

THE IMPACT OF MENNONITE SETTLEMENT ON THE
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF KANSAS

by

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Chapter One

Introduction

Human geography develops within the context of a cultural area. "The unit of observation must therefore be defined as the area over which a coherent way of life dominates."¹ As Zelinsky noted, "among the phenomena forming or reflecting the areal differences in culture with which (geographers) are so intimately concerned, few are as potent or sensitive as religion."² A study of how religion as a cultural phenomenon affects the landscape falls within the sub-field of cultural geography. Homogeneous religious communities have been shown to display unique settlement patterns or to be distinctive cultural areas.³ "...Religious institutions seek out, accentuate, and preserve differences...not only in the land but in the people who occupy it."⁴

Re-creation of religio-cultural areas which existed at some time past or which have undergone subsequent change is historical-cultural geography. A religious group which lends itself to such a study is the Mennonites who settled in Kansas (particularly in central Kansas) during the last three decades of the 19th century. The Mennonites, as a distinctive cultural group, have been the subject of several geographical studies. Sawartzky's book on the Mennonite settlement in Mexico (1971),

Byrum's settlement geography of Paraguay (1973), and DeLisle's study of the unique spatial organization of Mennonite villages in Manitoba (1974), are a few of the many works completed at the professional and graduate levels.

Heatwole (1974) lists three bases for choosing the Mennonites as an appropriate denomination for a geographical study. The Mennonites have:

1. An ideology which would likely give rise to a cultural area,
2. An appropriate body of theoretical literature available for study, and
3. A settlement pattern suitable for field observation.⁵

Elements of traditional Mennonite ideology which have historically combined to produce a distinctive cultural area are the belief that the members within the various sects function as a body, the separation from and non-conformity with the world, the choice of a rural, agricultural lifestyle and non-participation in military conflict. In North America there are distinctive clusters of Mennonite settlement such as those in Rockingham County, Virginia; Lancaster County, Pennsylvania ; Manitoba, Canada; and south-central Kansas. It is this last area that we have selected for field observation.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and explain the impact that European Mennonite settlement has had upon the cultural landscape of Kansas, with particular emphasis on Butler, Harvey, Marion, McPherson and Reno counties in the initial period of settlement, 1873-1885, and to identify those impacts which have persisted to the present. The cultural landscape includes arrangement of settlement, farm size and type, field patterns, housing types, and other aspects of the built environment such as schools and churches.

The proposed project is an historical-cultural geography: historical, because of the reconstruction of the past geography of the study area and the description of geographical change over time: cultural, because of the attempt to describe the "forms superimposed on the physical landscape by the activities of man."⁶ Also, the study area is recognizable as a culture area- "a community of people who hold numerous features of belief, behavior and overall way of life in common, including ...social institutions."⁷ That the Mennonites formed such a community is important in explaining their impact on the cultural landscape.

"Their creed...sets them apart from the dominant society. Their organization is congregational; the community determines the spiritual order and...what is approved in material things and activities."⁸

Method of Approach

As a method of approach, Trindell's research design for historical geography will be followed.⁹ A researcher in historical geography begins with historical facts including both primary and secondary written materials and physical evidence remaining on the landscape. For this project primary sources will include relevant material from the Mennonite library and Archives (North Newton, Kansas), the Kansas State Historical Society, original land plats and early (1870-1885) agricultural records for the study area. Field work will be important in the identification of relics on the landscape and impacts which have persisted.

It is postulated that the European Mennonites had a unique influence upon the cultural landscape of Kansas. Settlement and field patterns, crop choices, housing types and other elements of the built environment were transplanted from Europe and were directly attributable to the Mennonite religious culture.

Footnotes

- ¹ Carl O. Sauer, "Foreword to Historical Geography." Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. XXXI, March 1941 p. 11.
- ² Wilbur Zelinsky, "An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States: Patterns of Church Membership in 1952. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. LI, June 1961, p. 139.
- ³ Donald Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West 1847-1964." Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. LXV, June 1965, pp 191-220.
- ⁴ Zelinsky, p. 166.
- ⁵ Charles O. Heatwole, "Religion in the Creation and Preservation of a Sectarian Culture Area: A Mennonite Example." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation Michigan State University, 1974, p. 11.
- ⁶ Carl O. Sauer, "Recent Development in Cultural Geography." (1927) Quoted in: Geography Regions and Concepts by DeBlij and Muller , Wiley and Sons , 1985 p. 7.
- ⁷ Terry Jordan, The European Culture Area; A Systematic Geography. New York: Harper and Row, 1973, p.6.
- ⁸ Carl O. Sauer, "Foreword," to They Sought A Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico by Harry Sawartzky. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- ⁹ Roger Trindell, "The Geographer, the Archives and American Colonial History." The Professional Geographer, Vol. II, March 1968, pp 99-102.

Chapter Two

Mennonite Occupance in an Old World Setting

Origins of Mennonite Church

Four large church groups emerged from the Protestant Reformation of 1517, forming a political continuum from Right to Left. The Catholics, as the state-sanctioned official Church, remained the conservative Right; the Lutherans, retaining the Catholic ceremonialism and ritualism, were Right Center; the followers of the Reformed Church, more liberal than the Lutherans but also advocating the union of church and state, were Left Center; and the Anabaptists, "preaching a voluntary, free, independent religious organization separated from the state" occupied the extreme Left of the day.¹

The Anabaptists, from whom the Mennonite branch developed, began as an independent religious body in Zurich, Switzerland in the 1520's. After being banned there on March 7, 1526, Anabaptism spread to the Swiss Confederation, Austria, Bavaria, the Palatinate and the Netherlands. What threatened sixteenth century political leaders the most was the new group's belief in separation of church and state. "With prayer and obedience" it was thought that all obligation to the

government ceased.² In the Anabaptist view there were two kingdoms: the Evil Kingdom which was composed of the State and its churches and the Kingdom of Christ which was a community of believers. The Kingdom of Christ had no need for the state, and "Christians who chose to accept the discipline of Christ in the new kingdom must remove the sword, the taking of oaths, and the holding of political office."³ Indeed, the two beliefs which have had the greatest influence over Anabaptist tradition are non-swearing of oaths and non-participation in war. Although the Old Testament condemned false oaths, Jesus admonished His followers to take no oaths at all. As Anabaptists take the word of the Bible literally, no oaths are sworn. Non-participation in war is one of the most sacred beliefs held by Anabaptists of the past and present. Throughout the last four hundred years they have voluntarily relocated to avoid participation in war or war-support activities. This idea is also based upon a New Testament teaching:

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto God's wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine saith the Lord."⁴

In Holland an Anabaptist congregation was founded by Obbe Phillips in 1535. Phillips baptized a former Catholic priest, Menno Simons, into the group in 1536.

Subsequently, Simons organized more congregations in Holland and his native Friesland. The peaceful Anabaptists adopted the name Mennists (later Mennonites) in honor of this new leader.⁵

Dutch Mennonites Relocate in Prussia

Following Menno Simons' death, the distribution of the Mennonite population of Holland followed the northern coast, concentrated in the provinces of Flanders, Zeeland, Friesland and Groningen. This paper will focus on the movements of the Flemish and Friesians, who were the ancestors of the Mennonite groups who later settled in Kansas.⁶

In the late sixteenth century, as religious persecution reached its zenith in Holland, the Flemish and Friesian Mennonites relocated to the city of Danzig (Gdansk, Poland today) on the Vistula delta in Prussia. Here the land reclamation technology developed by the Mennonites in Holland was sought by Prussian noblemen.⁷ In 1562 two noblemen sent the Dutch Mennonites a special invitation to settle upon their wastelands.⁸ As in future invitations, religious toleration and agreeable landholding terms were offered as inducements. Eventually, Mennonite settlements spread along the successfully reclaimed lands between

the Vistula and Nogat deltas. It may be assumed that each family was large because in 1608 the Bishop of Culm "complained that the whole delta was overrun by Mennonites."⁹

Migration to Russia

By 1785 Prussian Mennonites owned more than 300,000 acres of land.¹⁰ The large, compact settlements proved problematic for both civil and religious authorities. Standing on the Anabaptist doctrines of non-resistance and separation of church and state, the Mennonites refused to support Frederick the Great's agenda of militarization or to contribute to the coffers of the state-backed Lutheran church. Furthermore, granting military exemptions to the Mennonites along the Vistula would set a dangerous precedent during a time when military service had grown "more unpopular with the masses."¹¹ Frederick did, however, grant the substitution of an annual payment of support to the military academy at Culm in lieu of actual military service.¹²

Conditions for the Mennonites deteriorated with the accession of Frederick William II. The previously mentioned military exemptions continued in force but new land laws were adopted. Mennonites were no longer

allowed to acquire new property, and prospective settlers were screened for adequate financial resources.¹³ These new conditions "created a...land shortage and a growing landless class with upward pressure on land values and downward pressure on wages."¹⁴

With no means of providing land for "their young people" and "fearful of their future" prospects in Prussia, the Mennonites sought a new settlement area for their colonists.¹⁵ As early as 1762 Catherine II of Russia had issued invitations to the Mennonite congregations of Danzig to settle newly acquired territory in South Russia. Like Prussian officials before her, Catherine sought the Mennonites for their agricultural expertise, and she offered generous religious and economic incentives to the prospective colonists, including: "free lands; free transportation...; tax exemption for a limited time; exemption from military duty...; religious toleration; and liberty in establishing...educational and political institutions as best suited their needs."¹⁶

These inducements sparked excitement in the increasingly hard pressed Prussian Mennonites, but the government of Prussia was less enthusiastic. Frederick William II did not wish to lose such a body of

prosperous farmers. At first, passports were denied to all but the very poorest migrants. Therefore, the poorest classes were among the first settlers to go to Russia.

Development of Mennonite Colonies in Russia

The first settlement of Dutch-Prussian Mennonites in South Russia occurred along the banks of the Chortitz River in 1789. This settlement, known as the Old Colony or Chortitza, contained four-hundred sixty-three families of the lower economic classes who were among the first granted permission to leave Prussia.

In spite of the ability that the Mennonites had acquired as farmers, adverse conditions and pests combined to cause great difficulty in the establishment of farms in Russia.

"Continental climate...produced long periods of hot and dry weather in summer and cold spells in the winter...Average precipitation was 11 inches. Droughts were common...and there were frequent locust plagues and gophers."¹⁷

Crops were extremely poor in the Chortitza colony for the first fifteen years.

Following subsequent religious and political assurances issued by Catherine's successors, Paul I and

Alexander I, three hundred additional Mennonite families entered Russia in 1803. These people eventually settled in the Tauride province on the Molotschnaya (Milk) River, one hundred miles south of the Old Colony. By 1835 when migration to this colony, referred to as Molotschna, ended, a total of 1,200 families consisting of 6,000 individuals had established sixty villages.¹⁸ These people achieved a higher degree of economic success almost immediately, having learned from the mistakes made by those of the Chortitza Colony.

Land Ownership and Distribution

The Russian government decided that Mennonite lands would be held under the hereditary household tenure system. Under this system the title to the land was held by the colony as a whole with the resident families granted hereditary usage only. Because Mennonite communities were historically congregational in outlook, functioning as a body of believers, the hereditary tenure system met no resistance. It was compatible with the closed, village system which had evolved over three hundred years of religious persecution. To the Mennonites it seemed only natural for village decisions to be made by a group of elders. However, problems arose with the hereditary tenure system when the allotted

parcels could not be subdivided among heirs and when no provisions were made for future landless in the colonies.¹⁹ Mennonite families were typically large; a fact which made additional parcels of land mandatory at some point in the future, certainly within two generations.

