

The Forgotten Immigrants: The Coming of the “Late Kanadier”, 1881 – 1914

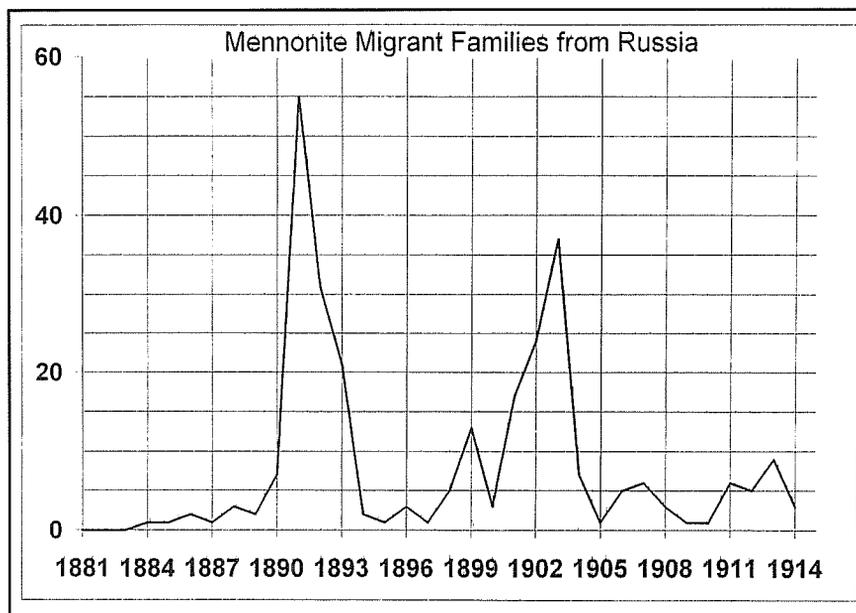
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Introduction

The written work on Russian Mennonite migration to America is voluminous. Yet the attention that has been given to this story for the period between the 1870s migration and World War I is negligible. The best work to date for understanding the migration has been Peter D. Zacharias’s work on Reinland, Manitoba. It is very brief, however, and focuses solely on the years 1888 – 1892.¹ Heinz Lehmann, writing in the 1930s, seemed more aware of late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century migration than most later scholars.² There are significant reasons for the dearth of scholarship on this period of migration. First, there are numerous places from which the migrants came. Secondly, they passed through different ports in coming to North America. Thirdly, they scattered to a variety of destinations in Canada and the United States. They were generally not highly organized and frequently came in very small groups of families or as single families. Thus there are not only one or two major sources from which one can get a glimpse of the migration.

To date, one can only hazard a guess as to the aggregate numbers of migrants from Russia to North America from 1881 to 1914. The statistics are scattered, incomplete and of dubious accuracy. John Warkentin, following the Government of

Canada Sessional Papers, suggested that 900 Mennonite emigrants came from Russia during the early 1890s.³ The 1893 Canadian government Sessional Papers sug-



gest that only 300 of those immigrants came from Russia and 600 from the United States.⁴ The Sessional Papers of subsequent years, however, seem to lose the Mennonites as a statistical category, although they do note the number of new homestead entries made by Mennonites. The statistics are subsumed variously under such as categories as Germans, Germans from Russia, Russians, and other categories. Official records, thus, sometimes record Mennonites, sometimes mis-record numbers, sometimes mis-classify them and sometimes seem to ignore them.

Histories that attempt to record the details of this migration can similarly be confusing. One study suggests that 101 Mennonites migrated to Canada during the three fiscal years between 1901 and 1904.⁵ The writer has identified seventy-three families that arrived during those three years. It is certain that there are many more to be identified. A writer in the 1894 Sessional Papers articulates the issue well when he says, “the conclusion has been forced upon me that all immigration statistics must necessarily be more or less fallacious in their character, and that very ill-founded conclusions can easily be drawn from them.”⁶

This study will try to illuminate what neither available statistics nor previous accounts have succeeded in doing. It will try to clarify the size, the shape and the character of migration from Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The materials on which the study is based include memoir material from the migrants and descriptive letters in the newspaper, the *Mennonitische Rundschau*.

From these sources I have created an immigrant list of 287 families, showing wherever possible the point of origin in Russia, the destination in Canada and the church affiliation. Moreover, I have reconstituted with complete vital data 144 of these migrant families. My findings will not answer all questions about the migration in a definitive way, but at least they enable one to set down some quantifiable facts and to identify some of the dynamics that shaped this migration.

This paper will not address migration from Russia to the United States, other than a few instances where an immigrant resettled in Canada within five years of leaving Russia. Mennonites clearly moved from Russia to a variety of American destinations until at least the 1890s.⁷ Among these immigrants were the followers of Klaas Epp who had made the trek to Central Asia before settling in Kansas and Nebraska.⁸ That story has been developed by other writers.

The Migration 1881 – 1889

The migration flow from Russia to Canada was very small during the 1880s. My study has identified only ten families who came in these nine years. They came from several locations in Russia and did not have a great deal in common. The case of Albert Unrau and his mother Helena (Plenert) Unrau appears as a clear case of family unification. They left Franzthal, Molotschna, in the early summer of 1884 to join one of Mrs. Unrau's children who had settled in Manitoba's West Reserve in the 1870s.⁹

