

~~/~~THE PRETTY PRAIRIE MENNONITES: THEIR EUROPEAN MIGRATIONS,  
IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES  
AND ASSIMILATION INTO AMERICAN SOCIETY

by

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## Introduction

The Pretty Prairie Mennonites emigrated to the United States during the "Great Migration of 1874." In that year thousands of German colonists emigrated from Russia, where they lived for nearly a century. They scattered to various parts of the world, especially the United States. Many German Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans settled in midwestern states and territories, such as Kansas and Dakota Territory.

Those who became the Pretty Prairie Mennonites had a long and unique history filled with many hardships and much suffering. They migrated more times than most Mennonites. Within two centuries the Swiss Mennonites traveled as many as five times searching for a better place to live. Chapter one relates the history of the ancestors of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites from the beginning of Mennonite religion in sixteenth century Switzerland to the establishment of their settlements in Russia during the early nineteenth century. Much of the information in this chapter was found in various articles in Mennonite magazines and in books dealing with Mennonite history. I was unable to obtain any primary source material because of its inaccessibility.

A brief explanation of the Mennonite faith is included to give the reader a complete understanding of the political and social pressures the Mennonites endured.

There are many branches of Mennonite faith. It is not the purpose of this paper to define and describe the various branches and their differences. Rather, it is to explain the basic beliefs of Pretty Prairie Mennonites, their history and relationship with the world around them.

All of the Mennonite emigrations in Europe involved economic, political and social causes. Economic bad times were always a cause for emigration, even in America. Socially, the Mennonites faced pressures from native citizens, other religious groups and each other. Their religious idea of the purpose of government and negative encounters with the governments of Europe led the Mennonites to form a negative opinion of all government, even in America.

A history of the emigration of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites to the United States follows. Emphasis is placed on the decision to emigrate and the ordeals and hardships the Mennonites encountered while leaving Europe. There is much information found in books and articles to support my findings. Also, some theses and addresses give pertinent information.

The immigration of the Mennonite group from Russia to their new frontier homes in Dakota Territory and Kansas is explained next. Some of these Mennonites later became the Pretty Prairie Mennonites. This chapter also relates the hardships and suffering the Dakota pioneers faced on the

cold frontier. These hardships were the major reasons that the Mennonites migrated south to Pretty Prairie, Kansas. Information for this material came from a variety of sources including a scrapbook containing ships' logs, government hearings and newspaper articles. Also, books theses, addresses and other primary sources were useful.

The next chapter details the history of the Pretty Prairie community and the immigration of the Mennonites from the Dakota Territory. The growth and progress of the Mennonite community during its first few years is portrayed. I was able to rely on newspaper articles of the time period and personal interviews to get new information. Deeds were analyzed to determine the economic progress of the group. A few local history books were also very helpful.

The assimilation of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites into American society and their gradual assimilation is complex and involves several factors, including political involvement, change from the German language to the English language and the adoption of American religious and social customs. All of these factors are affected by the growth of the Mennonite economy. The first four chapters state that the Mennonites changed their social and religious beliefs during their various migrations in Europe. Also, during their stay in each settlement the Swiss Mennonites changed even more. These changes affected the assimilation

of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites into American society. By 1950 the Pretty Prairie Mennonites had successfully assimilated into American society and kept their cultural heritage.

Much of the resources used in this chapter are personal interviews taken during the summer of 1986. One of the most valuable interviews was the one with Vernon Krehbiel. Vernon is a descendent of Jost Krehbiel of Cezewill, Switzerland. Jost Krehbiel was a Swiss Mennonite that first led the Pretty Prairie Mennonites' ancestors out of Switzerland. This is the only Swiss Mennonite family line that can be traced unbroken from the present back to the sixteenth century.

The interview with Lonnie McCubbin proved to be helpful as well. Mr. McCubbin is an elderly non-Mennonite who grew up in Pretty Prairie. His insight into Pretty Prairie history provides an outsiders view of the Mennonite way of life.

My interest in the Pretty Prairie Mennonites has its origins in my undergraduate work. At that time my area of study was eighteenth and nineteenth century European social history. After graduation from Kansas State University, I returned to my hometown, Hutchinson, Kansas, and began teaching eighth grade American history. During my postgraduate study my interest in American social history increased, while my study of European history continued.

In order to connect my two interests, I began studying immigration history.

The decision to focus on the Pretty Prairie Mennonites as a thesis topic came about because of the community's proximity to Hutchinson. After checking the immigrant history of the area, I discovered that much had been written. There is an Amish community ten miles south of Hutchinson. Mennonites live in Buhler ten miles northeast, and Mennonites heavily populate the area to the east in cultural centers such as Hesston, Hillsboro, and Newton, Kansas. Many smaller settlements lie to the south and southwest of Hutchinson. Pretty Prairie, one of these communities, is about twenty miles south of Hutchinson.

I discovered the Pretty Prairie Mennonites had a unique history, and only a few local histories had been written. There are many books concerning the Mennonites in general; however, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites had not been studied to the extent that is documented in this paper. Most of the Mennonite histories were written by Mennonite writers. Being Catholic, I have brought an outsiders outlook to Mennonite history. Thus, with the objective perspective of a historian, I have attempted to write the history of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites and their assimilation into American society.



## The Swiss Mennonite Migrations in Europe

The ancestors of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites began their historic migrations in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> They were part of the large Anabaptist emigration from Switzerland. The Mennonites or Anabaptists (as they were called during the Protestant reformation) had the choice of leaving the country or confronting the threat of death at the hands of the Swiss government. Swiss Mennonite migrations continued for approximately two hundred years, eventually taking them to Russia.

The Swiss Mennonites who emigrated to Dakota and Kansas came from the same area in Russia. Earlier, they had been neighbors in Switzerland. During their European migrations, between the Swiss and Russian experiences, the Swiss did not always live in the same place. Beginning in the eighteenth century, after a lengthy stay in France and Germany, this Swiss minority moved three more times before coming to America from Volhynia, Russia in 1874. They had

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1. In this paper, several terms are used to name the Pretty Prairie Mennonites including--Swiss, Swiss Mennonites, Swiss-Volhynians, Russian Mennonites and Dakota Swiss. The term Mennonites is used to name the Pretty Prairie Mennonites specifically, and is used to identify all Mennonites. The reading infers the proper definition. The terms Swiss Palatines and Swiss Galacians deals specifically with the Swiss who lived in the described region, and thus, is distinguished from the Swiss who lived in France.

lived under Austrian, Polish and Russian rule. The migrations occurred because of religious disagreements, economic problems or a combination of the two. The Menonites were constantly seeking a land where they could become economically secure, while practicing their religious and social ideals.

