vergleich mit anderen Minderheiten 1917 bis 1941/42," in *Die Deutschen im Russischen Reich und im Sowjetstadt*, 76, 92.

<sup>12</sup> Buchsweiler, 69.

<sup>13</sup> Wenn die Sowjetdeutschen sozusagen in die Zahnräder der Geschehnisse gerieten und teilweise von ihnen zermalmt wurden, kann man deswegen nicht auf eine Analyse des Ganges eben dieser Zahnräder verzichten. *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>14</sup> For accounts of these reforms see Urry, *None But Saints*, 207–212.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the emigration of the Memnonites from Russia to America*, translated by Helen Janzen (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical

Society, 1981); Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia, A Case Study in Church-State Relations: 1789-1936," PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1984, 42-84; Urry, *None But Saints*, 211-18; and Harry Loewen, "A House Divided: Russian Mennonite Nonresistance and Emigration in the 1870s," *In Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988: Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz*, edited by John Friesen (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), 127-43.

<sup>16</sup> Frank H Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962), 26.

<sup>17</sup> C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, fourth edition revised and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), 452-3.

<sup>18</sup> Fleischhauer, 311.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 315. See Harvey L Dyck, "Russian Mennonitism and the Challenge of Russian Nationalism, 1889," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 56 (October 1982): 335, for a translation of the article by A. A. Velitsyn, written in the 1890s, that serves as the source of this information.

<sup>20</sup> Long, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 38-9

<sup>22</sup> Klein, 46-47.

<sup>23</sup> Schünemann, #256, 290.

<sup>24</sup> Schünemann, #426, 380.

<sup>25</sup> See Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, 24, for a brief discussion of this subject. See also Gerhard Wiens, "Russo-German bilingualism: a case study," *The Modern Language Journal*, 36 (1952): 392-95.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold Dyck, "Tomakoftje," in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, edited by Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1988), 163-91. *Verloren in der Steppe* is found in Volume 1 and the Koop and Bua stories in volumes 2 and 3.

<sup>27</sup> Long, 36. See also Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Education in Russia," in *Mennonites in Russia*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Long, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Dyck, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 185.

<sup>30</sup> Dyck, "Eascht soo'n poa Wead," *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 154.

<sup>31</sup> Al Reimer, "Derche Bloom Råde: Arnold Dyck and the Comic Irony of the *Forstei*," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984): 60-71.

<sup>32</sup> Dyck, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 162.

<sup>33</sup> "Nein unsere Forsteier waren nicht schlechter als ihre damaligen und heutigen Kritiserer, nur unverfälschter waren sie." Dyck, "Aus meinem Leben," *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 484.

<sup>34</sup> Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*, translated by J. B. Toews and others (Fresno, 1978), 612. See Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism," 147-57 for an account of the debate about the camps in the Mennonite community in Russia.

<sup>35</sup> John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets & Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982), 57. See also Helmut-Harry Loewen and James Urry, "Protecting Mammon: Some dilemmas of Mennonite non-resistance in late Imperial Russia and the origins of the Selbstschutz," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 9 (1991): 34-53.

<sup>36</sup> Long, 37.

<sup>37</sup> Songs and sayings in Plautdietsch, the Mennonite mother tongue, have been collected, but I have found only one song that refers to the Mennonite war experience. "Fierendartijch Sanitären" is a two stanza fragment of a song relating the experiences of young men serving in the medical corps during World War I in Doreen Klassen, *Singing Mennonite: Low German Songs Among the*

*Mennonites* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1989), 126. Although there are soldier songs in the Heinrich Friesen collection, Mennonite Heritage Centre, (Winnipeg, Manitoba, microfilm:69, almost all of them are traditional German soldier songs not related to the Russian experience. There is one that speaks of standing watch on the Wolgastrand, but it seems likely that this song was taken over from the Russian German community.

<sup>38</sup>. Schünemann, #425, 380.

<sup>39</sup>. Klein, 50–51. Klein makes the point that many Russian recruit songs express the same kinds of feelings.

<sup>40</sup>. Klein, 48.

<sup>41</sup>. Schünemann, #422, 378.

<sup>42</sup>. See Wesley Berg, "Hymns of the Old Colony Mennonites and the Old Way of Singing," *The Musical Quarterly* 80 (Spring 1996): 77–117, for a detailed examination of the melodies of the Old Colony Mennonites, whose oral tradition is similar in many ways to that of the German colonists.

<sup>43</sup>. Fleischhauer, *Die Deutschen im Zarenreich*, 247–52;

<sup>44</sup>. James Urry and Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonites and the Crimean War, 1854–56," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7 (1989): 9–32.

<sup>45</sup>. *Ibid.*, 24–26. According to Urry and Klippenstein, the praiseworthy way in which Mennonites had acquitted themselves during the war also coloured the Russian attitude toward the Mennonites in the negotiations of the 1870s.

<sup>46</sup>. Klein, 52.

<sup>47</sup>. According to Klein, "lange Kosaken salat" (Cossack pikes and sabers)

<sup>48</sup>. Fred C. Koch, *The Volga Germans in Russia and the Americas, from 1763 to the Present* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 202.

<sup>49</sup>. George K. Epp, "Russian Patriotism Among the Nineteenth-Century Russian Mennonites," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 4 (1986): 120–34. But see Urry and Klippenstein, "Mennonites and the Crimean War," note 85, 30, on Epp's interpretation.

<sup>50</sup>. Small groups of Mennonite men volunteered to serve as medical personnel in the war, some of whom had requested transfers from forestry camps. Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism," 129–35.

<sup>51</sup>. Schünemann, #430, 383. There is a note indicating that this song was transcribed by a colonist. The irregularities of word forms and spellings are undoubtedly a manifestation of the *Kolonistendeutsch* that Long describes, Long 50–51.

<sup>52</sup>. Schünemann, #427, 381.

<sup>53</sup>. Schünemann, #431, 383.

<sup>54</sup>. Schünemann, #433, 384.

<sup>55</sup>. Klein, 54.

<sup>56</sup>. Klein, 53.

<sup>57</sup>. Klein, 55.