Teacher Heinrich Rempel and his family seem to have had different reasons for emigrating. They were from Molotschna Colony originally but had been living in a rental colony in the Orechow region. Mr. Rempel was employed as a teacher there, but it seems the family's situation was financially precarious nevertheless. They received help to migrate to Manitoba from relatives already there. The Rempels were fortunate enough to find as travelling companions several Molotschna families who were migrating to the U.S. Their ship docked in New York on 28 May 1886 from where the Rempels traveled west by train. Their tickets had only been pre-paid to St. Paul, Minnesota. There the family was left without any resources and they had to find help to pay the remaining \$17.00 fare to Niverville, Manitoba. Heinrich Rempel states that, since they were poor, a great deal of help was given them to help them get established in Manitoba. He began teaching school again. After seven months, he wrote that he was happy in his new job and in no hurry to become a farmer.¹⁰

A third migrant family, Gerhard and Elisabeth (Rahn)Wiebe and their children, came to Canada from Ebenfeld, Russia. Gerhard Wiebe had a mother and a sister living in Manitoba, but it seems the request of the Burwalde Mennonite Church for ministerial leadership also played a strong role in his decision to emigrate. In addition to his ministerial work, he seems to have farmed successfully.¹¹

It is clear that there is no real coherence among the migrants of the 1880s. Six families whose religious affiliation is known ended up in four different Mennonite

churches. These families also went to different settlement locations. Throughout the decade, it seems that emigration interest was low among Mennonites in Russia. Barring family reunification concerns, there was no great drive to relocate.

Migration 1890 –1896

The 1890s furnish a very different set of circumstances both in Russia and in Canada. The status of agriculture in Russia was precarious during these years. Yields of cereal grains were generally rising from the 1880s onward. Price trends, however, were downward for all cereals except for a brief upward spike during the Russian famine of 1891.¹²

The fact that wheat prices were slower to fall than other grains, and that Mennonites were more heavily oriented to commercial export production, enabled them to sustain themselves well compared to the Russian peasantry. Mennonite farmers (unlike the peasants) had considerably more land per capita than was needed for bare subsistence.

The greatest agriculture-related factors affecting Mennonite migration were the availability and cost of land. Land ownership was for most Mennonites the key to capital accumulation. If one wished to establish one's children as farmers, one had to own a farm to provide a viable capital base for the necessary expansion of holdings for the next generation.

The reality in Russia generally was that while revenues were stable or in decline on the farms, land prices were increasing at a rapid rate. For someone who was landless, this made it exceedingly hard to acquire capital for a land purchase, especially given the fact that laboring wages were very low. The chief hope was always that the mother colonies would acquire land to begin new settlements.

An alternative strategy was to find a rental farm and thus build a pool of capital. This strategy, however, often entailed a long wait. It would never enable one to achieve the success of a *Vollwirth*, a "full farmer", in the main colonies of Khortitsa (the Old Colony) or Molotschna. But it could enable farmers to make small advancements financially while waiting for better opportunities elsewhere. The communities of Fuerstenland, Ebenfeld, Steinau, Blumenfeld and Hamburg were all situated on rented land. In each of these cases there was considerable out-migration.

A recurring worry in rental settlements was the negotiation of rental contracts. Rents could go up very sharply. In 1892 rent per *dessiatine* in Fuerstenland increased from 2.25 Rubles to 6 Rubles.¹³ When Nepluievka Colony's contract expired in 1890, it seems that it was impossible to negotiate satisfactory terms for two of the colony's villages. According to Paul Langhans these villages were dissolved.¹⁴ Franz Isaak Doerksen suggests that in Fuerstenland there was a recurring pattern among the settlers:

In general, most settlers, as soon as they had some cash, sold their farms and moved onto their own land. But there were always migrations to

America. The first one...began in 1875. Following that one there were...some further migrations, some quite small and others somewhat larger. These recent migrations [that is, 1891 and after] were prompted by increases in land rent. When such major migrations occurred there was a dramatic decrease in land prices and the more impoverished settlers bought [land] at that time. Farm buildings also tended to deteriorate as settlers were not willing to invest too much money.¹⁵

It is due to the nature of the rental colonies that their residents are represented out of all proportion to their demographic significance in Russia among the emigrants of the years 1888 – 1896. This 'revolving door', Doerksen suggests, enabled one to find former Fuerstenlaender throughout the Russian Empire.

There were also numerous people in the Khortitsa Colony who were either landless or owners of only small parcels of land. The *Mennonitische Rundschau* for the early 1890's contains many accounts of migrants from Khortitsa and other colonies who owned their own farms. Yet many of the migrants' letters in the *Rundschau* claimed that Canada was a better country for a "poor man", the term many of the migrants applied to themselves. Bernhard Loewen, for example, claimed that "in Russia I was one of the many who was sorely pressed by poverty."¹⁶ Another person wrote the following: "I ask my brother if there is also land to be had for us. Here we have none because it is very expensive: 150 Rubles per *dessiatine* and even more. There are several families in [Neuendorf] who desire to emigrate but because of great poverty many will not be able to do so."¹⁷ And migrant Gerhard Wiebe wrote very succinctly: "My prospects in Russia were bad. I was a day laborer and in the circumstances as they were there, it was impossible for me to acquire land – rent was expensive and capital I had none, so there remained no option but to come to America."¹⁸ Many reports share this tone.

Cultural concerns, too, were a root cause of the migration. But they clearly were less important than the economic considerations just cited. The virulent anti-German writings of the Russian nationalist A.A. Velitsyn in the late 1880s essentially suggested that Mennonite prosperity was a result of special privilege, that Mennonite religious views were dangerous to Orthodox Russia and finally that in their unassimilated state Mennonites were potential traitors should Germany ever attempt to expand eastward.¹⁹ Glosses of Velitsyn's writings did appear in various Mennonite writings, but there is no clear evidence that any migrants to North America were influenced by these views. Russification in education is mentioned as a concern by only one emigrant correspondent. Historian Adam Giesinger suggests that moves toward overtly Russifying the school system of Germans in Russia began in 1892 when the government placed all schools under the jurisdiction of Russian school inspectors.²⁰ The impact of this development on outward migration also appears weak.