Lack of land became a growing concern. By 1841 in the Molotschna Colony only 1,033 families out of 2,733 were land holders.²⁰ By 1860 about half of the families in the seventeen villages of the Old Colony and two-thirds of those in the sixty villages of Molotschna were landless cottagers with or without ownership of their houses. Since land ownership was the prerequisite for voting, the landless had no voice in village council decisions. Additionally, those Mennonites who wished to move out to better their economic situation could not easily do so. "Permission to leave the colony for any length of time was granted only if the persons involved were willing and able to pay (their share of the village) taxes in advance for a number of years."²¹ This was a hardship indeed for the landless who had no means of support.

Agricultural developments in the first half of the nineteenth century added to the land shortages

experienced by new generations of Mennonite farmers. Sheep raising, which had been the focus of economic activity earlier in the century, gave way to grain production in the late 1830s . Two factors led to this change: competition from Australia forced domestic wool prices down, and an increased demand for wheat on the domestic and foreign markets made wheat production more profitable. After 1860, factors such as improved internal transportation links and development of ports near Mennonite villages combined to place even more emphasis on wheat production.

As the Mennonites mastered the semi-arid agricultural conditions of South Russia, even more acreage was devoted to grain production. In 1860 the land allotment per family in both colonies was one hundred-seventy five acres per person, thirty-eight percent of which were planted to wheat. By 1881 the wheat acreage had increased to sixty-three percent and to seventy five percent in the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies, respectively. As wheat became more profitable, Mennonite farmers sought out even more land on which to plant additional crops. Only the most wealthy, however, could afford to rent the required amount. Increased wheat culture, which was land intensive, "exacerbated...the conflict between the land owners and the landless."²²

The land problem reached a climax in 1862 when fifty-thousand Nogai tribesmen who lived near the Mennonite colonies in South Russia left for Turkey. Instead of easing the Mennonite land shortage, however, the Russian government brought in 10,000 Bulgarians and Russian peasants to settle the vacant land. Finally, in 1866 the government issued a new land policy which made possible the amicable resettlement of the Mennonite landless into daughter colonies. Among the reforms of the new land policy were the enfranchisement of the landless and the division of the original full farm allotments into half-farms of eighty-six acres and quarter-farms of forty-three acres. Each new settlement had to make provision for the future landless to avoid the problems experienced by the two mother colonies.²³ Prior to the Mennonite movement to North America, which began in 1873, the Old Colony (Chortitza) had twelve daughter colonies and Molotschna had six.²⁴

The land question having been resolved in the mid-1860's, new challenges faced the Mennonites in South Russia. The privileged status previously guaranteed by Tsarina Catherine II and Tsars Paul and Alexander I were threatened by the reforms of Alexander II. With growing militant nationalism and the presence

of numerous groups of Germans within his borders, Alexander II began a program of Russification. Among his proposed reforms were universal military conscription and the mandatory usage of the Russian language in elementary schools. Although the majority of the Mennonites were Dutch in origin, German was spoken in church services and in the classroom. The Mennonites were proud of their German culture.

"They made a greater effort to maintain their German culture than other Volksdeutschen colonists because of the sense in which they interpreted the Biblical injunction to be separate from the world. The German language served as a barrier protecting them from assimilation into the surrounding Ukrainian culture, which they regarded as inferior..."²⁵

Therefore, removal of the German language had strong social implications. The conscription issue caused the greatest difficulty, however, for the scripturally based Mennonites. Participation in war or war-support activities was banned by scripture, and for the most conservative this became a major issue in the forthcoming migration effort. Less important but nevertheless significant was the fact that the Mennonite villages, heretofore governed by village elders, were henceforth to be considered Russian volosts with Russian governance. Almost immediately the Mennonites made plans to escape the infringement upon their chosen lifestyle by finding a new homeland. The search effort

undertaken eventually led the majority of those who decided to leave Russia to settle in Kansas . This will be the topic of the next chapter.

Footnotes

¹ C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites. 3rd. ed., revised and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn. Mennonite Publication Office: Newton, 1950 pp. 2-3.

² Ibid., p. 23.

³ James Juhnke, People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites. Faith and Life Press: Newton 1975, p. 10.

⁴ Romans 12:17.

⁵ Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations in the United States. New 6th ed. Nashville : Abingdon Press 1975, p.107.

⁶ Sophie Schmidt, "Alexanderwohl in the Making," Unpublished Paper, Bethel College, Newton 1943, p. 5.

⁷ John A Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1975, p. 13.

⁸ Smith, p. 263.

⁹ Ibid., p. 264.

¹⁰ Maurice Schwanke, "Origins and Migrations of the Kansas Mennonites," Unpublished Cultural Geography Paper, Kansas State University, 1975, p. 9.

¹¹ Smith, p.282.

¹² Ibid., p. 282-3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁶ Albert Koop, "Some Economic Aspects of the Mennonite Migration with Special Emphasis on the 1870's Migration from Russia to North America," Mennonite Quarterly Review LV (1981) p. 147.

- 17 David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia- A Sketch in Its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919," Mennonite Quarterly Review, XLVIII (1974) p. 10.
- 18 Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 14, p. 381.
- 19 Rempel, p. 7.
- 20 Ibid., p. 25.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
- 23 Ibid., p. 26-27.
- 24 Krahn, "Russia," p. 386-87.
- 25 David Haury, "German-Russian Immigrants and Kansas Politics: A Comparison of the Catholic and Mennonite Immigration to Kansas and Their Politics," Unpublished Paper Bethel College (1972) p. 7.

Chapter Three

Relocation to Kansas

Search for a New Homeland

Mennonite colonists considered the withdrawal of privileges granted by Russian authorities as a violation of the law.¹ What concerned their leaders most was the loss of exemption from military service. Because non-participation in warfare was (and is) a basic tenet of the Mennonite faith, military service was unthinkable. A delegation was chosen from the various congregations to seek a personal audience with the Tsar himself to discuss the service issue.² However, the delegation which went to Yalta in January of 1873 was turned away by Tsarevich Alexander and it never spoke directly to him.³ Instead, a representative of the Tsar, General-Adjutant von Todtleben, met with the Mennonites at a church assembly in the Chortitza Colony. To dissuade them from leaving South Russia von Todtleben offered substitution work in hospitals, on railways, as municipal firemen or in the state forestry service. To those whose conscience would not permit them to participate in alternative service remained the "complete freedom to emigrate during the next six years."⁴ It may be assumed that the alternatives

proposed by von Todtleben met with the approval of most of those present at the meeting. When a vote was taken on whether to migrate or to remain, only thirty-two voted for the former while the vast majority, five hundred sixty, voted to remain.⁵ This decision was not irreversible, however; only four months later there were many who had caught emigration fever."⁶

In case relocation became the only recourse to some type of mandatory government service, the various Mennonite congregations of Russia and adjacent areas of eastern Europe chose a delegation of twelve men to tour North America where they separated and never formed a united delegation. Some of the areas through which they travelled were southern Manitoba--especially near Winnipeg--in Canada and Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Dakota territory, Nebraska and Kansas in the United States. The twelve met only once in Fargo, North Dakota territory.⁷

These twelve Mennonites sought large tracts of land with climatic and physical conditions similar to their agricultural land in Russia and which could be purchased at a moderate price. They searched North America for a location on which to establish closed Mennonite settlements with self-governance and exemption

from any military obligations. One delegate, Paul Tschetter, recorded his thoughts on the agricultural prospects of the lands through which he travelled.

Winnipeg- June 9, 1873- "Shipping of lumber cost would be too great..."

Dakotas- June 12, 1873- "Barley seeded April 24, and cut June 28. Wheat seeded April 20 and cut July 20..."

Dakotas-June 28, 1873- "Wheat and corn crop looking good...but the region as a whole did not appeal to me, especially for village life as we have it in Russia, because there is too much water on the bottom land."

Sioux City- July 6, 1873- "The country is excellently suited for wheat, oats and corn."⁸

From Tschetter's diary it is clear that the Mennonites' chief aim was to transplant their village life in its entirety from Russia to the landscape of the resettlement area.

While the search of North America continued, a series of informational letters passed between American Mennonites and their Russian counterparts. Through the efforts of John Funk of Elkhart, Indiana, Americans had prepared for the coming of the Russian delegation. Funk was the publisher of Herald der Wahreit and the English version, The Herald of Truth. Each monthly edition of the newspaper offered advice for immigrants and a regular series of letters entitled "From Kansas" by American Mennonites who had recently homesteaded in Marion, Harvey, and McPherson counties. As early as

March, 1872, American Mennonites suggested Kansas as a possible location for their Russian brethren. The Kansas Mennonites took an active part in the search for suitable land. A contemporary Herald of Truth article stated:

"... would it not be good for the church here in America, ... to find a tract ... where they might settle and be enabled to secure good and cheap homes for themselves and their families. Would it not be a good idea to try and get them to join in the Kansas Colony. "9

Also at this time Russian Mennonites, temporarily residing in the United States, corresponded with their families back home. One such person was Bernhard Warkentin, Jr., who arrived in Summerfield, Illinois, in 1872. Learning of the Mennonite situation in Russia, agents from various railroads invited Warkentin, his American host Christian Krehbiel, and the previously mentioned Mr. Funk to inspect open lands along their rights-of-way. Warkentin, who ventured from Manitoba to Texas, conveyed his findings in letters to his close friend, David Goertz who remained in South Russia. Canada did not impress Warkentin favorably because the climate was too harsh.¹⁰ However, his letters were positive enough on the prospects of the central plains that Goertz left Russia in 1874.

Shortly after his arrival in the United States, Goertz published a German language booklet describing the Arkansas River Valley in Kansas and including the text of an amendment to the militia law passed by the state legislature in 1874 which exempted conscientious objectors from military service. This booklet entitled Die Mennoniten Niederlassung auf den Landerwein der Atchison, Topeka und Santa Fe Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft in Harvey and Marion County, Kansas, probably reached the Mennonites en route, yet it still was a valuable inducement for settlement in this area.¹¹ This booklet not only advertised the large tracts of land available for purchase from the Santa Fe Railroad but also published, in German, Kansas' new militia law.

David Goertz's pamphlet advertised the fact that the Santa Fe had for sale three million acres of prime agricultural land situated along the right-of-way in central Kansas.¹² The Santa Fe (and other developing railroads) advertised extensively to attract settlers. Chosen as immigrant agent was C.B. Schmidt, a newly arrived German. Schmidt established contacts with German ethnic groups in the United States and learned of the plight of the Russian Mennonites. Schmidt even went to the Mennonite colonies in South Russia to stimulate interest in his company. To the landless of the

Chortitza and Molotschna colonies Schmidt presented a solution to their problem. Offering land from \$1.50 to \$8.00 per acre plus package travel deals from Russia to Kansas, he persuaded over five-thousand Mennonites to settle on Santa Fe lands.¹³ The benefits were mutual. For the financially plagued Santa Fe the business generated by the Mennonite immigration may have staved off bankruptcy. Between February 15, 1873, and May 31, 1877, the Russian Mennonites paid \$332,509.72 to the Santa Fe.¹⁴

Members of the Delegation of Twelve had also visited Kansas lands in the company of railroad officials. Delegates Buller and Ewert made such a trip in the summer of 1873, accompanied by Bernhard Warkentin. The entire delegation returned to Russia with a favorable report on the settlement possibilities in North America but disagreed over specific locations.¹⁵ The more conservative Chortitza representatives recommended Canada because of the promise of complete military freedom and self-determination in matters of education. The more moderate members from the Molotschna colony recommended the United States despite the fact that President Grant and the Congress offered no special religious guarantees or military exemptions.¹⁶ The decision to leave Russia, in general, followed along

conservative to liberal religious lines.