The Anabaptists were a sect of Protestantism, originally known as the Swiss Brethren.<sup>2</sup> Their separation from the reformed Protestants occurred in the sixteenth century because of two Anabaptist principles: strict Biblicism and a church concept of the dualistic world. The Anabaptists believed an individual should follow the Bible more strictly than the Reformed Protestant Church. Their concept of a dualistic world said the state government and state churches belonged to the evil world, or kingdom, "and the new community of regenerated believers belonged to the kingdom of Christ."<sup>3</sup> The state kept order in the evil world. The Anabaptists believed a person should obey the state, but it had no control over the church, or the kingdom of Christ.

This concept had many far-reaching aspects. The term, "Anabaptist," is a label applied to the followers of the

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2. Leo Schelbert, Swiss Migration to America: The Swiss Mennonites (New York: Arno Press, 1980), p. 99.

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

dual kingdom concept because of of their belief that child baptism meant nothing, Anabaptists baptized adults only after a conference in Zurich in 1525. The term, "Mennonite," came into use after 1536, because of the work of Menno Simons of the Netherlands who strengthened the Anabaptist movement in that area.

Another aspect of the dual kingdom concept was that of peaceful non-resistance. Mennonites refused to fight wars of the state because of religious principle. "Christ has forbidden his disciples all resistance in war, revenge, or defense by armed force, having commanded his followers to return good for evil."<sup>4</sup> Mennonites backed this argument with quotations from the Bible, including, "Whomsoever shall smite thee on thy cheek, turn him the other also."<sup>5</sup> Their pacifism caused the Mennonites problems throughout their history. The fear of local communities reacting negatively toward the Mennonites as a result of patriotism and nationalism kept them from feeling secure. Their rejection of military service was a symbol of the Mennonite dissent. As a result, the Mennonites' relationship with state was an uneasy one.

In the years that followed the separation, Mennonites found themselves constantly at odds with the state

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4. Kim Fritzmeier, "A Spiritual Heritage," The Hutchinson News, July 24, 1983.

5. Ibid., citing Matthew 5:39.

government. Religious persecution occurred at various times and in different degrees throughout the seventeenth century. Many Mennonite leaders were burned to death while their families watched. Anabaptists were dragged from their beds at night, tied to poles and told to renounce their beliefs. If they refused, they were burned at the stake, or a dunking chair was used to bring about their deaths. Those who did not change their views were drowned in icy water.<sup>6</sup> Mennonties "suffered every conceivable indignity and torture, and even death."<sup>7</sup>

Mennonites were definitely in the minority. Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed Protestants all disapproved of the Mennonites. Church leaders, who were usually the government leaders as well, did everything they could to encourage Anabaptists to change their views. It became a crime to be Anabaptist, and the punishments varied from mutilation or death to fines or grave warnings.<sup>8</sup>

These types of confrontations continued, as did sporadic emigrations, until the late seventeenth century when increased persecution forced many Mennonites to leave

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6. Tim Stucky, A Chanter (Pretty Prairie, Kansas: Prairie Publications, 1980), pp. 43-44.

7. L. L. Waters, Steel Trails to Santa Fe (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1950), p. 225.

8. Schelbert, Swiss Migration to America: The Swiss Mennonites, p. 114.

Switzerland. The local governments of both Bern and Zurich made a concentrated effort to expel the Mennonites.<sup>9</sup> Ancestors of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites moved to areas in Germany and France. In 1671 about 700 Mennonites fled the Canton of Bern and settled in South Germany in an area called the Palatinate. Other Swiss Mennonites arrived in small numbers to the area as early as 1650. Jost Krehenbuhl (changed to Krehbiel in Germany) was the leader of the Mennonite group in Cezewill, Switzerland. Jost's family name is the only Mennonite name that can be traced unbroken from America back to Switzerland. Other Swiss Mennonite names in Bern were Muller, Kaufman, Schrag, Gering, Stucki, and Zercher (later changed to Zerger in Russia).<sup>10</sup>

The Palatinate at this time was a depopulated, war-torn area of the middle Rhine. The Thirty Years war had destroyed the land. The confiscated church land was put into the hands of the local princes. Prince Karl Ludwig of the Palatinate used the Mennonites to reconstruct the destroyed land.<sup>11</sup> Most of the Swiss settled in Falkenstein

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9. C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), p. 307.

10. Martin Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," Mennonite Life, vol. 9, no. 4, October 1954, pp. 156-158.

11. Walter Kuhn, "Swiss-Galacian Mennonites," Mennonite Life, Vol. 8, No. 1, January, 1953, p. 24.

and Nassau just west of Worms and Mannheim on land leased from the Prince. Other Mennonite villages were started later, including Pfrimmerhof, founded in 1709 by Jost Krehbiel, Potzbach, Albisheim, Ebersheim and Rothenbergerhof.

The Swiss Mennonites were welcomed at first, and Prince Karl tolerated their religion. Later, the welcome wore off. During the eighteenth century persecution and discrimination of Mennonites escalated. They were allowed freedom of worship, but they could not build their own churches; they could not do evangelical work among their neighbors; nor could they have a meeting with more than twenty Mennonites present. Later, Mennonites were denied the right to live in cities, and the government had to approve all marriages.<sup>12</sup> The social gap between the Mennonites and the local people widened. Persecution tied the Mennonite families closer together and closer to their church. Their religious loyalty "convinced them their community was morally superior to that which surrounded them."<sup>13</sup> These beliefs separated the Mennonites further from their neighbors.

In addition to religious persecution, war was another problem the Mennonites faced. In 1688, the army of King

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12. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," p. 158.

13. Stucky, A Chanter, p. 44.

Louis XIV of France proceeded to destroy the Palatinate. The land was again ravaged and burned. About 200 Mennonite families were forced to emigrate. For the next twenty-five years Mennonites would emigrate to colonial America. Even though wars, bad crops, cold summers and emigrations caused hardships, many stayed and some became prosperous.<sup>14</sup>

Important changes took place in the Mennonites' way of life in South Germany. Dairy farming had been the major occupation in Switzerland, but in the Palatinate the Swiss became "pioneers of progressive agriculture."<sup>15</sup> They improved upon crop rotation practices and introduced the use of clovers, potatoes and feedlot practices. The Swiss also began the use of minerals in fertilizer while in the Palatinate. The Mennonites gained a reputation for being very advanced in farming techniques.

The Mennonite stay in the Palatinate affected the lifestyles and everyday routine of the Swiss. The local German dialect modified the Swiss-German language. The Mennonites also picked up some German customs but kept many of their old ways as well.

The Amish split from the Mennonite church affected all Mennonites including those in the Palatinate. The debate began in Switzerland and spread throughout the Mennonite

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14. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, pp. 308-309.