Besides these "push" factors in Russia, there were also "pull" factors in Canada. The Canadian Pacific Railway had been completed in 1885, opening large sections of the prairie region for settlement. Both the federal government and the CPR had an interest in seeing the West settled. Klaas Peters of Gretna, Manitoba, was recruited

as an immigration agent and employed by the CPR.²¹ In 1890 he went on a trip to Russia. He met prospective immigrants in Kherson, Schlachtin, Khortitsa Colony, Nepluievka, Fuerstenland, Puchtin and Molotschna colonies. He lists twenty Mennonites from Puchtin, Fuerstenland, Nieder Khortitsa and Schlachtin as interested in moving. He writes that he told prospective immigrants of the good soils on the Canadian prairie and of the free homesteads. Due to an acute scarcity of money, however, many delayed their departure. Peters ultimately arranged fares for seventeen Mennonite families (and also some non-Mennonite families) who came to Manitoba in 1891.²²

Peters tended to be pessimistic about procuring migrants from Khortitsa and Molotschna. He believed that farming was too successful there at the time to make emigration attractive. He was in error, especially with regard to Khortitsa. The potential for finding settlers among the cottagers in Nieder-Khortitsa or among the landless of villages such as Neuendorf, (where they were willing to help people relocate to America) was high. Thus numerous people came from the Old Colony and a few also from Molotschna, Peters' view notwithstanding. Given his focus, it is not surprising that most of his emigrants came from the *Pachtkolonien*, the rental colonies, of Puchtin, Nepluievka and especially Fuerstenland.

Peters made further trips to Russia in December 1893 and March 1896.²³ He spent most of his time recruiting in Sagradowka and Schlachtin and visiting friends, presumably in the Old Colony. On his 1893 trip he did not succeed in getting beyond Fuerstenland. It is quite clear that Peters had minimal impact on the out-migration at this time. According to my statistics, from the peak of fifty five emigrant families in 1891, the numbers of emigrating families fell to thirty-one, twenty-one and four for the years 1892 through 1894. Clearly there were factors besides immigrant agents at work.

Another source of information that kept Russian Mennonites interested in "America" was the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. It regularly published letters from Mennonites in Canada, the U.S. and Russia. People encouraged their friends to emigrate, told them of available lands in the Canadian Northwest, and informed them about labor and market conditions in Canada. While the impact of these letters may well have been wide, they were usually directed in quite a pointed fashion at friends and relatives. Johann Ens wanted to know if his sister-in-law, widow Neufeldt, was interested in coming to Manitoba. If so, the trip would cost her nothing as he would forward a ticket (*Freikarte*) for her.²⁴ Less direct, but no less weighty are many letters urging people to come live in a place of greater hope. They express freedom or prosperity for workers, or promise land for farmers. Despite an occasional dissident voice (one for example, deriding the land in the Saskatchewan Valley) it is clear that the *Rundschau* kept the possibility of overseas emigration as a viable option in the Russian Mennonite mind.

There were checks on these "pull" factors. One was that Mennonites who arrived in Manitoba in the late 1880s and early 1890s had to organize their own trips (unless recruited by an agent) and raise the funds themselves. Many received help from relatives in Manitoba or elsewhere, but it was done on an individual family

level. In February 1892 letters from a group of Mennonites in Russia asked Klaas Peters to organize financial aid for their emigration to North America. Peters promised to represent their interests before the railway and the government, but counseled the prospective migrants to contact the church *Ältesten*, the leading ministers. The Bergthaler Church leaders suggested the migrants should turn to the railways for credit and promised that the church would guarantee such loans. When the railway land department responded, noting that it required 125 signatures as guarantors, it seems the Bergthaler church decided to abandon the matter.

Peters writes: "There have been sentiments expressed that some families are completely relying on help from here. This can only be for people who have friends here who guarantee assistance. For those who are waiting for help from the church here there is no positive response at this time and only weak hope for the future that any help will materialize".²⁵ He counseled people to arrange their own resources or come over through the agency of friends. He stated that many had come to Canada by this means. Peters has a point that is often confirmed in the immigrant correspondence. The migration was an individual family affair. Only on occasion, as in the case of Neuendorf, Khortitsa Colony, was there aid from Russian-based sources.²⁶ It is not certain whether other places followed this example. Numerous other villages and colonies extended aid to their people resettling in daughter colonies, but it is possible perhaps that emigrants to America were seen in a different light.

Another check on the migration is apparent in the context of the migration wane between 1893 and 1897. The reason for this down turn in migration is not entirely clear, but there are some clues. It certainly *was not* because wheat production was prospering. What does appear to have had substantial weight was internal migration, the move to newly opened daughter settlements in Orenburg and Ufa provinces by Khortitsa and Molotschna residents. Orenburg drew people from all Khortitsa daughter colonies for they were eligible to settle there if they were landless.²⁷ Again, a number of Khortitsa villages gave support to their people who wanted to move to Orenburg. Schoenhorst gave 200 Rubles to every departing family, but demanded a release from all further responsibility for the migrants.²⁸

A third check on the migration during the mid-1890s was that the rental contracts in Fuerstenland had been negotiated and those who could not live with higher prices had already left. The next expiry date for the land rent contract in Fuerstenland was not until 1901. Thus only a few migrants left after 1893 and they certainly did not do so due to any fear about immediate rent increases.