- 1-The most liberal or progressive, comprising two-thirds of the Mennonite population, remained in Russia.
- 2-A moderately conservative group, mostly from the Molotschna colony, settled in Kansas and other states.
- 3-The most conservative, primarily from Chortitza, migrated to Manitoba, Canada because of the complete military exemption given by the government.¹⁷

In the end the majority of those who left Russia decided to come to the United States, specifically to Kansas. "Of the approximately eighteen thousand Mennonites that came to North America in 1873-74, about ten thousand came to the United States, of whom possibly five thousand located in Kansas.¹⁸ There were many factors influencing the migrants in favor of Kansas.

- 1-Kansas had enacted a military exemption for conscientious objectors;
- 2-The Santa Fe was offering to transport to Kansas seventeen loads of freight (and Mennonite passengers) free of charge for three months.¹⁹
- 3-Information favorable to Kansas had reached the Russian Mennonites in letters from David Goertz and Bernhard Warkentin and in pamphlets, published in the German language by the Santa Fe.
- 4-The physical landscape of Kansas was similar to the Ukraine from which the Mennonites originated. "The weather, the crops and the general conditions were very similar to those of the Molotschna settlement. Winter wheat . . . could be expected to grow here . . . and the water table could be easily reached."²⁰

Additionally, the remote location of the chosen Santa Fe lands meant that the Mennonites could establish their new settlement with a minimum of interference from

outsiders.

European Mennonite Settlements in Kansas

Many European Mennonite groups settled in Kansas. The first purchase of land in Kansas by Russian Mennonites was that made by Peter and Jacob Funk in 1873. Upon their arrival these two families had temporarily resided in Summerfield, Illinois. After learning of the Funk brothers' desire to find permanent homes in the United States, A.E. Touselin of the Santa Fe railroad approached a member of the Summerfield Mennonite congregation, Christian Krehbiel, to persuade them to make an inspection trip to Kansas. This was accomplished in 1873. That same year, after surveying lands in central Kansas from Florence to Newton, the Funk brothers, bought two sections of land near Marion Center for \$2.50 per acre.²¹ This transaction set a precedent for future arrivals. Krehbiel observed, "With this purchase the die was cast for Kansas."²²

Single families came from Russia in the fall of 1873. Most waited for a time in Summerfield, Illinois, at the homes of American Mennonites. The John Rempel family however, proceeded directly to Council Grove, Kansas, and acquired five-thousand acres of land. Others, arriving in 1873, eventually settled in Marion County

and were influential in persuading still others to join them.²³ Nevertheless, the bulk of immigrants arrived in 1874, travelling as congregational bodies.

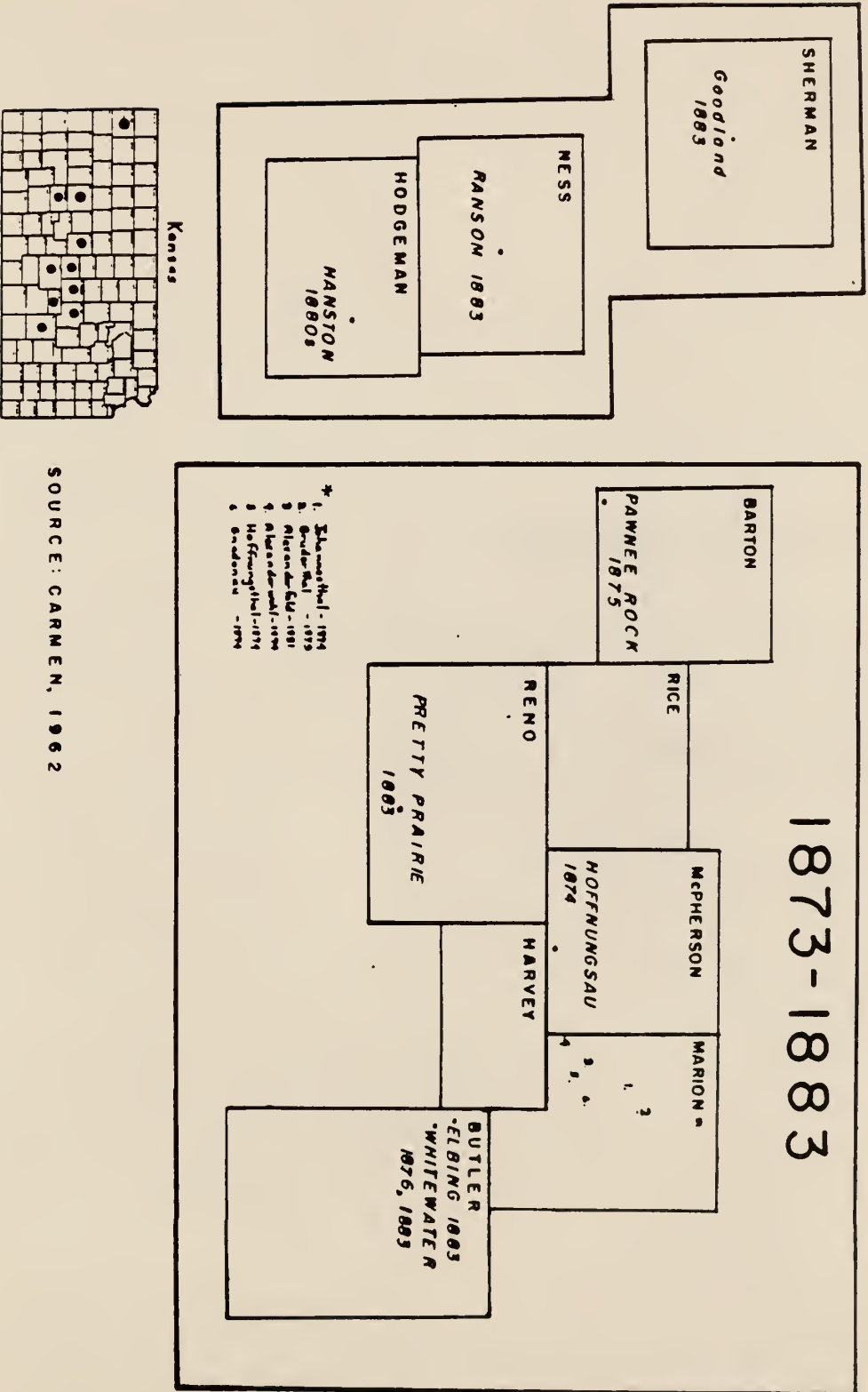
The first large group of Prussian Mennonites entered Peabody on May 16, 1874. These people, who travelled in groups ranging from a few families to entire congregations, were wealthy, well educated and conservative. Their settlement, north of present day Hillsboro was large enough eventually to be divided into the Johannestal and the Bruderthal congregations. However, the first church services were held one day after arrival in Kansas, May 17, 1874, in the existing public school house north of Canada, Kansas. ²⁴

A second group of Prussians came to Kansas in July, 1876. Initially this group located near present day Whitewater and Elbing in Butler county, but the settlement "eventually extended from south of Peabody to the eastern edge of Newton." ²⁵ (Figure 1) The name of the city of Elbing, founded in 1887, reflects the cultural origins of these Mennonites from Elbing, West Prussia (currently Poland).²⁶

The next large group, the Krimmer (Crimean) Mennonite Brethren, arrived in Marion County in 1874. Their unique settlements at Gnadenau, Hoffnungsthal and Alexanderfeld

MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS

Figure 1



SOURCE: CARMEN, 1962

will be more fully discussed below.(Figure 1.)

Following the Krimmer group came the large Alexanderwohl congregation. This group was unique in that almost the entire congregation of the Alexanderwohl Church in Russia relocated to Kansas. Because of the numbers of people involved , the group divided itself in half for the journey and never reunited. The Alexanderwohlers, led by Jacob Buller, purchased land from the Santa Fe fifteen miles north of Newton. They arranged themselves into several small villages according to the method used in Russia. These ten villages will also be more fully discussed below. The second group of Alexanderwohlers, led by Dietrich Gaeddert, located on thirty-five sections east of present day Buhler. Their settlement, known as Hoffnungsau, arose north-west of an American Mennonite community at Halstead.(Figure 1)

A large group of Polish Russian Mennonites left Europe in late 1874 and early 1875. Movement in winter was difficult at best, and for this group of financially pressed Mennonites many hardships existed. American Mennonites in Pennsylvania made preparations for these travellers to spend the winter in the east.²⁷ However, most of the families proceeded to Kansas without either

money or provisions. Christian Krehbiel recalls,

"This huge company of immigrants, consisting of one-hundred families with many children, was dumped by the Santa Fe in Florence, Kansas, with only a store building for shelter in middle of January...The only indoor quarters of this multitude was a store about 80 by 30 . It was a veritable pesthole...Standing about on either side of a center aisle lay sick and exhausted men, women, and children on straw stacks midst cooking and eating utensils . No fresh air!..."²⁸

Similarly difficult conditions were met by the families of this group who were housed in boxcars in Newton and Pawnee Rock. The unique settlements developed by this last group of Polish-Russian Mennonites will be discussed in the next chapter.

Swiss Mennonites were also among those whose consciences led them to resettle in Kansas. These Swiss were divided into two contingents. First came those who had most recently lived in western Russia. A few of these families joined acquaintances in South Dakota but most located near Moundridge, Kansas. In time those who originally settled in the north moved to Pretty Prairie in Reno County.²⁹ (Figure 1)

The second group of Swiss Mennonites came directly from Switzerland. In 1874, Switzerland enacted a law

requiring all males to participate in military service.³⁰ Here, as in Russia, there were religious objections to the new law. Subsequently, ten families from Bern left for Kansas in 1883 and located near Whitewater. Other Swiss Mennonites arrived in Kansas via Iowa and Missouri. These people settled in Ness County near Ransom and in Sherman County near Goodland. (Figure 1). It may be assumed that a large number of Mennonites settled near Ransom because the area came to be popularly designated as "Dutch Flats"³¹

Scattered small groups of Mennonites continued to arrive early in the 1880s. One of these had fled from Galicia to escape service in the Austrian Imperial Army. "Fifty-three families settled near Butterfield, Minnesota, and twenty-three migrated to Kansas."³² Unlike the majority, some of these Mennonites homesteaded northeast of Hanston (formerly Marena) in Hodgeman County rather than purchasing railroad lands. Another party of Austrian subjects from Galicia arrived in 1883, settling at either Hanston or at Arlington in Reno County. The Galician congregation remained small.³³

The third and last group of European Mennonites to enter Kansas came originally from Prussia. These people had fled from the militarization in Russia to the

sparsely populated provinces in central Asia. After many years of hardships, they eventually decided to join their brethren in Kansas.³⁴

In the early 1890's single families continued to migrate from Central Asia. The last of these arrived in Inman, Kansas in 1893.³⁵ Other small groups of refugees from the Bolshevik Revolution sought shelter in Kansas in the 1920's.³⁶

Summary and Conclusions

In summary, about eighteen thousand European Mennonites migrated to North America in the 1870's. Five thousand of them chose Kansas as a resettlement area because of military exemptions given to conscientious objectors, similarity to the physical landscape of their home land, and the vast amount of unoccupied land along the Santa Fe right-of-way. Favorable reports sent by American Mennonites, Russian Mennonites temporarily in the United States, and the Delegation of Twelve successfully advertised the prospects of Kansas.