15. Kuhn, "Swiss-Galacian Mennonites," p. 24.

communities. The ancestors of the Swiss-Volhynians who emigrated to Kansas and Dakota took the more conservative Amish viewpoint. "The majority of the Swiss-Volhynian Mennonites are of Amish background."<sup>16</sup>

In 1693, in the Canton of Bern, Jacob Amman of the Emmenthal congregation made an inspection tour of various Swiss congregations and concluded church discipline was too lax. The argument was over the discipline of "avoidance." An unfaithful church member was punished by being denied the right to participate in communion service. Amman said that such members should not "eat" or sleep with their spouses in order to receive the full punishment of "avoidance." This was previously a practice of Menno Simons and therefore, was not new. A schism grew between Amman and his followers, the Amish, and the more conservative Mennonites led by Hans Reist. The Amish beliefs spread rapidly through Switzerland, Palatinate, Alsace and other areas of Mennonite settlement, including part of France. In time the argument spread to other topics such as the types of garments that were deemed inappropriate. The Amish kept the old traditional garb, such as hooks and eyes instead of buttons to fasten

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16. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," p. 158.



jackets, and shoestrings instead of buckles.<sup>17</sup>

Another group of Mennonites had opted to go to France in 1671 instead of southern Germany. The first Mennonites settled in Montbeliard in the early 1700s. These Mennonites suffered some discrimination but were generally tolerated by the French government. They were allowed to have their own cemetery, but they could not build churches. The Mennonites had very good relations with the government, however they aroused the anger and bad feelings of neighbors when they refused to serve in the military.

In France, the Swiss continued the dairy farming practices they had used in Bern. They kept the same Swiss-German dialect and did not assimilate into the local society as much as the Swiss Palatines. Some of the family names on the Montbeliard Church record were Schwartz, Roth, Graber, Gering, Stucky, Flickenger, Rupp, and Sutter.<sup>18</sup> Ancestors of Elder Stucky, who brought many Swiss-Volhynians to Moundridge, Kansas, lived in the Montbeliard

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17. Detailed accounts of the split are found in various sources including Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, pp. 128-131; C. Henry Smith, The Mennonites (Berne, Indiana: Mennonite Book Concern, 1920), pp. 87-89; and Schelbert, Swiss Migration to America: The Swiss Mennonites, pp. 136-139.

18. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," p. 158.

community of original Amish stock.<sup>19</sup>

The Swiss-Mennonites of the Palatinate migrated again in the 1780s to Galacia in Poland. Galacia came under Austrian control in 1772, when it was obtained as a result of the first partition of Poland. Poles populated the western half of the region, and Ukrainians lived in the east. The Ukrainians were very primitive in their agricultural techniques compared to the Mennonites.

The Colonization Charter of 1781 allowed Emperor Joseph II to colonize Galacia. Thousands of Germans began migrating to various sections of the region. These were small and widely separated areas of land, most of which were obtained from monasteries. German Catholics were migrating to Galacia as early as 1774, but the Edict of Toleration of 1781 enabled Lutherans and Reformed Protestants to colonize. When the Mennonites in the Palatinate expressed their need to emigrate, Joseph II accepted their request mainly because of their reputation as experienced farmers.<sup>20</sup>

The Mennonites left their well established homes for financial and religious reasons. In Galacia, they were promised freedom of religion, a ten year tax exemption,

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19. I. G. Neufeld, "Jacob Stucky-Pioneer of Two Continents," Mennonite Life vol. 4, no. 1, January 1949, p. 47.

20. Kuhn, "Swiss-Galacian Mennonites," pp. 24-25.

exemption from the military, thirty to forty acre farms with buildings and other financial inducements. Yet these reasons alone did not lure many prosperous Mennonites. Only about twenty-eight Mennonites emigrated in 1784 and 1786. The Mennonites who were willing to move were probably having financial problems, as they were "all poor or would not have exchanged well-established homes in the Palatinate for the uncertainties of a pioneer experiment."<sup>21</sup>

The Mennonite emigration began in 1784 when six families joined twenty-nine Lutheran families and founded Falkenstein west of Lemberg. Two of these Mennonite families later migrated to Russian Poland. The heads of the families were Peter Krehbiel (grandson of Jost) and John Schrag. In 1786, eighteen Mennonite families and two or three others founded Eisendel, near Falkenstein. Six of these families also migrated to Russian Poland, Heinrich Muller (Miller) from Ebershein, Germany, Jacob Schmitt from Rothenbergerhof, Johann Zerger from Potzbach, Christian Albrecht, Christian Brubaker, and Johan Maurer. Three more families settled the same year in Rosenberg. These three villages, less than fifteen miles from each other, became the center of the Mennonite colony.<sup>22</sup> Sources give

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21. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 324.

22. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," pp. 158-159.

conflicting evidence on the numbers of Mennonites who arrived in Galacia during these years. The communities grew with the arrival of new immigrants and from natural increase.

In Galacia, the Mennonites ran into more trouble with their neighbors. First of all, the Palatines did not automatically receive the freedom of religion they were promised. The government included them in the local Evangelical Parish, located at Dornfield. The government granted the Mennonite's request to practice their religion in 1789 and prohibited the immigration of any more Mennonites.<sup>23</sup> Some Mennonites saw this as a shadow of the persecution that was to come.

The Mennonites soon found themselves in conflict with their neighbors. Prosperity proved to be a problem. Since land was scarce, overpopulation became a new pressure, and the Mennonites were forced to confine their efforts to small plots of land. The Mennonites became wealthier than their Lutheran and Catholic neighbors, because of their farming expertise. These two problems caused tension between the Mennonites and the two groups.<sup>24</sup>

A third problem the Mennonites faced in Galacia was a religious conflict that occurred between the Amish and the

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23. Kuhn, "Swiss-Galacian Mennonites," p. 26.

24. Ibid., p. 26.

Mennonites. Both groups had migrated from the Palatinate, and they chose to live side by side. Arguments arose over leadership roles in the church and clothing standards. These different problems were decisive factors causing ten families previously mentioned, plus Jacob Bergthold of Rosenberg, to emigrate again. The decision was finally made after an invitation of some Hutterite Brethren to join their community, or Bruderhof. The Mennonites left for the northern Ukraine to arrive the next year in the Russian province of Chernigov, near the town, Vishenka.<sup>25</sup>

Around 1790, the Montbeliard group emigrated to Poland in search of a better way of life. They had become dissatisfied with the French community. The Mennonites found it increasingly difficult to live peaceful and happy lives under government and community pressure. Little is known about various settlements and movements of these migrators. A passport that some Montbeliard travelers used to gain entrance to Podilia suggests some of the group may have lived for a while in that province in Russian Poland. The names on the passport are "Moses Gering, Johann Graber, Johann Lichti, Peter Kaufman, with Elisabeth Graber, his wife, and Anna Rothe."<sup>26</sup> Other Mennonites may have accompanied them or, perhaps, may have gone somewhere else

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<sup>25</sup>. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," p. 159.