Finally, it is possible that developments in Canada contributed somewhat to the waning of the migration. First of all, it appears that there was some loss of confidence in Peters as an immigration agent already by 1893.²⁹ Even more significant perhaps was the fact that the many settlers who had gone to the Rosthern area in the Canadian Northwest (later Saskatchewan) had had a calamitous year in 1895. Reports are inconsistent, but it appears that for several years agriculture at Rosthern was struggling.³⁰ This did not bode well for Russian Mennonite emigrants since Rosthern and surrounding areas were the primary destinations for new settlers in the early and mid 1890s.

Migration 1897 – 1905

In 1897, after four years of virtually no migration people began moving once again. In 1898 two Mennonite land scouts from Russia, Peter Krahn and Peter Braun, came to the Canadian West to investigate settlement possibilities.³¹ Their report unfortunately is not extant, but it demonstrates at least that Mennonites were looking to North America again.

Once again there were both “push” and “pull” factors at work. In Russia the early settlement at Orenburg had been very hard and numerous settlers left. Cornelius Krahn notes that “poverty, long winters, poor soil, remote markets and theft by the nomadic population . . . made the beginning extremely difficult.”³² In addition to this the settlers endured several bad harvests. Then, too, Fuerstenland was again facing the prospect of renegotiating the colony’s rental contract. In short, the situation was approximately the same as it had been in the early 1890s. Although Molotschna was opening up new settlements in this period, Khortitsa made no significant new land acquisitions between the opening of the Orenburg settlement and the outbreak of War with Japan in 1904. In addition in 1900 a depression that continued until after the 1905 revolution hit Russia. Finally, between 1900 and 1902 “acts of violence and disobedience grew both in intensity and in number.”³³ Incidents of arson and other evidences of peasant rage especially became more common.

In Canada also there were changes that while not critical perhaps are still noteworthy. Immigration was a responsibility of the Department of Agriculture until 1892. The record of the Department in peopling the West had not been stellar. When the Department of the Interior took over responsibility for immigration they could only find 28,000 of the 83,000 immigrants who were supposed to have arrived in 1891.³⁴ A variety of new advertising initiatives were launched in the United States and commissions were increased for booking agents. The greatest change happened, however, when in the wake of the Liberal election victory of 1896, Clifford Sifton was appointed Minister of the Interior. He simplified homestead procedures, forced the railways to choose their lands in Western Canada, and breathed new life into the immigration branch.³⁵ He centralized the department so that he would be in a position to make all final decisions.³⁶ Everything was subordinated to the objectives of getting farmers to come to Western Canada. The objective was to get farmers from European countries where governments were hostile to emigration activity. Sifton’s department made secret agreements with a group of steamship company agents.³⁷

Among the Mennonites these changes resulted in the end of Klaas Peters’ work as an immigration agent. Gerhard Ens, an 1890s immigrant, indicated an interest in immigration work. While it seems he never had an official position, he did act in the capacity of an immigrant recruiter among Mennonites in the USA. He also concerned himself with migration desires of Mennonites from Fuerstenland. In 1902 he attempted to arrange financial support for their migration to Saskatchewan.³⁸ It is not clear whether the venture succeeded.

The Mennonites who came to Canada from 1884 to 1896 either stayed in Manitoba's West Reserve or moved to the Rosthern, Eigenheim and Waldheim areas in the Northwest after 1891. From 1895 many also settled in the Hague-Osler Reserve that had been established just north of the Saskatchewan River. When migration resumed slowly in 1898, the Rosthern area was filling up. By 1902 very little good land was left in the areas that had been reserved for Mennonite settlement. The immigrants of the early 1890s had gone to Rosthern (forty-eight families), Hague-Osler (twenty-eight families), and to non-reserved areas in the Saskatchewan valley (twenty-three families). The immigrants arriving between 1897 and 1905 (twenty-five families) had made the settlement in the Saskatchewan Valley area (Langham, Dalmeny, Borden, and Hepburn) their primary goal. Secondary destinations for the period were Herbert, in present-day south-western Saskatchewan, (twenty-four families) and the West Reserve in Manitoba (nineteen families).

1906 – 1914

The nine years before World War I was a much less significant migration period than the two previous periods. And whereas one could say that economic considerations played by far the largest role in the migration between 1890 and 1903, increasingly socio-political factors played a role in the decision to move. Indeed, economic considerations tended to explain only the waning of the migration.

The period starting in 1906 saw great changes in Russia. The agriculture minister, Stolypin, was determined to expand the large scale settlement of Siberia.³⁹ Providing land for the peasantry was part of his plan for turning the peasants into commercial farmers. Siberia was the brightest hope. Mennonites also acquired several large blocks of land, one near Pavlodor and another near Slavgorod.

As Orenburg did in the late 1890s, Siberia now became an alternative destination for many Mennonites who might otherwise have chosen to come to Canada. Clearly a few people had doubts early on in this internal migration, but they were a small minority. Peter Neuman from Molotschna, for example, wrote that "many people are getting ready to move to Siberia and settle on crown land, but would it not be more advisable to go to Canada than to the wide steppes where there are no workers and no ready markets for one's products?"⁴⁰ The fact is, however, that rarely did a person choose Canada over Siberia in the years between 1906 and 1914. The reasons were perhaps not hard to understand. Russia's agriculture was prospering and there was no need to go abroad for land could be acquired at home.

A second development in Russia was that cereal prices continued recovering and laying the basis for a newly found prosperity.⁴¹ In reading reports from the Mennonite colonies in Russia during the years 1906-08 one gets the sense that things are going well and continuously getting better. Even in Fuerstenland the chronic despair seemed to be breaking. Franz Doerksen wrote that the colony was doing better in 1909 with the high rent of twelve Rubles per *desiatina* (2.7 acres) than earlier with the lower rent of eight Rubles.⁴² The fact is that from 1906 to 1910

Mennonites had the good fortune to have a half decade of good yields and excellent prices. In Molotschna, there was considerable prosperity. In Khortitsa things were rosy enough that *Aeltester* Isaak Dyck suggested to immigration promoter Gerhard Ens that even though he, Dyck, agreed with the idea of emigration for the landless, he did not dare say so in his official capacity. It was too dangerous for him in his leadership position to try to raise the issue.