In some cases large groups of Mennonites left Europe travelling as congregational bodies. This was the case with both the Alexanderwohlers and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren of south Russia. Moving as congregational units

under the leadership of an elder, each Mennonite sect reestablished its' own independently functioning church upon settlement in Kansas. Although they were philosophically connected to all other Mennonites, each group chose its own elder and was not formally linked to a worldwide church governing body. This was in contrast to another large group, the German Catholics of the Volga region, who chose to leave Russia, beginning in 1875. The Catholics were also opposed to the militarization and Russification efforts of Tsar Alexander II. However, the main reason the Volga Catholics chose to leave was economic pressures stemming from land shortage.³⁷ Furthermore, the Catholics came to Kansas in small family groups and subsequently established new parishes here. They remained connected with the hierarchy of the world wide Catholic Church. The concept of the "Church" and the location of the building itself varied between the two groups. These contrasting ideas will be explored in the next chapter which will focus on elements of the built environment of the Mennonite immigrants.

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⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

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16 C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites. 3rd. ed., revised and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn, Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1950, p. 448-449.

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21 Christian Krehbiel, Christian Krehbiel: Prairie Pioneer Translated by Elva Krehbiel Leisy and Edward Krehbiel. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1961, p. 75, 76.

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24 David Haury, Prairie People :The History of the Western District Conference. Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981, p. 29, 30.

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Chapter Four

Mennonite Occupance on the Landscape of Kansas

Introduction

Mennonite migrations throughout Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave rise to unique settlement types. These settlements were later transferred to Manitoba, Mexico, Paraguay and briefly, to Marion and Barton counties in Kansas.

Street villages known as Hollanderdorfer or Hollanderein, developed by Dutch Mennonite refugees along the Vistula River in the sixteenth century, became the prototype of Mennonite villages later founded in Prussia and Russia. These villages were symmetrical and orderly with houses arranged in a straight line at regular intervals, usually on one side of the street. Different environmental and climatic conditions in the Ukraine caused slight modifications o the Prussian village pattern. No longer were there large swamplands to be drained but, instead, large fields upon which to develop crops. The need for summer fallow in the semi-arid climate of South Russia "made it necessary at times to adhere to an agreed upon communal pattern of crop rotation."¹ Additionally, the scarcity of land made wise use and planning mandatory for maximum return of

resources.

In the 1830's in Molotschna and Chortitza rigid rules for the layout of Mennonite villages were developed, specific to the point of defining the "exact location of each building, the planting of shade trees and orchards in the yards... and the location of the school."² By the time of the migration in the 1870's this method of village arrangement had been in use for forty years. The most conservative Russian Mennonites transplanted the modified Hollanderdorfer system intact to Manitoba.

Three groups from south Russia , who relocated to Kansas in 1874, also briefly established this type of village system. These were the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren who founded the villages of Gnadenau and Hoffnungsthal near present day Hillsboro; the Kleine Gemeinde (a minority sect related to the Krimmer Brethren) who founded a small village named Alexanderfeld; and the Alexanderwohl congregation which settled in several small villages north of Newton.³ A smaller group from Russian Poland established a street village in Barton County at Pawnee Rock .

These settlements had a great impact upon the cultural landscape of central Kansas. Due to their

desire to separate themselves from the surrounding world, the Mennonites replicated as closely as possible the self-contained rural lifestyle which had evolved in Russia. Wherever possible they settled on large parcels of land discontinuous to any American neighbors; they planted crops and erected structures similar to those which had been known in Russia, and their social and cultural life remained centered around the Mennonite faith. Each of these settlements-- Gnadenu, Hoffnungsthal, Alexanderfeld , Alexanderwohl and Pawnee Rock, will now be examined more closely.

Gnadenu

When the proposed program of Russification and militarization became known to the Mennonites of South Russia, one of the first congregations to leave was the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren of Annefeld near Simferopol. Under the leadership of Elder Jacob A. Wiebe, the Krimmer group arrived in New York on July 15, 1874. From there Bernhard Warkentin accompanied them to the home of an American Mennonite, John Funk, in Elkhart, Indiana. Elder Wiebe and Franz Jansen continued on to Kansas and Nebraska with C.B.Schmidt to survey Santa Fe railroad lands. The men were not impressed with Nebraska. Said Elder Wiebe, "In Nebraska we were afraid of the

deep wells which had to be drilled and cost much money, our people...were used to dug wells, so we decided for Kansas where the wells were shallow."⁴

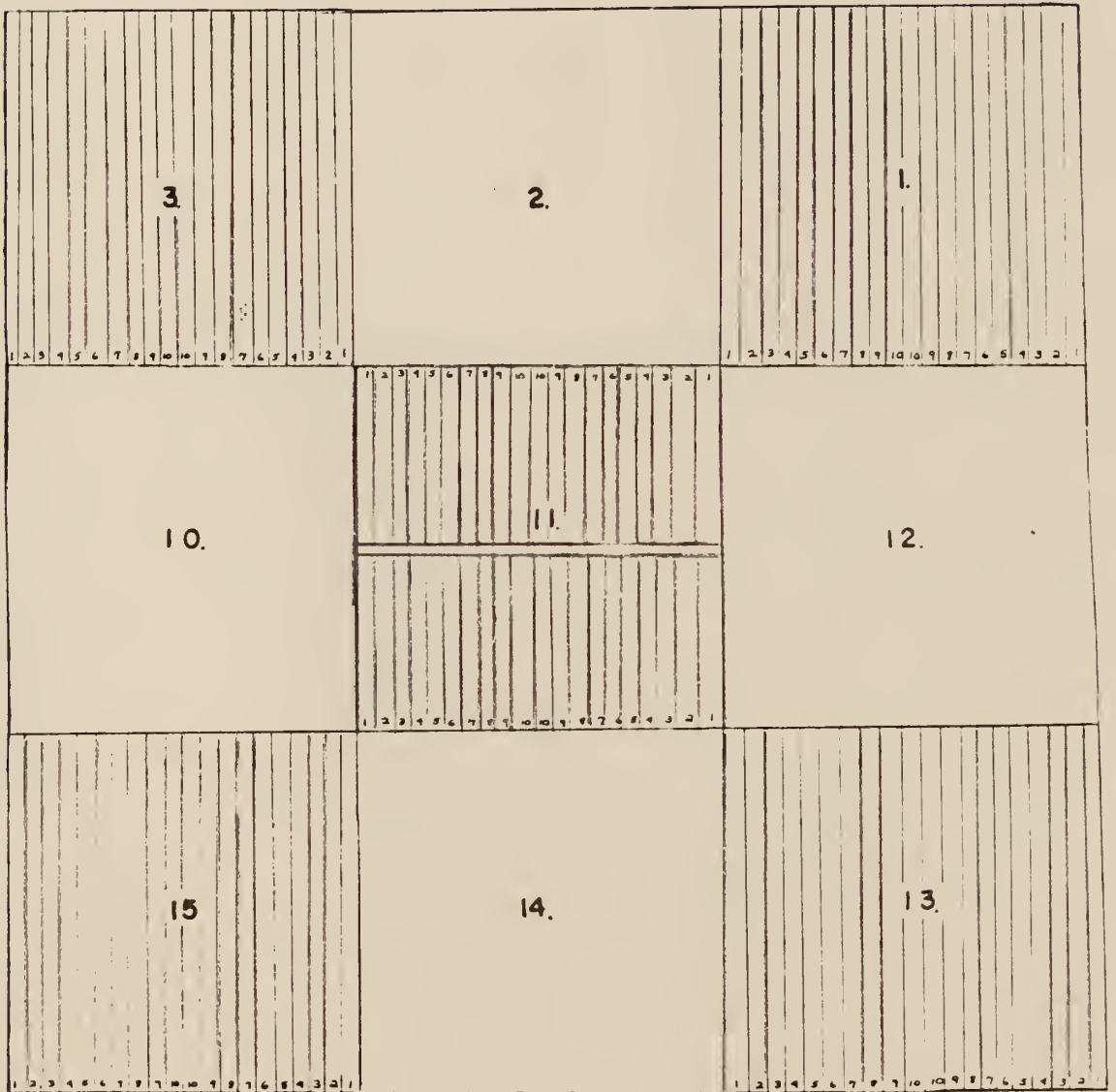
In Marion County, Kansas, the Krimmer Brethren bought twelve alternate sections of Santa Fe lands at from three to seven dollars per acre. They chose only railroad lands because they thought that the purchase of homesteads allocated by the federal government might tie them to political obligations contrary to the Mennonite religion. However, when American homesteaders in the area became discouraged by the grasshopper plague and drought of 1874, the Mennonites either rented or bought the vacated land.⁵

The village of Gnadenau (Grace Meadow) was laid out on an east-west road in the middle of Liberty township's section 11. (Figure 2) Initially, the villagers planned to farm only five sections: eleven, one, three, thirteen and fifteen. Land lying at a greater distance was to be used for grazing and later for farming.⁶ Perhaps the Krimmer Brethren were looking ahead to the future when the next generation would need new farm land.

Each of the farmed sections was divided into strips

Figure 2

GNADENAU VILLAGE PLAN 1874



numbered from one to ten. In section eleven there were four sets of numbered strips while in the four adjacent sections there were two sets to the section. Each strip of farmland was of equal width. Those in section eleven were sixteen acres each, and those in the outlying sections were thirty-two acres each.⁷ Since the numbering of the strips of the village section corresponded to those in the adjoining sections, every villager lived approximately the same distance from his field.⁸

"The residents of each quarter of the townsite farmed in the section nearest their homes, each being responsible for the farming of the land bearing the same number as that on which he lived...."⁹

Because of arrival in late summer, shelter was a major concern at Gnadenu. Initially, some of the immigrants stayed with established Mennonites of the Bruderthal community; others slept under overturned wagons. The first type of built shelter was the sarai, a building which served as a barn in south Russia. They chose the sarai because it was easy to construct and it required no materials beyond those readily available on the Kansas landscape.

In preparation for the sarai, a one to three-foot deep hole was dug as a foundation. Two walls were added in the shape of an inverted "V" beginning on the ground

and ending in a peaked ridge. These walls were constructed of cottonwood poles or planks and covered with prairie grass. A thirty-two foot long cottonwood pole was lowered into the peaked ridge of the inverted "V" to hold the walls in place.¹⁰ The ends of the "V" were filled in with adobe bricks, chunks of sod cut from the lawn, or clapboard depending upon how quickly the structure was needed for occupancy and upon cost. An adobe chimney extending twelve inches above the thatched roof completed the outside of the structure.