<sup>26</sup>. Ibid., p. 157.

in Poland. Elder Christian Stucky's family may have migrated directly to Urzulin, Poland in 1790, then on to Michelsdorf, Poland in 1797.<sup>27</sup>

It is believed that sometime between 1795-1800, the entire Monbeliard group settled in two Polish villages. Michelsdorf was near Warsaw and the other village, Urzulin, was about forty miles northeast of Lublin. They may have settled in these areas to get a better market for their Swiss dairy products. A list of names of the Michelsdorf settlement contain both Swiss and South German names--Albrecht, Bergthold, Flickenger, Graber, Gering, Gordia, Hubin, Hetinger, Kaufman, Maurer, Ratzloff, Roth, Sutter, and Zuch. The migrations of the South German Mennonites are just as sketchy as those of the Swiss Mennonites. Some Lutheran family names were added to the group at this time--Senner, Schwartz, and Wolkert.<sup>28</sup>

Michelsdorf was located on poor soil, and the group moved again to a large uncultivated area in the Russian province, Volhynia. Volhynia had become a Russian province after the third partition of Poland in 1795. The Swiss settled on the estate of Prince Lubansky, who sponsored the move, and the village of Eduardsdorf was founded in 1807.

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27. Neufeld, "Jacob Stucky-Pioneer of Two Continents," p. 47.

28. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," p. 160.

It was not until the years 1815-1816 that any substantial number of Mennonites migrated to this Russian province. Elder Christian Stucky of the Michelsdorf Mennonite Church emigrated with others of his congregation to Eduardsdorf at this time.<sup>29</sup> The remaining Swiss Mennonites migrated from Poland to Horodisch in 1837, after the failure of the Polish insurrection of 1830-1831, joining the mass emigration from that country.<sup>30</sup>

Polish nobles such as Lubansky used the Mennonites to cultivate their land because of their reputation as farmers. The native rural population of Volhynia was sparse and consisted of a few Ukrainians, who were not yet practicing the advanced farm techniques that the Germans and Mennonites used.<sup>31</sup>

Many Mennonites from various parts of Europe already lived in Russia as a result of Catharine II's invitation in 1786. In order to populate newly acquired land in the Ukraine, Catharine of Russia had issued a document inviting Germans to settle in the territory. They were promised

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29. Neufeld, "Jacob Stucky-Pioneer of Two Continents," p. 47.

30. This information is compiled from two sources: Mennonite Encyclopedia vol. IV. "Volhynia," p. 845.; and Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Background," pp. 159-160.

31. J. Neale Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, vol. 1 (1962), vol. 2 & 3 (1974) (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press), 3:177.

free land and complete religious and political freedom for a hundred years.

The Swiss Mennonites living in Chernigov found it increasingly hard to adapt to the Hutterite way of life. Hutterite religious and social customs were too difficult for the Swiss to adjust to. It is estimated that their stay was as short as one year, but the Hutterite name Waltner was added to the Swiss group. It is uncertain where the group went after their departure from Chernigov. A few families headed to Michelsdorf, Poland, and some joined a Prussian Mennonite settlement at Michalin in the province of Kiev, Russia. A Wedel boy married into the Swiss group during their stay with the Prussians. The Swiss Galacians who went to Michelsdorf from Chernigov ended up in Volhynia when the Mennonites there went to Eduardsdorf. Some of the names of this group match with the previously mentioned names of those living in Michelsdorf--Krehbiel, Schrag, Rupp, Stuckey, Kaufman, Flickenger, Miller, Graber, and Gering. These were all of the same group who had once lived in Galacia.<sup>32</sup>

Both the Prussians and the Swiss Galacians living in Michalin ran into problems with the local government over land contracts and taxes. When these problems escalated,

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32. C. Henry Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites (Berne, Indiana: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), p. 28.



the group emigrated to Volhynia. The Swiss Mennonites arrived in 1802 and inhabited the village of Berezhina on the land of Prince Lubansky, while the Prussians settled near Ostrog. Berezhina was located one mile north of Dubno which is northwest of Ostrog. Because of the building of a dam, the group had to move from Berezhina or be flooded out. They migrated two miles away to Vigansky. The founding of Eduardsdorf a few miles away and the subsequent arrival of the Mennonites from Michelsdorf led to a remerging of the two groups from Montbeliard, France and the Palatinate. Some Michelsdorf colonists settled to the east at nearby Horodisch in 1837. The same year Mennonite families settled in nearby Bereza, Alt-Kolowert, Dossidorf, Zahara, and Waldheim, where they built a church.<sup>33</sup>

Some Mennonites moved again after Czar Alexander II of Russian emancipated the serfs in 1860. One of the things the Emancipation Code did was to make large quantities of land available at reasonable prices. By that time, there was a scarcity of land in the Eduardsdorf area, and most of the settlement moved a hundred miles east to Kotosufka and Neumanofka. The Swiss built a church between the two villages. This became the center of new community, which took the name, Kotosufka, and the two former villages

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33. Mennonite Encyclopedia, "Volhynia," pp. 845-846.; and Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," pp. 159-160.

disappeared. Those near Dubno at Vigansky, who did not migrate east, settled in the villages of Hecker, Goritt and Futton. The church was located at Zahoriz. By the 1860s there were four major Mennonite centers in Volhynia: Horodisch, Waldheim, Kotosufka and Zahoriz.<sup>34</sup> The Volhynia Mennonite population consisted of the Swiss who had emigrated from Bern to the Palatinate and France in the seventeenth century. (see map 1)

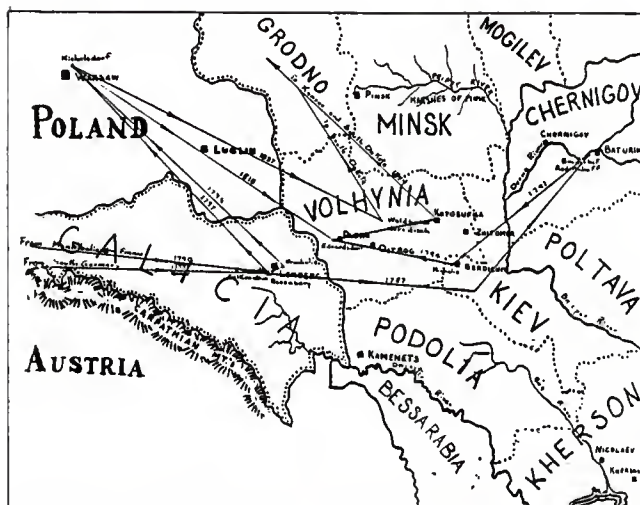
During their stay in Volhynia new names were added to the Mennonite communities. In addition to the Swiss Mennonites previously mentioned as living in Russia, are the names--Albrecht, Flinger, Schwartz, Stucky, Sutter, and Zerger. Some non-Mennonites were converted and joined the church. For example, just before moving to America, David Dirks and Friedrich Ortman joined the "Stucky Church" at Kotosufka. Other names were added through Mennonite intermarriage with non-Mennonite Germans possessing names such as Prieheim, Ries, Straus, Wedel, Voran and Waltner.<sup>35</sup>

The villages in Volhynia usually contained thirty to forty families. Each of the larger villages had a church. During the various migrations in Volhynia, the Swiss Mennonites managed to keep some of their traditional ways, and the German influence was retained as well. Generally,

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34. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," pp. 159-160.