There were areas in Siberia, Terek and Orenburg where economic woes could still encourage emigration. However, most of the people moving from Terek and Orenburg left for Siberia or other destinations in Russia. Some people who admitted to being penniless were still migrating to a difficult new frontier at Barnaul in Siberia.

The Canadian prairies had once again lost its attractiveness to the great majority of Russian Mennonites. Clearly domestic sources of land gave hope to Mennonites wishing to become landowning farmers. In this context they simply would not travel to overseas destinations.⁴³ Furthermore, a shift in the immigration policy in Canada seemed hostile to farmers from Eastern Europe. Frank Oliver who had succeeded Sifton as Minister of the Interior was far more British in his outlook and was said to have "little sympathy for 'Slavs' of any kind."⁴⁴ He certainly felt immigration ought to be far more restrictive and selective than it had been under Sifton. In short, he wanted people who had a cultural and political affinity to an English speaking world.

The few families who did come to Canada after 1906 were usually not attracted by promises of wealth. Political and social issues began assuming much larger roles in the decision making of emigrants. Already in 1904 Peter D. Penner and his family left for North America at least partly due to political considerations. The Penners' eldest son, Jacob, was quite involved in the underground student movement and Social Democratic politics.⁴⁵ The concern for their son in addition to some economic motivations induced them to leave Russia. In most cases, however, the post 1905 revolutionary environment, especially the peasant discontent expressed in acts of arson, theft and violence weighed on people's minds. The fortunate ones like the Pankratz family in Ufa could say, "we have nothing to complain of in temporal things; we have seen nothing of the discontent in Russia, only what we read in the papers."⁴⁶ Historian John B. Toews has suggested that during the civil unrest of "1905 and 1906 most actual contact [with a restless peasantry] was indirect. The acts of violence usually occurred in another locality or another village".⁴⁷ The fact remains, however, that when one became aware of murder or arson in the next village, it affected one's calculations.

There were also many instances where the violence did come closer than the next village. Harvey Dyck describes eight specific instances of a very direct attack on persons and property. The crimes ranged from arson to murder – the people affected ranged from a wealthy Khortitsa industrialist to an impoverished Terek settler.⁴⁸ A June 1906 letter by Nieder Khortitsa resident Jacob Rempel gives one a greater sense of immediacy. Rempel noted that:

. . . we only have frightening days here in Russia. Many of our Mennonites are beaten to death, burned down, and there is much theft every night. I have seen fifteen – twenty bodies lying on a pile – shot down. Then you can imagine how a person feels. Almost every night the sky is painted red by fire and it is getting worse. We are being threatened from all sides. Our village also has not been saved; we have already experienced much. This week another large *Wirtschaft* was burned to the ground. I witnessed this myself. The fires are set while everyone sleeps . . . at times up to 150 Russian men have come to the village and threatened to destroy everything (alles niederzuschlagen) if we don't give them a certain amount of money.⁴⁹

The March 1913 murder of the family of Jacob F. Toews (including his wife, three sons and two daughters) on their estate near Dawlekanowo in Ufa also seems to have shaken numerous people. It was widely reported.⁵⁰ If the report of the murder was not sufficient to arouse fear, the blow by blow account of the murder, complete with descriptions of how hatchets were used, in the *Friedenstimme* filled in for those lacking imagination. It remains conjecture, but it is possible that the departure of two families for Saskatchewan from Ufa in the summer of 1913 was related to this report.

A final socio-political motivation for the migration stemmed from new restrictions on mission work by Mennonites among the Russians. In at least two cases from 1911⁵¹ and 1913⁵² this was cited as a compelling motive. Official pressure, including hearings, surveillance and imprisonment, was brought to bear against the Mennonites. Everywhere there seems to have been a "sense of growing vulnerability and diminished intimacy. . . ." By 1906 an outside world was forcing itself upon the Russian Mennonite consciousness. When one migrant of the 1890s went back to Russia for a visit he suggested that no longer could feel at home in the Old Country even though he had been away for only 16 years. Especially the idea of having a watchman in every yard made him nervous. Mennonites were not used to this in North America.

Still the mood amongst Mennonites in Russia during this era strongly opposed emigration. The *Friedensstimme*, while not overtly opposed to any migration, seems to have had a covertly anti-America bias during these years. News and reports from North America tended to be filled with a series of astonishing disasters. The list of stories included flooding on the Mississippi River, tornadoes in Oklahoma, rising head taxes on immigrants to the United States, drownings at Niagara Falls, a strike by port workers, a cyclone in Regina, vandalism of telephone and telegraphy lines by workers in West Virginia, and iceberg damages to a ship bound for Montreal.

Adding to the factors that discouraged migration to North America may have been positive descriptions of South American destinations. A significant number of articles in *Friedensstimme* put forth the desirability of Mennonite emigration to Brazil and Argentina. Following almost every issue advocating emigration was an article bearing titles such as "Warnung vor Brasilien".⁵³ Only after the editor was accused of personal bias in January 1913 did the number of articles opposing

migration wane somewhat. Nevertheless stories of emigrants who were separated for months by port authorities due to trachoma and other difficulties still did occur. Of course the *Rundschau* tried to work the virtues of America and publicize the distress in Orenburg and Siberia.

Conclusion

This account was based on the 287 families that I, with a great deal of help from many others, have managed to identify. It is also based on the 144 families that I was able to reconstituted with a good deal of supplementary information. From these numbers and the accounts of the reconstituted families we can offer several conclusions.