The inside of a sarai contained both living quarters for the family and a stable for the farm animals. Built into the dividing wall between the two sections was a Russian oven used for both heating and cooking. "Once heated, it kept the house warm for hours with an armful of straw or hay..."¹¹ Since prairie grass was abundant in the Mennonite settlement area, this oven was used universally at Gnadenau.

The next type of dwelling was the adobe house. Adobe was chosen as a building material for several reasons:

- 1-The sticky clay-loam soil found in the area was nearly perfect for making adobe bricks;
- 2-The eighteen to twenty-four inch thick walls provided excellent insulation against the unpredictable Kansas climate and reduced the amount of lumber needed, and ;
- 3-The use of adobe minimized the cost of building a large home to "almost nil."¹²

The Mennonites produced bricks by the same procedure which they had developed in Russia. Each brick was twelve inches long, six inches wide and four inches thick. An average twenty-six foot by forty-six foot house required over four thousand adobe bricks and the attached barn required an additional four thousand.¹³ Adobe houses were rectangular in shape with the barn section always located at the northern end. This may have been to shield the family portion of the house from the elements. As was the case with the sarai, a Russian oven occupied the center of the structure. To finish the house a roof covering was made of either straw or "tall grass found on bottom land, or along creeks."¹⁴ Eventually, those with the means built frame houses, but in the familiar pattern of house and barn under one roof.

The Gnadenau settlement was laid out formally, according to the same rules devised in Russia in the 1830's. As Kansas journalist Noble Prentis observed in

1875, "...each house is determined of one thing, to keep on the north side of the one street of the town and face south..."¹⁵ Additionally, the houses were spaced at regular intervals with enough space between to allow for the planting of flowers and trees--an activity not widely practiced by American settlers in the area. The Mennonites of Gnadenau planted mulberry, apricot, olive, apple, pear, cherry and peach.¹⁶ Because the village was administered collectively, each resident had to pay his share for the row of trees or hedge which was planted along the village street.¹⁷ Returning for his second visit in 1882, Prentis was surprised at the success of the Gnadenau plantings. He wrote:

"...a score of miniature forests (were) in sight from any point of view...several acres around every house were set in Hedges, orchards, lanes and alleys of trees...Trees in groups and trees all alone...Where the houses were only a few yards apart...a path ran from one to the other, between two lines of poplars or cottonwoods...(There were) apples, cherries, peaches, apricots, pears, all in bearing, where seven years ago the wind in passing found only the waving prairie grass...¹⁸

Mennonite occupance at Gnadenau transformed the open prairie into a successful settlement bounded by an abundance of introduced vegetation.

To the Mennonites the most important elements of the

built environment were the church and the school. Each group of Mennonite settlers sought to establish a school and a church as quickly as possible, and it was no different at the Gnadenau settlement.

The first church at Gnadenau stood in the center of the village and was built of slabs of dried, stacked sod. This church, simple yet functional, lasted for only a short time. Following this building's collapse, a larger frame church was erected in the same place. The frame church was in use until 1897 when, because of a shift in the center of the congregation, a new church was built two miles south of Gnadenau near Hillsboro. This church served the Gnadenau community until destroyed by fire on Christmas Eve, 1956. After this occurrence the replacement church was erected in the city of Hillsboro because in the late 1950s the center of church membership was nearer that location.¹⁹ To the Mennonites the body of believers in the congregation was the "church" and, therefore, the church building was significant mainly as the meeting house. Nevertheless, church building's location reflected the center of the population which attended the church.

Schools were also of importance to the Mennonite immigrants. The first established at Gnadenau was in the

sod church building. Johann Harder , one of the early teachers, explained the significance of the schools:

"Because we always had schools in the old country...the different communities wished to begin similar schools in this country, to teach the most essential things of life. The chief purpose, however, was to teach the children the German language and to make them acquainted with the Bible..."²⁰

It was not surprising that one structure functioned as both church and school, especially since the church was centrally located in the Gnadenu settlement.

Hoffnungsthal

Mennonites from the Crimea also established the village of Hoffnungsthal which was located south-west of Gnadenu. At Hoffnungsthal the settlers bought eleven sections of railroad land- one for the layout of the village with ten reserved for farm land.²¹ Section seventeen of Risley (now Liberty) township was the village site. As in Gnadenu , dwellings occupied the north side of an east west road with farmland extending in strips behind the houses. Hoffnungsthal was much smaller, however, because it was home to only eight families.²² Nevertheless living in these small street villages did have advantages.

"It held (the settlers) close together in groups for mutual assistance and thus reduced their expenses. They could help each other in making their Saraj...The most important advantage ,however...was that it made a convenient group for starting a church or school...."²³

As mentioned above, the first types of structures built by the Mennonite immigrants were the sarai and then adobe houses. A uniquely constructed adobe house, subsequently known as the Loewen Adobe house, was erected at Hoffnungsthal. Instead of being constructed of adobe bricks shaped in wooden molds, the Loewen house was built according to the adobe/rammed earth model which was a building method unique to this settlement.

To make the adobe for such a dwelling, a large area of soil or clay was loosened spade deep and then moistened . A horse tied to a pole in the center of the excavation hole trod straw, which was used as a binder, into the mud. When the first layer of moistened earth was depleted, the process of excavating and mixing was repeated. Next, the Hoffnunftsthalers poured the adobe mixture into wooden moulds or casings measuring eighteen inches wide and several feet high. The three Loewen children packed the adobe tightly into the casings with their bare feet. As the completed portion of the wall

dried, the workers moved the casings up the walls until all four were completed. Wood to construct the beams, rafters and gables was transported from Peabody, the nearest Santa Fe terminal. The Loewen Adobe House remained a family residence until 1958- a fact which attests to the durability of the adobe/rammed earth construction method.²⁴ In that year the house was relocated to Hillsboro where it stands as a museum to the culture of the Russian Mennonite immigrants. The construction method of the other dwellings in the Hoffnungsthal village is unknown.

Alexanderfeld

Alexanderfeld, established two miles west of Gnadenu and one and one-half miles north of Hoffnungsthal, was a third small village built by Mennonite immigrants from south Russia. (Figure 1) Although the Mennonites of Alexanderfeld originated in the same area as did the neighboring settlers, they "did not feel comfortable associating with the Gnadenu Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church..." due to their membership in the Kleine Gemeinde church conference.²⁵ Additionally, some of the families had first settled in Canada and then relocated to Kansas.

Early church services were held by the

Alexanderfelders in various schools in the Gnadenau area. The first building used exclusively as a church was the former Gnadenau West schoolhouse purchased in 1897. The Alexanderfeld congregation met at this location until 1907 when they moved the building near to the present site of the Alexanderfeld cemetery. In 1910, when the congregation had outgrown the old schoolhouse, they bought the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church building. Just as had been the case in 1897, they moved the church to their cemetery location, thus allowing a continuation of church services at the same site. This larger facility served the Alexanderfeld congregation until 1971 when a new brick and concrete structure was erected.²⁶ It may be assumed, based on the example of Gnadenau above, that the site of the church building reflected the center of the Alexanderfeld congregation which remained near three-hundred individuals.

The seemingly isolated location of the church, now known as the Alexanderfeld Church of God in Christ Mennonite, is somewhat reflective of the Mennonite tradition of separateness from the world. The following observations made about old Mennonite churches in Danzig(Gdansk) apply equally well to the Alexanderfeld church.

"Nearly every rural church is located in an isolated spot...They seem to suggest the spirit of Come Ye Apart and in the undisturbed quiet of God's beautiful creation to worship Him...²⁷

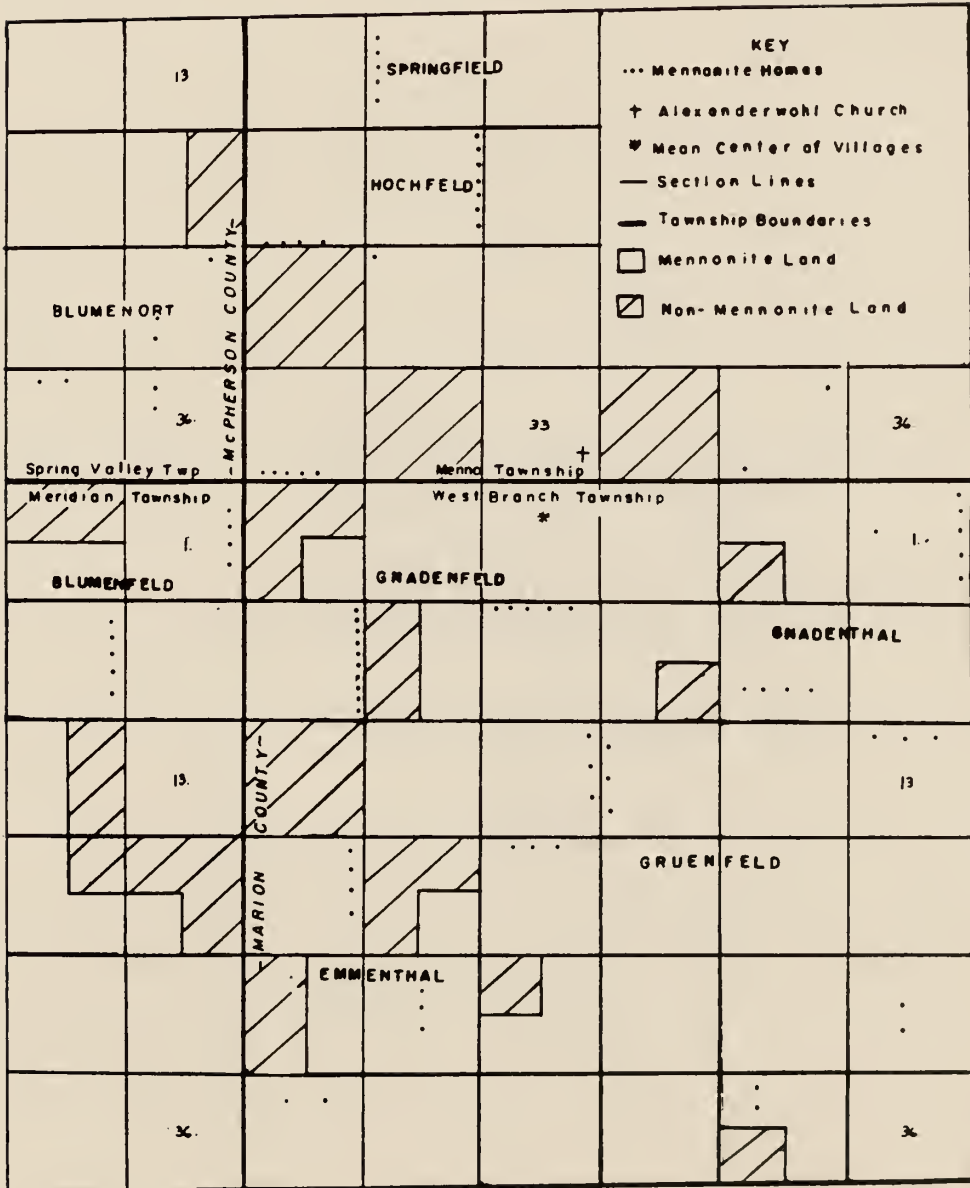
Alexanderwohl

In 1874 the Alexanderwohlers, from the Molotschna Colony in south Russia, settled on thirty-four sections of Santa Fe land in western Marion County and in eastern McPherson County. The Alexanderwohlers constituted the largest but not the most compact Mennonite settlement since they divided into several small villages. Among the largest were: Blumenfeld, Blumenort, Emmental, Gruenfeld, Gnadental, Hochfeld, Springfield, Schoental, and Steinbach. (Figure-3) Each village was located along a public road with the section behind the village divided into four equal parts.²⁸ Each village was separated by a distance of two to five miles.²⁹

Some of the villages were arranged similarly to the way in which Gnadenau and Hoffnungsthal were laid out, while others were merely a few houses in proximity. Hochfeld Village serves as an example of the former. The seven houses of the village were located on Menno Township's section twenty, while the community pasture was located on section twenty-one. Each villager had

Figure 3

ALEXANDERWOHL 1874



Source: Schmidt, 1949

three narrow strips of land: a large parcel immediately behind the house and two smaller parcels to the north. Hochfeld's orientation, however, was a bit different from that of Gnadenau. Whereas in Gnadenau the houses occupied the north side of an east-west village street, at Hochfeld the houses sat on the west side of a north-south section road (today, Kansas Highway 15). Furthermore, in a departure from the Gnadenau pattern the land was divided into unequal portions with the village leaders receiving the most. (Figure-4)³⁰

The location of American homesteaders' land may have caused some of the villages to assume the north-south orientation. This was probably the case at Gnadenfeld and Emmenthal. Other villages, such as Gnadenthal, may have assumed this arrangement to maximize the sharing of labor and farm implements between groups.