35. Ibid., pp. 159-160.



Map 1-Migration of Swiss-Volhynian Mennonites in Europe, 1773-1874, from Schrag, Martin, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," Mennonite Life, vol. 9, no. 4, October, 1954, p. 159.

the barn and the house were under one roof in early years of a Mennonite settlement. Sometimes two families would share a house. As the economic situation got better, more buildings were added. The Mennonite homes were made from lumber cut from the surrounding forests. Their homes were built far enough apart so that gardens, orchards, and flowerbeds surrounded each. The Mennonite village was usually surrounded by a row of trees or hedges. The church and school were at the center of each community. This became the center of activity for the villagers. The homes were all built in a similar simple style. Only the size varied.

The small farms the Mennonites used were usually rented. For example, in Eduardsdorf the land was rented or leased for twenty-five year periods. In larger villages the land was often rented by a group, and then divided among church members. The economic status varied from family to family in Volhynia. When the Swiss first arrived, they were poor, but through hard work and determination the Mennonites became well off, and some even became rich. Most Mennonites owned one farm or "Hof." The wealthier had two farms, and the less fortunate possessed one half of a farm. The land was owned in the villages, Waldheim and Kotosufka. This was the first time many of the Mennonites or their ancestors before them ever had the privilege of land ownership.

Most Mennonites made their living dairying or small farming, however, there were blacksmiths, weavers, and carpenters as well. The well-wooded land was not fertile enough to produce high yields, and primitive tools were used. At first, all the plows and harrows were entirely made from wood. Later, an iron point was attached to the plow and the harrow had metal spikes. The average family did the field work with two or three horses, although the wealthier often owned a few more. The dairy cows averaged five per family, and the very rich had as many as ten. All the animals grazed on the same pastureland, which everyone could use. A cowherder watched the herd.<sup>36</sup>

Actually, only a small portion of the crops were sold. The entire family took part in the harvesting of the various grains--rye, wheat, buckwheat, oats, millet, and flax. The Mennonites also grew potatoes. After the harvest, which lasted several weeks, the grain was thrashed. The Mennonites built their own buildings, furniture and tools from the woods in the area. They made their own clothing at home, but in later years it was purchased in town.<sup>37</sup> The Mennonites were finding prosperity and religious happiness in Volhynia. "For the first time Mennonites were encouraged to expand their

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36. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," p. 161.

37. Ibid., p. 161.

settlement and practice their religious beliefs according to their consciences."<sup>38</sup>

When a community was first established, church meetings were held at homes, but in larger towns churches were built. The church was run by a council called the Vorstand, consisting of elders, ministers, deacons and "Vorsanger," who were responsible for intoning the hymns sung without musical accompaniment. Church members voted to fill vacancies. The Mennonites practiced strict and harsh church discipline. They were all of original Amish stock, and many still were practicing these beliefs when they first colonized Russia. Before they emigrated to America, they lost some distinct Amish characteristics. Clothing hooks and eyes, for example, had been done away with.<sup>39</sup>

Education of the Mennonites was difficult due to the many obstacles they faced. The continuous moving made it hard for the Mennonite youth to have a stable formal education. The countries the Mennonites lived in often spoke different languages, which hindered effective education. Children worked at home and often missed school, especially during harvest season. This was

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38. Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites, p. 31.

39. This information is compiled from two sources: Smith, The Coming of the Mennonites, p. 148; and Mennonite Encyclopedia, "Volhynia," p. 846.

typical of all rural children of the time. Also, some Mennonite parents had an unfavorable attitude toward school. Parents would just as soon keep the children at home to work, and teach them what the parents thought was necessary.<sup>40</sup>

The Mennonites found they must teach the children themselves. The Church supervised the operation of the schools in Volhynia, and the preacher was usually the teacher. All children, ages seven to fifteen, attended the elementary level of school only. The children were not advanced by grades, but by their individual progress. At first, the only subjects taught were the Bible, arithmetic, reading, writing and catechism. The language of instruction was a Southern German dialect which was common in the Palatinate. In 1871, the Russian government began to take a more active role in the Mennonite educational system. It became mandatory that the Mennonite children were taught the Russian language. The Mennonite school council improved the curriculum to suit the government. New subjects taught were history, geometry, Russian, nature study and singing.<sup>41</sup>

The Mennonites' way of life in Volhynia separated them

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40. Schrag, "The Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite Background," p. 161.

41. D. P. Enns, "Education in Russia," Mennonite Life, vol 6, no. 3, July 1951, pp. 28-29.

from the outside world. A combination of a Swiss and South German culture survived a constant emigration process and grew for a short time in the isolated communities in Galacia, Poland, and Russia. The Volhynian villages were separated from the native Ukrainians by language and a culture, which they transplanted to Kansas and South Dakota.

These neighbors had been divided in two groups when they emigrated from their homeland in Bern, Switzerland. The descendants of these Swiss were reunited in Volhynia. They continued migrating due to economic, religious and social problems that plagued them. The Mennonites believed that in Russia, they would find peace.



## II

### The Swiss Mennonite Emigration From Volhynia, Russia to Dakota Territory, U.S.A.

Swiss Mennonites lived Volhynia as early as 1802. Immigration continued until 1837. The population grew large enough to support four congregations--Horodisch, Waldheim, Zahoriz and Kotosufka. The Swiss had migrated as many as five times since their departure from Germany and France in the eighteenth century. They looked to their community and religion to guide them through the uncertainties of migration, religious persecution, economic stress and conflict with governments. After becoming well established in Volhynia, the Swiss Mennonites once again were forced to choose emigration.

In 1874 the Swiss-Volhynians migrated to America. The move consisted of almost the entire Mennonite group. Out of the four congregations only seven families remained after the summer of 1874. In Russia, the Mennonites felt more secure and were making economic progress. They sacrificed their hard won homes to travel across the Atlantic to a place they knew little about. A new frontier with many dangers became their home. The move was not sudden, but well planned and thought out. It took much time and prayer for the Mennonites to make the decision to emigrate.

The decision was brought about by political, religious,

and economic pressures, However, the basic reason the Mennonites chose emigration was the same as in the European migration--to search for a place where they could live as they believed. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the Swiss came to believe their way of life was threatened. The spread of nationalism in Europe caused much of the fear. The growth of nationalism was brought to light with the "revolt of the Polish Russians in 1863, the emergence of Prussian militarism," and "the ambitious designs against the Turkish government" by Russia.<sup>42</sup> The growth of nationalism made many people believe the day of Russification of all people living within the boundaries of Russia had arrived.