First, based on this demographic data and the foregoing research, I would suggest that during the years 1881 to 1914 at least 2000 Mennonites, and perhaps as many as 3000, migrated from Russia to Canada. This is based on the assumption that I was able to identify about half the families. It is also based on the assumption that the average size of the 144 reconstituted families, 5.2 persons, reflects the average size of all families. In any event we can safely place the absolute minimum figure at 1500 persons, that is, 287 families x 5.2 persons. This does not include the Mennonites who came from Prussia.

Second, it is clear that for the people who migrated to Canada between the late 1880s and 1914, economic motives played a large role in their decision. Even when other motives came into play, there were nevertheless significant economic considerations.⁵⁴

Third, after arrival in Canada the great majority of migrants went first to the Manitoba villages of Gretna, Winkler, Rosenfeld, Emerson or Plum Coulee, in short, the communities near or on the West Reserve. True, some did go directly to Rosthern and other places in Saskatchewan. But, overall, it is very clear that the West Reserve played a critical role as a staging ground for late Kanadier colonization. Some immigrants stayed for two months and others for up to eight years as they orientated themselves to Canada. In these initial staging areas they chose to acquaint themselves with Canadian conditions of agriculture and labour. Here they usually had some familial or social contacts; here they could understand the world they were in. Many also chose to remain there permanently.

Eventually, the immigrant settlement tended to follow the prairie frontier. Families arriving in the early 1880s tended to stay in the original areas of settlement in Manitoba. But seventy-eight percent of those who came between 1890 and 1894 ended somewhere in the Saskatchewan Valley area, with thirty eight percent in the Rosthern area, twenty-two percent in the Hague-Osler Reserve and eighteen percent elsewhere in the valley. For emigrants who came in the period from 1897 - 1905 the primary destinations were now the edges of the Saskatchewan Valley, but not the Rosthern or Hague-Osler areas. The second most common area of settlement during these years was the Herbert area in south-western Saskatchewan. The same

general distribution continued for the years from 1906 to 1914. The Saskatchewan Valley remained the most common settlement area, with fewer numbers in Herbert, Saskatchewan, and the West Reserve in Manitoba.

Fourth, kinship ties and gender relations played a crucial role in the migration. The vast majority of people who came during these years had a relative in Canada of whom they were aware and with whom they had some contact. For example, Benjamin Redekop, the Mennonite Brethren preacher who came to Herbert in 1913, had a sister who preceded him in 1891.⁵⁵ He also had two uncles in the Old Colony church who had come to Manitoba in the 1870s. Another example is the Wiens clan at Dalmeny, Saskatchewan. One of the boys in the family settled there in 1901. A sister followed in 1911 and two brothers from Ufa 1913. In the 1920s when another sibling left Russia, where did he go?⁵⁶ To Dalmeny, of course. Despite these examples one must be careful not to ascribe casual status to kinship. Kinship did not make Mennonites emigrate in most cases that I have considered. It affected their decisions about settlement destination, church affiliation, land location and many other things, but not their decision to migrate.

Despite the patriarchal nature of Mennonite society, gender seems to have had a neutral affect on the shape of the migration. In the sibling relationships among the emigrant families that I reconstituted I found that there were slightly fewer female networks among emigrating families than male dominated networks. Because of the patrimonial nature of the families the parents and kinship networks of immigrant women were often unidentifiable. From the number of female networks that I was able to identify I drew the conclusion that women as often as men made the crucial decision as to final settlement location.

Fifth, the kin-oriented nature of the migration also meant that the migration was a chain migration. And because most migrants came as small extended family networks or as individual families, a significant check was placed on the volume of migration, that is, a disincentive to emigrate. In looking over the migrants on a family by family basis, I was struck powerfully by the migration experience as a human drama. The decision to emigrate and leave-taking, disposing of property, the expectation that one would never see many of the friends and relatives of one's youth were merely the first traumatic steps. The journey to the German or Austrian borders involved a number of stops. At the German frontier one might have problems with one's papers and have to answer questions about resources one had along. In many cases people would be quarantined in Berlin or at Hamburg or Bremen. Then there would be the threat of embezzlement along the way. The group of travellers Heinrich Friesen was part of were told by a man upon arrival in Hamburg that the ship their group had tickets for was only sailing in nine days time. If, however, they would pay eight dollars per person, they could be put on a fast steam ship leaving immediately. They decided that this was much cheaper than paying for hotels for nine days and paid. They were then taken to the port to board the ship. One of their party observed that it was precisely the ship they had already paid passage for in Odessa.⁵⁷ Others were forced to surrender significant monies because their papers were not in order. There were a fair number of different cases of

official extortion. Add to this the confusion, the fears in clearing immigration at the docking port, the inevitable difficulties about Trachoma and one is amazed that so many people were willing to undertake the migration. Heinrich Zimmerman in a typical report said that after arrival at Halifax his party was counted by two men who came on board the ship:

Then we had to see a doctor again who declared most of the immigrants to be sick. We also were told this, and that according to the law we couldn't stay . . . At eleven o'clock we were examined again and told the same thing. That evening we were given straw sacks and wool blankets and so we went to rest; some people cried. In the morning we had to see the doctor again. After this examination some people could continue the journey, but we and others had to go to the hospital because of our children's eyes. I had to pay forty dollars immediately for which the service received was very miserable. . . . After ten days we were let go to continue our journey by rail.⁵⁸

Sixth, the settlers' denominational affiliation changed overtime. The church distribution of immigrants who came between 1881 and 1903 was about thirty-three percent General Conference, thirty-two percent Old Colonist, twenty-one percent Mennonite Brethren and twelve percent Sommerfelder Mennonites. For those coming in the later decade, 1904-1914, this pattern changed sharply. The Mennonite Brethren now constituted forty-six percent of the migrants and General Conference people thirty-six percent of migrants, but the Old Colony and Sommerfelder groups acquired less than five percent each of new arrivals. Throughout these years, however, the religious distribution tended to be weighted heavily according to the settlement areas. The Mennonite Brethren people concentrated strongly in Herbert, Borden and Dalmeny, Saskatchewan and in Winkler, Manitoba. Rosthern, Eigenheim and Waldheim tended to be very strong General Conference settlement destinations. Not surprisingly, the Old Colony Church adherents were largely found in the West, in the Hague-Osler and Swift Current Reserves.