The Alexanderwohl Church

The Immigrantheus dormitory erected by the Santa Fe on section thirty-three of Menno Township functioned as a collective settlement church until 1886. In that year the Alexanderwohlers built a large wooden church across the road from the Immigrantheus. Based on the locations of the houses in the Alexanderwohl villages, it may be shown that this church was very near to the mean center

Figure 4

HOCHFELD VILLAGE 1874

14.5 A	21.75 A														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
1													43 ACRES	5 A. 1	
2													69 ACRES	7.5 A 2	
3														3	
4														4	
5														5	
6														6	
7														7	

Source: SCHMIDT, 1981

BSM

of the constituent congregation. (Figure-3) This being the case, it is not surprising that no other churches were erected by this congregation until 1920 . The Alexanderwohl church has remained on the same site for its entire hundred year history.

The Alexanderwohl Church, with an interior design reminiscent of Dutch architecture, was a departure from the rather plain , multi-functional churches which dotted the central Kansas Mennonite landscape. A feature unique to the Alexanderwohl church is what has become known as the " Alexanderwohl Arch." This rare feature described as a "basket-handle, elliptical or three-centered arch," is repeated on the interior and exterior of the building forty-two times. (Plate-1) However, the simplicity of design blended in with the Mennonite outlook.

"(The arch) was not offensive, but rather appropriate for these Mennonites...It is embracing, all-encompassing, and comforting. Visual characteristics like these may subconsciously influence...worship...We shape our surroundings, and...they shape us"³¹

As mentioned in the last chapter both the large Alexanderwohl congregation and the Volga German Catholics left Russia at the same time. Both contingents were religious people who centered a great deal of their

Plate 1



Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, 1987
1 Mile North of Goessel, Kansas on
Highway-15

lives around the church. However, the location of and the meaning of the church differed between the Mennonites and the Catholics. A comparison between the Alexanderwohl Church near Goessel and the Cathedral of the Plains at Victoria, Kansas, illustrates this point.

The Mennonites of Alexanderwohl built their church in . . .the middle of their villages;the Catholics built a church in each village . The Mennonites lived on their farms and commuted to Church; the Catholics lived near the church and commuted to their farms . . .each assigned a different role to the church. To the Mennonites, God and the church were with them, wherever they were; the majestic Cathedral of the plains...helped the Catholics aspire to God." 32

The absence of any houses within sight of the Alexanderwohl Church underlines the fact that the Mennonites , unlike their Catholic counterparts, have remained a rural people.

Pawnee Rock

A small group of Mennonites arrived at Pawnee Rock, Kansas from Karolswalde, Russian Poland, in November, 1874. These people spent a very uncomfortable first winter in Kansas, housed in railroad boxcars. The following spring they laid out a village east of Dundee, according to the Russian plan. Twenty families bought two sections of Santa Fe railroad lands in Buffalo (currently Liberty) township in Barton County.(Figure 1)

They established the village on section sixteen and farmed section nine, adjacent to the north. It is likely that both sections were divided into thirty-two--acre strips, giving each family sixty-four acres of farmland oriented in a north-south direction. There were no sarai or adobe structures, all houses having been constructed of lumber shipped from Michigan. It may be assumed that the Dundee colonists did not see their village as a permanent feature because the houses were pegged rather than nailed together. ³³

As in the central Kansas Mennonite settlements, the church building was centrally located in the village and also served as a school. In a departure from the traditional materials of wood or adobe, the church was constructed out of limestone blocks, quarried at Olmitz, which was twenty miles from Dundee. This stone building last functioned as a school in 1909 and as a church in 1915. It was destroyed by a tornado in 1950. The Dundee street village lasted only a few years, but the Bergthal Mennonite Church at Pawnee Rock continues to the present. ³⁴

Summary and Conclusions

Several attempts were made in the 1870's to establish Russian Mennonite villages on the plains of central

Kansas. Uniform street villages of the Hollanderdorfer type were briefly established at Gnadenau, Hoffnungsthal and at some of the Alexanderwohl villages. One such village was attempted in western Kansas at Dundee in Barton County. None of these villages persisted more than a few years as such. Kansas historian Alberta Pantle gives the following reasons to explain why the village system did not survive at Gnadenau. The reasons could apply equally well to the other villages . These factors were:

- 1-Absence of the necessity to band together for safety as they had done in Russia,
- 2-Improved agricultural machinery which made strip farming impractical,
- 3-The free and open spirit of the frontier,
- 4-Close contact with non-Mennonite neighbors, and
- 5-Confusion which arose over tax collection.³⁴

Although the village life did not acquire permanence, Mennonite families still comprise the majority in the settlement area. Also, the Mennonite churches, representing several sects, remain the dominant force in the social and cultural life of the various congregations. Other permanent impacts which the Mennonites had on the cultural landscape of Kansas, particularly the central portion of the state, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Footnotes

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- 22 Willems and Wiebe, p. 12.
- 23 H. P. Peters, History and Development of Education Among the Mennonites. (1925) p. 16.
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- 25 Raymond Wiebe, Hillsboro City on the Prairie. Multi-Business Press: Hillsboro (1984), p. 104.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Wilson Hunsberger, "Danzig Mennonite Church Buildings Today," Mennonite Life, Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 10,11.
- 28 Janzen, p. 27.
- 29 Von Meter, p. 48.
- 30 Peter U. Schmidt, "The Beginning of Hochfeld Village and the Alexanderwohl Church," Translated from the German by Richard Schmidt. Mennonite Life, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1 (1981), pp. 4,5.
- 31 Brian Stucky, "Alexanderwohl Architecture," Mennonite Life, Vol. XVI, No. 1, pp. 22,23.
- 32 The Kansas Immigrants: A Series of Fifty-Six Articles on the Ethnic Heritage of Kansas. Division of Continuing Education, The University Press of Kansas: Lawrence (1983), p. 18.
- 33 Heritage: First One-Hundred Years- Karlswalde Russia to Pawnee Rock and Dundee, Kansas- 1874-1974, Bergthal Mennonite Church. Mennonite Press: North Newton (1974) p. 25.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.26,27.

³⁵ Pantle, p. 267.

Chapter 5

Other Impacts on the Kansas Cultural Landscape

Impact on Agri-Business

The Mennonite immigrants had other impacts upon the cultural landscape of Kansas beyond those associated with the physical processes of constructing street villages. As previously mentioned, one of the intentions of the Delegation of Twelve was to find land in North America suitable for the growing of crops with which the Mennonites were familiar in Europe. This was particularly true for the representatives of the Molotschna colony from which the majority of Kansas Mennonites migrated. In central Kansas they found favorable agricultural conditions for the continuation of wheat cultivation which had gained prominence in Russia in the 1840's.

Among the seeds brought from Russia were those of various fruit trees, an edible variety of sunflowers, and watermelon. Silkworms and the seeds of the mulberry tree also made the trip to Kansas.¹ The one kind of seed which was to have the greatest impact upon Kansas agribusiness, however, was that of Turkey Red or Crimean wheat. This strain of wheat adapted well to the climate of Kansas.

The Mennonite immigrant farmers set about the task of planting Turkey Red, a hard winter variety, almost immediately upon arrival in Marion County. Some broke virgin prairie for their first crop; others purchased improved land from American settlers who had given up after the August, 1874, grasshopper invasion and drought.² Initially, each farmer planted about five acres of wheat and from five to seven acres of rye.³ Corn, the dominant crop on American farms in the area, received only secondary consideration. Grains other than corn remained, for the most part, untried in central Kansas prior to the coming of the Mennonites because the climate was thought to be too dry. The preference for corn by American farmers is illustrated by the following:

Table 1--Crop Acreage, 1872 ⁴

<u>County</u>	<u>Winter Wheat</u>	<u>Spring Wheat</u>	<u>Corn</u>
Harvey	0	0	1,855
Marion	722	0	2,415
McPherson	125 1/2	0	2,953 1/2
Reno	0	2	5,061

The American farmers in the study area did not have confidence in spring wheat because it "gave a highly uncertain yield, owing to lack of resistance to drought and cold."⁵ The few acres of winter wheat which appear

in Table 1 (above) were grown by French settlers near Cottonwood Creek.⁶

By 1879 the six counties of the study area were among the states leaders in the production of hard winter wheat: McPherson ranked first; Barton, fifth; Butler, eighth; Reno, ninth; Marion, eleventh; and Harvey, twelfth. Interestingly, two counties--Sedgwick and Dickinson--adjacent to the Mennonite settlement area, ranked second and third respectively. By 1879 cultivation of wheat, especially the hard winter variety, exceeded that of corn in four of the six study area counties; a fact which is clearly demonstrated by the following:

Table Two--Crop Acreage, 1879 ⁷

<u>County</u>	<u>Winter Wheat</u>	<u>Spring Wheat</u>	<u>Corn</u>
Barton	60,478	10,456	39,901
Butler	46,561	600	69,019
Harvey	36,148	1,518	41,167
Marion	38,472	2,742	34,815
McPherson	82,234	4,986	54,646
Reno	44,151	20,282	47,272

Although a small group of French settlers in Marion County may have been the first to introduce hard winter wheat to Kansas, credit must be given to the Mennonite immigrants for its widespread use. They came to central Kansas without the prevailing native prejudices against

wheat cultivation and, more importantly, they had successfully raised wheat under similar circumstances in Russia.