The social and political isolation of the Mennonites and other German-speaking settlers in Russia created some negative reactions from the Russian natives, especially since these outsiders had more privileges than the average Russian as a result of Catherine II's generous colonization grants of 1786. The Mennonites had more success than most of the other German-speaking settlers. They were similar in not marrying natives, in their refusal to bear arms to defend Russia or participate in civil government and in maintaining German culture. All these things created ill

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42. C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1956), p. 440.

feelings among the Russian neighbors. They put pressure on the government to withdraw the privileges the German-speaking settlers were promised.

When the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, Russia informed the government of the North German Confederation that it would remain neutral if Germany agreed to certain conditions. One condition stated that German guardianship over Germans living in Russia and still maintaining German or Prussian citizenship would end. Bismark, Chancellor of the North German Confederation, compromised by adding that the Germans would have ten years to emigrate or become Russian citizens. By agreeing to this, the Czar did not break Catharine's promises the years before the privileges expired.<sup>43</sup> This satisfied the Russian people, who now believed special privileges for German-speaking settlers were revoked.

In 1870 Czar Alexander issued a mandate proclaiming all special privileges had ended for German colonists. Neither the Mennonites nor the other German-speaking settlers were informed of this. Mennonites, in general were not concerned with politics and did not read newspapers. It was only due to rumors that the news gradually reached the German colonies. Settlers there, many second or third

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43. Victor C. Seibert, "History of the Kansas Mennonites with a Study of Their European Back[g]round," M.A. Thesis, Fort Hays Kansas State College, 1983, p. 33.

generation Russian-born, heard that they were to be subject to military service. The years 1871-1874 became years of unrest, worry and anxiety in all these colonies and in particular for the Volhynians. Soon after hearing the rumors, the Swiss met at Ostrog to talk about the problem. It was decided that Elder Jacob Stucky of Kotosufka and Elder Tobius Unruh, a Prussian Mennonite from Ostrog, were to go to St. Petersburg to see if the privileges had indeed been revoked. Fearing the worst, they had instructions to try to obtain a more lenient mandate. They worked hard, never got to see the Czar and accomplished little. They left knowing there were definitely going to be some changes and feeling that their religious freedom was in jeopardy. On their return to Ostrog an official gave them more information and told them they would become subject to military and civil duty.<sup>44</sup> Other German communities also sent representatives to St. Petersburg to try to convince the government to alter its views, and they met with similar results. The Czar eventually agreed that the pacifist Mennonites could do labor work in forestry and shipbuilding, or they could do sanitary work on the battlefield or in a hospital, in place of military service. This did not satisfy most of the Mennonites, as this work

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44. P. P. Wedel, A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites Who Migrated from Wolhynien, Russia to America and Settled in Kansas in 1874, " Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin B. J. Goering, 1960, pp. 37-38.

was still linked to the military.<sup>45</sup>

There was a good reason to fear the Russian military. The thought of compromising their religious beliefs by bearing arms seemed terrible to the Swiss Mennonites, but there was more to it than that. Enlistment in the Russian army was very brutal for the soldier. He was subject to twenty-five years of cruel and disciplined conditioning. Parents feared the loss of their sons, carted away from home for such a long period, especially under these conditions.

For the Mennonites the cause of emigration cannot be placed solely on the fear and religious avoidance of military service. Some Mennonites living in urban areas gave up the principle of non-resistance, and thus the religious aspect was not a consideration for them. There were other laws that were passed and other events that occurred that led the Mennonites to decide on emigration.

The goal of the 1870 mandate was Russification of all people in the Russian Empire. This meant they must speak Russian and have the same rights and privileges as a Russian citizen. In 1871 the government took control of the Mennonite schools. The Russian language was to replace German. The Fursorge-Komitee at Odessa was a board of trustees appointed by the government to supervise the

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45. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 252.

political and economic life of the colonists. As a result of the new education law, the Fursorge-Komitee was abolished, and the colonies were directly governed from St. Petersburg. The Mennonite communities were self-sufficient, but under the new legislation the communities and schools became directly responsible to the central government. The language, culture, customs and loyalties to their fatherland were now to be thoroughly Russianized. The Russian Orthodox Church controlled the Russian parochial schools and had a voice in governing the government primary schools. The Mennonites feared the loss of religious liberty. As mentioned earlier, the Mennonites did adapt their curriculum to satisfy the government. Other severe measures and regulations, such as taxes, were later imposed on socialists, Communists and religious organizations, including Mennonites.<sup>46</sup>

These political and religious issues were secondary to the major reason for emigration: economics.<sup>47</sup> Although the Mennonites formed well-established communities, they achieved limited economic progress during their short stay in Volhynia. However, they were more successful than other settlers. Some of the area had poor soil, and the

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46. Seibert, "History of Kansas Mennonites," p. 34.

47. J. Neale Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, vol. 1 (1962), vol. 2 & 3 (1974). (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press), 3:2.

primitive farming techniques used there proved to be an economic disadvantage. While they were beginning to prosper, repeated migrations kept them from accumulating great wealth. It was only in the latter years at Waldheim and Kotosufka that they owned their own land.<sup>48</sup>

The wars and revolutions in Europe previous to the Mennonite emigration had caused an economic crisis in the area. In addition, the crop failures between the years 1871-1873 made emigration seem like the only solution to solving the many problems the Swiss Volhynians faced.

Mennonite historians claim that economic hardship was only of secondary importance because not only the poor left, but the rich as well. They argue that they migrated searching for "eternal values" through "divine guidance."<sup>49</sup> "Our forefathers migrated because they put God and his Kingdom first place and their religious convictions in first place."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, economics and political persecution appear to be the major factors for emigration.

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48. Mennonite Encyclopedia, 4 vols. "Volhynia" (Hillsboro, Kansas: Mennonite Brethern Publishing House, 1955), p. 846.

49. David V. Weibe, They Seek a Country (Hillsboro, Kansas: The Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1959), p. 13.

50. Menno Kaufman, "Reflections from the Past," in Addresses and Other Items of Interest Connected with the 75th Anniversary Services of the Swiss Mennonites Held on September 5, 1949, ed. Harley J. Stucky (North Newton, Kansas: 1950) p. 37.

"It is not a fear of military service, but a simple desire to better their conditions that drives young men to emigrate."<sup>51</sup>

Many people feared the the experience of having to emigrate once again, but there were few alternatives. The Mennonites put off emigration as long as they could, always hoping for an act of grace. They often prayed and had meetings as often as two or three times a day over the subject. They came up with several choices for possible destinations--Australia, North America, South America, Africa, Siberia and Turkey. Most of the Swiss-Volhynians believed North America was the best choice. Cornelius Jansen was partially responsible for the favoritism toward America.