Seventh, points of origin of the immigrants changed somewhat overtime. The Fuerstenland Colony was strongly represented in all these waves of migration, although families living on rented land were less likely to be dislodged and become emigrants during the last decade before World War I. The volatility associated with being a resident on a *Pachtkolonie*, a rental colony, eased slightly in the last decade but it never disappeared. The large Khortitsa and Molotschna colonies, on the other hand, contributed significant numbers of emigrants only during the early years. The last decade before World War I was considered to be the good years on these colonies, and to date I have identified no immigrants from Khortitsa or Sagraadowka and only one from Molotschna for the years, 1904-1914. The immigrants who did come during this last decade came from a far-flung assortment of colonies such as Orenburg, Ufa and the Kharkov areas. These were places that were only settled while the previous waves of migration were occurring, but they became the seedbed of a migration wave that was cut off by war in August of 1914.

Eighth, the people who make up this migration are a diverse lot of Mennonites. They range from the most conservative of Old Colony church members who migrated to Mexico in the 1920s, including Rev. John P. Wall, to people like Jacob Penner, the Communist Party member and Winnipeg city alderman for many years. They range from impoverished and marginalized Mennonites, to those who assumed leadership as church *Ältesten* and provincial politicians.⁵⁹ And they include both successful farmers and committed teachers.⁶⁰

Finally, it is the sum of these characteristics that have hidden these migrants from the view of historians. The Mennonite migration between 1881 and 1914 was a relatively small wave, composed of individual families who came as chain migrants. They came quietly, from many points of origin and settling in many points in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. And they were a diverse lot, associating with different denominations and representative of different classes. This very diversity has served to keep these migrants from the centre stage of Mennonite migration history.

Notes

¹ Peter D. Zacharias, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Reinland, MB: Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976), 125-128.

² Heinz Lehmann, *The German Canadians, 1750-1937*, trans., edited and introduced by Gerhard P. Bassler (St. John's, NF: Jespersen Press, 1986), chapters 4-6.

³ John Warkentin "The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba," (Ph. D. Diss., University of Toronto, 1960), 201. See Canada: *Sessional Papers*. 1892. No. 7, Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Appendix 12. P. 105.

⁴ Canada. *Sessional Papers 1893. No. 13*.

⁵ Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, *Canada and its Provinces, Vol VII* (Toronto: Publishers Association of Canada, 1913), 527-533.

⁶ Canada *Sessional Papers 1894*, no. 13, xxxvi.

⁷ See Helmut T. Huebert, *Hierschau: An example of Russian Mennonite Life* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1986), 96.

⁸ See Clarence Hiebert *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Hillsboro, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1974), 405 – 449, and also Fred Richard Belk, *The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia 1880 – 1884* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1974), 177-195.

⁹ Lawrence Klippenstein "Pioneer Portraits of the Past," *Red River Valley Echo*, 20 November 1974, 4; and John Dyck and William Harms, eds., *1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve* (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Historical Society, 1998), 249-250.

¹⁰ Heinrich Rempel, "Hochstadt, P.O. (Gruenfeld)," *Mennonitische Rundschau* [hereafter *MR*] 14 July 1886: 4 and Heinrich Rempel, "Hochstadt, P.O.," *MR*, 16 February 1887. See also Abe Warkentin, *Reflections on our Heritage* (Steinbach, MB: Derksen Printers, 1971), 45.

¹¹ Frank Brown, ed., *Mennonite Brethren Church – Winkler, Manitoba, 1888-1963* (Winkler, MB: Mennonite Brethren Church, 1963), 8. See also Arnie Neufeld "Canada's First Mennonite Brethren Church at Winkler, Manitoba," *Mennonite Historian XIV* (Sept. 1988), 5. See also Peter Abrams, "Reinland, 28 April," *MR* (9 May 1888), 1.

¹² Peter Gatrell *The Tsarist Economy* (London: BT Batsford, 1986), 101-102, 132-135 and I.D. Kovalchenko, "Agrarian Crisis in Russia at the end of the nineteenth Century," *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, Vol 1, 60.

¹³ Heinrich H. Friesen, "Lebensbeschreibung," 1, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives [hereafter MHCA], Winnipeg. See also: Peter Klassen, "Sergejefka," *MR* (11 June 1890).

¹⁴ D.H. Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten* (Steinbach, MB: *Mennonitische Post*, 1984), 92. Paul Langhans "Der heutige Stand der Siedlungst taetigkeit deutscher Mennoniten in Suedrussland." *Petermanns Mitteilungen* 44 (1898), 175.

¹⁵ Franz Isaak Doerksen, untitled manuscript, 45, MHCA. He says "weil so viel auswanderten und auch so viel einwanderten findet man allerwaerts Leute die auf den Fuerstenland gewohnt haben." This manuscript will be published in 2000 in the third volume of the West Reserve Historical Series, edited by Adolf Ens, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

¹⁶ Bernhard Loewen, "Reinland (Gruenfeld)," *MR* (5 Nov. 1890), 1.