The spread of winter wheat culture in central Kansas was labelled a "folk phenomenon."⁸ Some highly successful non-Mennonite farmers such as T.C. Henry of Abilene grew Turkey Red wheat in the late 1870s but claimed not to know the strain's origin. Henry stated, "Finally my attention was directed to the Turkey or Red Russian Variety. It was hard wheat and at first regarded as much inferior to Red May (which was the popular strain grown by central Kansas farmers at the time) but it proved very hardy and yielded prolifically. I substituted it in 1877. I know nothing of its origins. The wheat farmers of Kansas should offer a prize for this information."⁹

Area newspapers were also slow to recognize Turkey Red as a new and valuable type of wheat. Nothing was written on the subject until 1881 when articles appeared in both the Marion County Record and the Chase County Leader.¹⁰ Kansas historian, Homer Socolofsky, writing in 1959, did not find this lack of attention surprising, considering the Mennonites' way of life. Observed Dr. Socolofsky,

"The fact that there was no widespread discussion of the new wheat variety...was due...to the nature of the Mennonites and the types of communities they established in Kansas. Furthermore, a half dozen acres or less of wheat in western Marion County in 1875 would not attract the attention that was given to the sunflowers and the huge watermelon patches which were cultivated by the new arrivals. Wheat was already common-place, although it might be a new variety, while watermelons and sunflowers, used as food, were a rarity and therefore newsworthy."¹¹

In 1898 Turkey Red became the standard wheat grown in Kansas. "It had gained a reputation for high average yield and winter hardiness, a characteristic very important to farmers."¹² Most hard winter wheat grown in Kansas today has been developed from Turkey Red.¹³ In time the state became the nation's leader in the production of winter wheat, a position which continues to the present.

The Milling Industry

Given the lack of knowledge surrounding the introduction of Turkey Red wheat, it is not surprising that the first mill devoted to its processing was built by a Mennonite. That mill was built by Bernhard Warkentin at Halstead, Kansas, in 1874. Wheat was raised in such small quantities at the time, however, that he had to bring wheat from Atchison to keep the mill functioning.¹⁴ It was also Warkentin who imported

hard winter wheat from the Crimea in such quantities that it became available for sale to the general public. This was accomplished in 1885-86. Also at that time, due to the success that Turkey Red wheat enjoyed, Warkentin, in partnership with others, founded the Newton Mill and Elevator Company. This mill, contemporarily the largest and most modern in central Kansas, is preserved today as an historical landmark. (Plate 2) This distinction points to the significance that Bernhard Warkentin and Turkey Red Wheat held for Kansas agri-business.

Although Turkey Red Wheat grew well in Kansas, the hardness of the variety made it difficult to mill with the technology available in the mid-1870's. Also, the darker color of the flour was frowned upon by Kansas homemakers who were accustomed to white flour. But just as the Mennonite farmers had led to the widespread planting of the new strain, so did the Mennonite millers lead in the acceptance of Turkey Red as a valuable commercial flour. New technology was added as soon as it became available, often involving extensive remodeling every few years. For example, the Halstead Mill in 1881 was a four-story structure with four sets of traditional stone burrs (grinding stones) and five sets of innovative steel rollers. The rollers were necessary to

Plate 2



Newton Mill and Elevator Company, 1987
Founded by Mennonite Immigrant, Bernhard
Warkentin

more finely grind the hard red wheat. In 1882 a new smokestack, stone engine-house, and an eighty-by-sixteen-by-twelve-foot grain storage room were, added and two years later a seven-story, fifty-thousand-bushel elevator was built.¹⁵ Thus, a decade after the Mennonites began to plant hard winter wheat, the most modern technology was in place to process it. When the other (non-Mennonite) millers adopted the new steel rollers, the cheaper price of the once unpopular Turkey Red made it an attractive alternative to the softer wheats.

According to Leslie Fitz, a milling industry authority:

"Turkey wheat could be bought more cheaply than soft wheat and chemical analysis indicated that it would make a flour of high gluten content...The introduction of hard wheat gave an impetus to the Kansas wheat industry."¹⁶

Other Impacts on the Built Environment:

Schools and Preparatory Academies

Schools held a prominent place on the cultural landscape of the Mennonite settlements. Elementary education had ties back to their religious outlook:

"...Wherever the Mennonites migrated in Europe, they insisted on their own schools to insure a Christian education and loyalty to their own denomination. Thus, upon their arrival in Kansas they established schools."¹⁷

State-wide education laws which required children eight to fourteen years of age to attend public school were not always enforced. Therefore, the Mennonites found the freedom to form their own own village schools. Initially, the schools were held in private homes or in multi-purpose structures which functioned as both church and school. These private schools were not strictly parochial; nevertheless, the main purposes were to acquaint Mennonite children with their German culture and to teach the Bible. The number of such private village schools increased from about a dozen in 1877 to over forty in 1898, distributed in villages throughout the central Kansas settlement area.¹⁸

To supply the large number of teachers needed to staff the private German language schools, the Mennonites founded preparatory academies. The first such school met at Blumenthal in the Alexanderwohl settlement. Four years later, in 1882, another was opened at the Emmenthal village school.¹⁹ The latter location did not prove successful because of the lack of room available in which to house the students.²⁰ In 1883 the Emmenthal building was relocated to Halstead, and the school began operating under the name, Halstead Seminary. At that time some of the youth began to attend state, and therefore, secular institutions which were

being built in close proximity to the Mennonite villages.²¹ The Halstead Seminary could not meet all the needs for higher education, and support grew for a Mennonite-operated four-year college. However, preparatory schools continued in operation at Buhler from 1890-1900 and at Goessel from 1906-1923. (Plate-3)

Mennonite village or German schools continued into the early 1900's. Usually, these schools, like the preparatory schools, were private or church supported. Such schools were founded at Hillsboro in 1887, at Hoffnungsau in 1907 and at Pawnee Rock in 1903. The purpose of these elementary schools was the same as that of the first immigrant schools: "to teach the German language and culture."²² To that end the German language and Bible studies were taught. Gradually, however, the term mandated for public, English education was lengthened and this left less time between the terms for the privately conducted Mennonite schools. In 1903 the state-required school term was five months; in 1909 it was increased to seven months.²³

"This...had a very serious effect on the German school. With the former five months term there had always been two month of German...in the spring, but now that was impossible...In March, 1919 the legislature passed a law prescribing English as the exclusive language for all elementary schools...This was a death blow at the



Goessel Preparatory School, 1987
Goessel Heritage Center Complex

German schools..."²⁴

In 1923 the state-mandated term was lengthened to eight months leaving only four to six weeks for German schools. Gradually, the extra effort needed from teachers, parents and children led to the discontinuation of the German language elementary schools.²⁵ However, Mennonite parochial schools conducted in the English language continue in operation in Kansas at the present, various congregations of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite supporting eight private schools for grades one through eight. (Figure-5) The religious philosophy of the Church of God in Christ is the most conservative of the Mennonite groups which originated in Europe. They founded the private schools to counter the effects of "increasing secularism... in the public schools."²⁶ According to Bonnie Toews, present day teacher at the Meadowlark Christian School, only Mennonite children currently attend the eight parochial schools maintained by the group. Additionally, the education of the students attending the schools is considered complete when they finish the eighth grade. Church of God in Christ members do not find secondary or higher education necessary for their children.²⁷

Impact on Higher Education in Central Kansas

Halstead Seminary closed in 1893 as interest increased in establishing at Newton a Mennonite institution which came to be known as Bethel College.

The Halstead buildings were moved to Newton to serve as dormitories for the Bethel students. However, animosity arose between the developers of Bethel College and those who were in favor of maintaining the seminary.

"Skepticism and disagreement persisted regarding the merits and role of a Mennonite college...Moreover the proponents of the religious and secondary education offered at the Seminary did not automatically approve of the more advanced and worldly program of the college."²⁸

Another factor in the development of animosity may have been the way in which the Mennonite college came to be located at Newton. When other central Kansas cities such as McPherson, Lindsborg and Sterling developed four-year colleges, residents of Newton offered the Kansas conference of Mennonites "\$100,000 in land and conscriptions on the condition that the conference erect and maintain a first-class college at Newton."²⁹ To the most conservative of the Mennonite leaders this offer may have seemed opportunistic on the part of those who made it, and certainly the offer did not stem from

religious but, rather from business motives.

Nevertheless, the offer was accepted because Newton was a prosperous city in the heart of the Mennonite settlement area, and because a refusal would have allowed an opportunity for another denomination to control the college. Despite the success which Bethel College attained, there remained opposition as late as the 1930's.³⁰

Mennonite colleges were also founded at Hillsboro and at Hesston. The more conservative and biblically literalist Mennonite Brethren Conference established Tabor College in 1906. The location of the college in Hillsboro made the city "a mecca for Mennonite Brethren."³¹ The third Mennonite college was built at Hesston in 1909 by Old Mennonites who came to Kansas from eastern states. It did not seem out of the ordinary to have three denominational colleges within a radius of twenty miles. To the Mennonites "...it was a measure of intellectual and cultural vitality as well as ecclesiastical diversity."³²

Hospitals and Homes for the Elderly

Another category of buildings prominent on the Mennonite cultural landscape are health-care facilities. Within twenty-five miles of Goessel there are five

church-supported hospitals and six homes for the elderly. (Figure 5) Providing care in church-supported institutions allows the Mennonites to remain free from state support and to maintain the degree of self-sufficiency to which they have become accustomed over the centuries. The large number of such institutions in the study area is possible due to the diversity of Mennonite sects and to the large Mennonite population. Most of these facilities also provide services for non-Mennonite patients as well and, therefore, play a prominent role in health care in the central Kansas region.

Monuments to Mennonite Immigrant Culture

Many buildings which had importance on the Mennonite immigrant landscape are preserved today as museums. One such building is the Loewen Adobe House which originated in the Hoffnungsthal village. In 1956 this house was moved to Hillsboro where it became known as the Hillsboro Adobe House Museum. Everyday items used by the Mennonites of the 1870s, ranging from the Mennonite oven to farming implements, are displayed there. The Adobe House, because of its unique construction method, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Travelling south of Hillsboro on Kansas Highway-15,

one will approach the Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church. Just south of this original immigrant church are historical markers detailing the coming of the Russian Mennonites. In nearby Goessel is the Heritage Museum Complex. On these grounds may be found a Mennonite immigrant house, the Bethesda Hospital, the one-room Blumenthal Schoolhouse(1875), the Goessel State Bank (1910), and the Goessel Preparatory School(1906).

Further south, in Newton, the home and mill of Mennonite leader Bernhard Warkentin are also maintained as museums. Both of these structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of Mr. Warkentin's efforts in introducing the Turkey Red Wheat strain to Kansas farmers.³³ Other cities which feature monuments to Mennonite immigrant culture are Walton, Pawnee Rock and Moundridge.

Footnotes

¹ Sondra Von Meter, Marion County Past and Present. Marion County Historical Society, 1972, p. 47.

² Ibid., p. 47.

³ Harry Willems and David F. Wiebe, Editorial Committee, They Live In Hope-A Guide to Hillsboro's Adobe House Museum and the Mennonite Adobe House Culture of Central Kansas 1874-1900. Hillsboro: Business Press, 1986 p. 13.

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⁵ Von Meter, p. 57.

⁶ Abraham Albrecht, "Mennonite Settlements in Kansas," Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Kansas, 1924 p. 32.

⁷ Kansas State Department of Agriculture Second Biennial 1879-80. Topeka, 1881 pp. 35, 47, 49, 61, 65.

⁸ James C. Malin, Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1944 p. 250.

⁹ Cornelius Krahn, From the Steppes to the Prairies 1874-1884. Newton: Mennonite Publication Office, p. 11.