Jansen was originally from Prussia and had not given up his Prussian citizenship upon immigration to Russia. He was a Prussian consul at Berdiansk and thus, unlike other Mennonites, kept more informed about world affairs. When the Russification mandate was instituted, he began contacting Mennonite leaders in America such as John F. Funk, editor of the Herald of Truth, to obtain information concerning probable territory open for colonization. Christian Krehbiel, a Swiss Mennonite who emigrated to

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51. Seibert, "History of Kansas Mennonites," p. 39, citing Edith Abbott, Historical Aspects of the Emigration Problem, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), p. 148.



America from Bavaria in 1851, and Peter Weibe from Russia also provided Jansen with information. Upon obtaining the information, he published several books and pamphlets and distributed them to the various Mennonite communities in Russia, including the Swiss-Volhynians.<sup>52</sup> He kept in constant contact with the Volhynians informing them on decisions of other Mennonite communities and advised them to emigrate to America. Jansen was exiled in 1873 and settled in Pennsylvania. He had been accused of organizing a mass emigration movement in Russia.

Various railroad companies also sent fliers, pamphlets, and sometimes representatives to Russia with the intention of persuading the Mennonites to settle on land the companies needed to sell. The Santa Fe Railway Company convinced many Mennonites to migrate to Kansas with German-language fliers such as; Railroad Lands in Central and Southwestern Kansas on Eleven Year Credit, published in 1873 and 500,000 Acres of the Best Farming and Fruit Lands, published in 1874.<sup>53</sup> Prospective buyers in Europe whose names were obtained from immigrant aid societies and other organizations in America received these materials.<sup>54</sup>

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52. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 444.

53. Thelma Jean Curl, "Promotional Efforts of the Kansas Pacific and Santa Fe to Settle Kansas," M.A. Thesis, University of Kansas, 1960, pp. 96-100.

54. James Marshall, Santa Fe, The Railroad that Built an Empire (New York: Random House, 1945), p. 82.

Through rumors and the printed material, Mennonites learned many things about America. There was a high level of wages; there was cheap land; gold was discovered; american manufacturers were raising their prices; many new shipping companies were organized; and transportation prices were going down. They discovered that societies had been organized for the purpose of assisting emigrants, both those in Europe and those already in America. They also heard rumors of savages inhabiting the western frontier.<sup>55</sup> Some Mennonites began to believe that America was filled with evils. Jansen pointed out to them America was a haven for lawbreakers and a refuge for those persecuted for their faith. Even with the bad points, America became the first choice for many Mennonites. The information they received gave them a ray of hope that America was the promised land.<sup>56</sup>

Meanwhile the Volhynian Mennonites heard that some South Russian Mennonite scouts were going to America to investigate the possible areas to settle. The Swiss-Volhynians selected Andreas Schrag to represent them on the trip, and Elder Tobius Unruh represented the Ostrog congregation. They joined with ten other men to make up the Mennonite delegation. However, they divided into three

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55. Seibert, "History of Kansas Mennonites", p. 38; Kaufman, "Reflections from the Past," p. 21.

56. Seibert, "History of Kansas Mennonites," p. 50.

groups after they discovered their interests were different. Schrag and Unruh joined two men from South Russia, Jacob Buller from Alexanderwohl in the Molotschna colony and Leonhard Suderman of Berdiansk.

This group left in mid-April, 1873, and preceded to pick up Wilhelm Ewert, the delegate from a Mennonite colony in Western Prussia. They arrived in New York on May 22 and headed west, stopping off to visit the Mennonites in Pennsylvania. After passing through Elkart, Indiana, and Chicago, they met up with the two other groups on June 9 at Fargo, Dakota Territory, which was the head of navigation on the Red River. Here the groups met the representatives of various railroad companies, who were accompanied by John F. Funk from Elkart, William Hespeler, a representative from the Canadian government, and Jacob Y. Schantz, who represented the Ontario Mennonites.

The delegation was interested in the cheap land that was offered in an area that extended from Winnipeg, Manitoba south through Minnesota, Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Texas. After inspecting the area around Fargo, the group was first taken to Manitoba, which they toured until some of them decided it was not suitable for the needs of their constituents. Ewert pointed out there were too many grasshoppers, the land was too wet, and it was too cold. Five delegates from South Russia found Canada agreeable and decided to settle there. On July 6 the rest of the

delegation arrived back in Fargo, and after a few days rest explored to the south and west of the town. The group was very impressed with the rich soil and abundance of flowers and fruits in the area. On July 16 the seven remaining delegates began investigating Minnesota. The legislature there passed a resolution saying they welcomed Mennonites to live in their state. They found rich soil and cheap land in the areas they visited and were impressed with what they saw. After a week the Mennonites went to Nebraska but were not impressed with what they found. The land was sandy and hilly, there were few settlements and there was a scarcity of water, which meant deep wells needed to be dug.

This was the end of the tour, and the delegates began to head back to New York. Unruh along with the Hutterite representatives, Paul and Lawrence Tschetter, went via Elkart, Indiana, while Suderman, Schrag and Schantz spent a few days in Summerfield, Illinois and then proceeded to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Buller and Ewert joined another delegation led by Christian Krehbiel, on a tour through Kansas and Texas. All the Russian delegates met in New York on August 20 and returned to Russia.<sup>57</sup>

The delegation investigated the soil, laws, religion,

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57. Wedel, "A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites," p. 39; C. Henry Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites (Berne, Indiana: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), pp. 51-65; Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, pp. 447-449.

schools and especially the military requirements in every region they visited. Through the association with American Mennonite leaders, Suderman became convinced that they had nothing to fear in America and were going to be able to practice their beliefs as they wished, 'including refusal to serve in the military. Some of the delegates were not as convinced. Paul and Lawrence Tschetter petitioned President Grant to let them be free from military service for fifty years, and after that the Mennonites would agree to pay money. Grant claimed it was out of his hands, and it was the states' decision. He comforted them by saying the United States would not need them anyway because he expected the U.S. would not enter any wars within the next fifty years.<sup>58</sup>

Kansas, with the encouragement of German-speaking C. B. Schmidt, immigration representative of the Santa Fe Railway Company, passed a law on March 10, 1874 with the hope it would draw Mennonites to the state. The law stated a conscientious objector must file a petition stating he was a conscientious objector on or before May 1 of every year.<sup>59</sup> Although a petition failed at the national level,

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58. Seibert, "History of Kansas Mennonites," p. 54.