¹⁷ Peter Harder, "Neuendorf," *MR* (25 Mar. 1891), 1.

¹⁸ Gerhard Wiebe, "Gretna, 30 Januar," *MR* (11 Feb 1892), 1.

¹⁹ John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1982), 51.

²⁰ Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Krushchev* (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1974), 231. Adolf Ens "Mennonite Education in Russia," in John J. Friesen ed., *Mennonites in Russia: Essays in Honour Of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1989), 82-88.

²¹ Leonard Doell, "Klaas Peters (1855-1932): A Biography" in Klaas Peters, *The Bergthaler Mennonites* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1988), 49-50.

²² Canada, Department of the Interior Immigration Records, Saskatchewan Archives, Volume 16, file 143, film 2515.

²³ Doell, 55-56

²⁴ Jacob D. Giesbrecht, "Plum Coulee," *MR*, 12 March 1890, 1.

²⁵ Klaas Peters, "Gretna, 25. Februar," *MR* (2 March 1892), 1.

²⁶ Dietrich Wiebe, "Reinland," *MR*. (10 Feb. 1892), 1, and Eduard Wiebe "Reinland," *MR* (3 Feb. 1892), 1.

²⁷ A.R., "Die Versorgung der Chortitzer Landlosen mit Land," *MR* (23 Jan. 1894), 2.

²⁸ Peter P. Dyck, *Orenburg and Ural* (Clearbrook, BC: Christian Bookstore, 1951), 12.

²⁹ Abraham Ens, letter, 30 August 1893, courtesy of Edward Enns, Winnipeg, MB.

³⁰ Friesen, "Lebensbeschreibung," 15 and Peter P. Klassen, "Mennonite Beginnings at Rosthern," *Mennonite Life*, 31 (Dec. 1976): 4, 10.

³¹ Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786 - 1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: 1974), 316.

³² Cornelius Krahn, "Orenburg," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV

³³ Gerschenkron, "Agrarian Policies and Industrialization: Russia 1861 - 1917," in H.J. Habakkuk and M. Postan, *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Vol VI (Cambridge: The University Press, 1965), 783-784.

³⁴ Norman Macdonald, *Canada Immigration and Colonization 1841 - 1903* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), 146.

³⁵ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 249.

³⁶ Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921 A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), 55.

- ³⁷ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 249; Brown and Cook, *Canada*, 55-63.
- ³⁸ Adolf Ens, *Subjects or Citizens?, The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870-1925* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 97-98.
- ³⁹ Donald W. Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 153.
- ⁴⁰ Peter Neuman, "Grossweide," *MR* (24 April 1907): 6.
- ⁴¹ Peter Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy, 1850-1917* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1986), 124, 132-135.
- ⁴² Franz and Katharina Doerksen, "Olgafeld," *MR* (22 Dec. 1909), 156.
- ⁴³ Jake Peters, "The Determinants of Mennonite Migration: A Case Study of the Fuerstenland Colony 1889-1914," Unpublished term paper, University of Manitoba, 1987.
- ⁴⁴ Brown & Cook, 64.
- ⁴⁵ Interview Data, Roland Penner, Sept. 1999. See also: Jacob Penner, "A Letter from Winnipeg in 1907," trans., Victor Doerksen, *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 15 (1997):191-196.
- ⁴⁶ Jake & Helena Pankratz, "Ufa" *MR* (17 April 1907): 7.
- ⁴⁷ John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1982), 50.
- ⁴⁸ Harvey L. Dyck, "Midpoint Between Revolutions: The Russian Mennonite World of 1911" *Mennonite Life* 36 (March 1981) no. 1: 15-17. For other incidents see Toews, *Czars*, 50.
- ⁴⁹ Jacob and Katarina Rempel to Jakob Buhr, Gretna, MB, 1 June 1906, Jacob Buhr Collection, MHCA, Vol. 2213.
- ⁵⁰ A. Friesen, "7 Menschen auf bestialische Weis hingeschlachtet," *Friedensstimme* XI (3 April 1913), 5-6. See also James Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 3 (1985), 34, note 85.
- ⁵¹ Esther J. Wiens, et. al., *Our Wiens Heritage* (n.p., 1980), 27-29.
- ⁵² Freda Pillman Redekop., ed., *The Redekopp Book* (Waterloo, ON: BenAnna Tree Publishers, 1984), 6-9.
- ⁵³ "Warnung vor Brasilien," *Friedensstimme* (1 Aug. 1912), 8.
- ⁵⁴ Peters, "The Determinants of Mennonite Migration."
- ⁵⁵ Redekop, *The Redekopp Book*.
- ⁵⁶ Wiens, *Our Wiens Heritage*.
- ⁵⁷ Friesen, "Lebensbeschreibung," 10.
- ⁵⁸ Maria and Heinrich Zimmerman, "Winkler," *MR* (11 Nov. 1903) 5.
- ⁵⁹ Among these immigrants were the following church leaders: *Ältester* Peter A. Toews of the Manitoba Sommerfelder Mennonite Church; *Ältester* Cornelius Epp of the Saskatchewan Bergthaler Church; prominent Old Colony minister, John P. Wall; and many more men who became ministers in Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Churches. One immigrant, Gerhard Ens, became a member of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.
- ⁶⁰ Their impact on the Mennonite private elementary school system is incalculable. In the last generation of the private schools, the late Kanadier people (immigrants between 1880-1914) brought a stronger educational background to their teaching than most Manitoba-born teachers in the system had. They tended to view teaching more as a career than the homegrown teachers. Finally they tended to take the task of teaching very seriously as a calling from God. Heinrich Rempel's statement, "die Kinder liegen mir am Herzen," was typical of many late Kanadier teachers whose letters to the *Rundschau* reported on village education.