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¹¹ Homer Socolofsky, "Kansas Wheat History," Marketing Kansas Wheat. Topeka: State Board of Agriculture, 1959 p. 41.

¹² Von Meter, p. 58.67 p.

¹³ Willems and Wiebe p. 13.

¹⁴ Albrecht, p. 52.

¹⁵ Victor Neufeld, "The Mennonite Flour Milling Industry of Harvey, Marion and McPherson Counties of Kansas: 1873-1900," Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Kansas, 1967 p. 49,50.

- 16 Leslie Fitz, "Development of Milling Industry in Kansas," Kansas Historical Quarterly, Vol. XII (1911-12) p. 59.
- 17 David Haury, Prairie People: The History of the Western District Conference. Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1981, p. 82.
- 18 David V. Wiebe, They Seek a Country. 2nd Ed., Freeman, South Dakota:Pine Hill Press, 1974 p. 181.
- 19 Ibid., p. 125.
- 20 Haury, p. 89.
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- 22 Haury, p. 105.
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- 26 Raymond Wiebe, Hillsboro City on the Prairie, Hillsboro: Multi-Business Press 1984, p. 105.
- 27 Bonnie Toews , Telephone Interview January 11, 1988.
- 28 Haury, p. 94.
- 29 Ibid., p. 95.
- 30 Ibid., p. 94.
- 31 James Juhnke, A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites. Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1975 p. 23.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Robert Schrag, "A Center of Mennonite Businesses: Newton, Kansas," Mennonite Life ,April 1960 p. 65.

Chapter Six

Summary and Conclusions

Mennonites have made significant impacts upon the cultural landscape of central Kansas. Their religious denomination had its roots in the Protestant Reformation of 1517 and they remain biblical literalists who take direction for their lives from New Testament scripture. Two of the most important of their beliefs are the non-swearing of oaths and nonparticipation in military conflict. Throughout Mennonite history migrations have occurred to avoid both forced participation in political processes and military conscription.

State-sanctioned religious persecution drove the Mennonites from Holland and Switzerland into eastern Europe where a large number eventually settled in Prussia and Russia. Throughout their migrations Mennonites were often settled upon less than prime agricultural land but they turned this difficulty to their advantage.

"Adversity was for centuries a relentless taskmaster...To survive on poor land required increasing application of energy and...ingenuity to build up the soil... This often meant trying new ways of farming in order to produce the best results in new and difficult circumstances...Thus, adversity became one of the basic factors explaining why Mennonites have a tradition as expert farmers.¹

Mennonite expertise was used in land reclamation in Holland and Prussia and in the introduction and expansion of grain crops in Russia. Indeed, European autocrats such as Frederick the Great and Catherine the Great offered to the Mennonites special inducements, such as religious toleration and control over education, to interest the group in settling in their respective countries.

In the early 1870's rising militant nationalism in Russia, Prussia and Switzerland caused eastern European Mennonites to seek out a new homeland in North America. Based on information sent to them by American Mennonites, their Delegation of Twelve, and by agents of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, the majority chose Kansas as a resettlement area. Kansas was selected because of physical and climatic similarities to southern Russia exemption given to conscientious objectors from state militia service by the Kansas Legislature; and importantly, the sparseness of population in the chosen settlement area. In central Kansas the Mennonites of Prussia, Russia and Switzerland, unhampered by American neighbors, established several villages extending from western Marion County into northern Butler County. Another small Mennonite colony was established between Pawnee Rock and

Dundee in Barton County. In these Kansas communities the built environment reflected a way of life developed over three hundred years in various countries of Europe.

Two types of dwellings were unique to the Russian Mennonite immigrants- the A-frame sarai of the Gnadenau settlement and the adobe houses at Hoffnungsthal, each of which featured living quarters and barn space under the same roof. This was in contrast to American settlers of central Kansas who built separate facilities for farm animals and equipment.

In their settlement pattern the Mennonites also differed from their contemporaries. In the 1870s a traveller to the area would have seen sarai or adobe houses arranged along one side of an east-west street, and upon entering into conversation he would have heard the German language almost exclusively. Clearly, a quiet agricultural lifestyle would have been observed.

Kansas agri-business, another element of the cultural environment, also was influenced by the coming of the Mennonites. Corn, which had been the staple crop in the settlement locale, was rapidly replaced by hard winter wheat. Each Mennonite family brought Turkey Red wheat with them from Europe for their own use, and

because the strain proved to be so successful in Kansas, Bernhard Warkentin imported large quantities of the seed from the Crimea for sale to the general public in 1885-86. By 1898, only twenty-five years after the immigrants' arrival, Turkey Red was the standard wheat variety grown in the state. Credit must also be given to Mennonite millers for the development of the technology to process the unfamiliar, hard and dark flour. One-hundred years after Turkey Red was introduced to central Kansas, wheat was the state's number one crop and Kansas was the leading wheat producer.²

Several cities in the study area continue to show the Mennonite influence. Goessel, Hillsboro, Moundridge, Elbing, Pretty Prairie and Yoder belong in this category. Other cities including Newton, Inman, McPherson and Halstead have large Mennonite populations. Hillsboro, in addition to being the location of Tabor College, is the conference headquarters for the Mennonite Brethren Church. Moundridge serves the same function for the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. The Newton community, in addition to including Bethel College within its borders, is the national headquarters for the General Conference Mennonite Church. Also located in Newton are the Western District Office, the

Mennonite Central Committee, the Mennonite Press, Mennonite Weekly Review, and Mennonite Magazine. Unlike Hillsboro and Newton, Hesston developed as a local agricultural center rather than as a denominational center.

Today a visit to the Mennonite district of Kansas, which includes Marion, Harvey and parts of Mcpherson, Reno, and Butler counties, still gives one the impression of a successful agricultural lifeway. The numerous churches, located inconspicuously on corners of cropland attest to the fact that faith and separateness are still central themes in Mennonite life.

Many monuments have been erected to the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870's. Some of these, such as the Hillsboro Adobe House Museum and the Mennonite Heritage Complex at Goessel are relics of the original built environment. Other memorials are more personal; an example is the cemetery. Blended into the agricultural landscape instead of set apart from it, the burial sites of the immigrant elders tie together the religious and agricultural emphases of the Mennonite heritage. A visitor to even an original cemetery such as the one at the Gnadenau site, finds himself in the midst of hundred year old tombstones completely surrounded by crop land

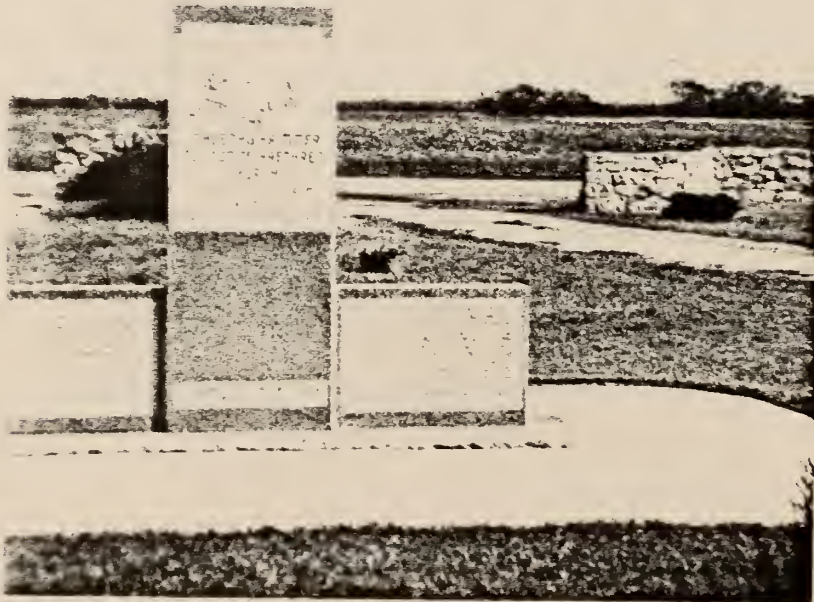
and modern farming implements.(Plate -4) Indeed, the choice of prime agricultural land as burial sites was scripturally based as was all other elements of Mennonite life:

"Remember the Lord in all you do and He will show you the right way...Honor the Lord by making Him an offering from all your land produces. If you do your barns will be filled with grain."³

Plate 4



Johannestal Cemetery



Gnadenau Cemetery

Plate 4.

The proximity of Mennonite cemeteries to crop land illustrates the relationship between religion and agriculture which has continued on the landscape of central Kansas.

Top: Johannestal Mennonite Cemetery

Two Miles North of Hillsboro

Bottom: Gnadenau Mennonite Cemetery

One Mile South of Hillsboro.

Footnotes

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- ² Farm Facts. Kansas State Board of Agriculture, 1973-74, p. 16F.
- ³ Proverbs, Chap. 3:6,9-10.

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THE IMPACT OF MENNONITE SETTLEMENT ON THE
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF KANSAS

by

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the impact which Mennonite settlement had upon the cultural landscape of Kansas with particular emphasis on the counties of Butler, Harvey, Marion, McPherson and Reno in the initial settlement period, 1873-1885, and to identify those impacts which have continued to the present. The cultural landscape is defined herein as arrangement of settlement, farm size and type, field patterns, housing types and other aspects of the built environment including schools and churches.

Method of Approach

Trindell's research design for historical geography was followed as a guide for researching this paper. Based on that design historical facts, including both primary and secondary written materials, and physical evidence remaining on the landscape were studied. For this project written sources included relevant materials from Mennonite libraries and from the Kansas State Historical Society, agricultural records for the areas involved and maps prepared based on the memories of original Mennonite settlers. To identify impacts which have persisted field work was conducted in Marion, McPherson and Harvey counties. Additionally, several persons familiar with the Mennonite cultural landscape

were interviewed.

Findings

As postulated at the onset of this study, it was found that European Mennonites had a unique influence upon the cultural landscape of Kansas. Settlements, field patterns, crop choices, housing types and other elements of the built environment were transplanted from Europe and were directly attributable to the Mennonite religious culture.

Conclusions

1. European Mennonites introduced the Hollanderdorfer village type to the cultural landscape of central Kansas most visibly at Gnadenau, Alexanderwohl and at Pawnee Rock. These villages featured homes arranged along a central village street with fields and crop land extending behind the settlement in narrow rectangular strips.
2. The Mennonite settlers constructed two unique dwelling types - the A-frame sarai and the adobe-brick house-, both of which featured living quarters and barns under the same roof.
3. Kansas agri-business was greatly influenced by the introduction of Turkey Red wheat and the milling technology to process it. By 1898, twenty-five years

after the Mennonites' arrival in Kansas, Turkey Red was the standard variety grown in the state and significantly, most hard, red wheat grown today is developed from that strain.

4. Mennonite immigrant social and cultural life centered around the church. Consequently, early churches of the various sects stood at the center of the constituent congregations. When the population base shifted the church building was relocated to reflect the change.
5. Due to the large number of Mennonites in the study area several central Kansas cities emerged as denominational and educational centers. Hillsboro, Moundridge and Newton belong in this category. National headquarters of the Mennonite Brethren Church are located at Hillsboro while Moundridge serves the same function for the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. The Newton community serves as the seat of the General Conference Mennonites and several of the groups' publishing concerns.