59. Ibid., p. 55; C. B. Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work," address presented at the 4th Annual Convention of the Colorado State Realty Association, Colorado Springs, Colorado, June 20-23, 1905, p. 15.

similar laws were passed in Minnesota, Nebraska, and Dakota territory. Jansen believed that the Mennonites had little to fear since the United States did not have a peacetime draft.<sup>60</sup>

The delegates in Schrag's group decided to report to their constituents that all lands were acceptable except Manitoba. They all agreed that there was cheap land available all along the frontier in unlimited amounts beyond the needs of the Mennonite Brethren. The delegates of the poorer communities favored the Dakota territory due to the cheap government land available rather than the more expensive railroad land. "The Tschetters, Schrag, and Unruh seemed fully settled on a region around Fargo and the Red River valley."<sup>61</sup> Schrag also showed some interest in a section of land near Pembina on the Canadian border in Dakota territory. Suderman stated no preference on location, but decided to emigrate to America. Suderman's point of view was changed by his journey. Before the trip he believed America was only for adventurers and criminals.<sup>62</sup> Ewert was also impressed with Dakota

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60. Eduard Reimer Gustav and G. R. Gaeddert, Exiled By the Czar: Corelius Jansen and the Great Mennonite Migration, 1874 (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1956), p. 97.

61. Smith, Coming of the Russian Mennonites, p. 65.

62. Wedel, "A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites," p. 39.

territory, yet he, Suderman and Buller later settled in Kansas.

When Schrag returned and reported to the Swiss-Volhynians, they made their decision. Each congregation took the favorable report and decided itself. "The whole matter was earnestly and prayerfully considered."<sup>63</sup> All the Swiss congregations decided to emigrate to North America.

Preparations for emigration began immediately and there were many problems. Land had to be sold or leased, and personal possessions had to be sold as well. The entire villages of Waldheim and Kotosufka were for sale, including livestock, real estate and personal property. In Horodisch only buildings and livestock were for sale because the land was rented. These people were poor and did not own their own land. Some land was controlled by the Czar, and according to the original land grant it could only be transferred to other Mennonites, thus the right to use the land was sold. Landowners wanted to sell, but there was no one who wanted to buy. John Waltner and Peter Goering spread the word on the sale. They traveled west as far as Bohemia advertising these items. Because of the low marketability of the land, much of it was sold at a very low price. The furniture that was not sold was either

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63. Gustav and Gaeddert, Exiled By the Czar, p. 42.

destroyed or taken to America along with other movable property. Buyers began arriving in winter and spring, and all the land was sold by July 1874. German Lutherans, for the most part, bought the villages. Financial discouragements did not stop the Swiss-Volhynian's emigration plans.<sup>64</sup>

The next step was to obtain passports. Often this was a long and drawn-out process that proved tedious and frustrating. A passport committee was formed by election which consisted of Jacob Wedel, Andreas Goering and Julius Fosz, a Lutheran. These men could speak Russian and knew the proper legal procedures, and yet a lawyer was hired at great expense to deal with the corrupt government officials, who were bought off to speed up the process. Sometimes it took months to obtain a passport after a request was filed. The government did not want the colonists to leave and provided many obstacles in order to persuade them to stay. The Mennonites had to write a petition to their governor stating when they had come to Russia, what religion they were, what special privileges they had obtained to date, why they wanted to leave and the name and addresses of those leaving. The passports finally

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64. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, pp. 449-450; Jonas A. Stucky, Epochs of History of First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie, Kansas, 1884-1954, (Pretty Prairie, Kansas: First Mennonite Church, 1955), pp. 7-8.



arrived in the spring of 1874 at an average cost of fifty dollars per family.<sup>65</sup>

Tickets were more of a problem because of the high price, about eighty dollars per person. Most of the well-to-do paid the passage for those who could not afford it. Many Swiss-Volhynians were too poor and asked for money from Mennonite aid societies. These committees were formed by men such as Christian Kreibel, John F. Funk and other American Mennonite leaders for the purpose of collecting money for the emigrants in need. Jacob Stuckey pleaded for help for his congregation by writing letters that were published in the Friedensbote, a Pennsylvania Mennonite journal. He stated that more than one half of the one hundred fifty-nine families needed aid.<sup>66</sup> Andreas Schrag brought a petition upon his arrival appealing for financial aid to help finance the Swiss-Volhynian emigration. The Swiss requested a loan of about six to eight thousand dollars.<sup>67</sup>

Those who borrowed money agreed to work in Illinois and

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65. Smith, Coming of the Russian Mennonites, p. 93; Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 450; Wedel, "A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites," pp. 40-41.

66. Smith, Coming of the Russian Mennonites, p. 100.

67. Cornelius Krahn, ed., From the Steppes to the Prairies, (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1949), p. 76, citing Herald of Truth X, July, 1873.

other eastern states to pay back their debt. The Mennonite publication, Herald of Truth, announced:

Satisfactory arrangements have been made with the Inman Steamship Company to bring the Russian Mennonites from Hamburg to New York. The fare for those who have not the means to pay their own passage will be paid in New York upon their arrival by the committees appointed for that purpose. Those having their own means will pay their passage directly at Hamburg.<sup>68</sup> Some propose to start immediately after Easter.

By now the Russian government feared it would lose some forty thousand of its most industrious farmers. More lenient military restrictions were mandated if the Mennonites chose to remain. Also, the government tried to persuade the colonists to stay by pointing out the negative aspects of living in America. The new attitude convinced a few, but the majority went ahead with their plans.<sup>69</sup>

In 1874 four groups consisting of 159 families left Volhynia for America. The Zahoriz congregation made up the first two groups. Andreas Schrag and ten other families left from the villages of Zahoriz and Futter on April 10. This advance group had established themselves in the Dakota territory by the time the other congregations arrived.

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68. Clarence Hiebert, ed., Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need, A Scrapbook About Mennonite Immigrants From Russia, 1870-1885 (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1974), p. 122, reprint of Herald of Truth, April, 1874.

69. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, pp. 450-453.

These Mennonites were probably more well-to-do than the others and could afford to leave at an earlier date.<sup>70</sup> The rest of the Zahoriz congregation from the villages of Gorrit and Hecker left shortly after Schrag's departure.

The third group of Swiss-Volhynians left the villages of Horodisch and Waldheim in early July and settled near the previous two groups in Dakota Territory. This group consisted of fifty-three families lead by Reverend Peter Kaufman, Christopher Schrag and Christian Kaufman.

The fourth and largest group did not leave until August 6. Elder Jacob Stucky led the seventy-three family Kotosufka congregation to America. The entire congregation emigrated except for Peter and Magdalena Graber and a total of six remained in the other three. Most of the Stucky group settled in Kansas, but some went to Dakota where some of their close relatives were located.

The departure was an emotional event for the Mennonites. The thought of moving to America caused the emigrants to experience fear and sadness. They actually knew very little about the geography of the new land, and this added to their fear of the unknown. There were many unsolved problems such as unsold property and lack of funds. This built the tension and anxiety. Naturally, many still did not want to leave, and there was a lot of

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70. Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas 3:142.

crying on the day of departure. "The thought, to leave the old home forever was almost unbearable." It was "almost impossible to comfort them."<sup>71</sup> The pain of separation was too great for many as they were leaving behind the fruits of their hard labor. Russian farmers, neighbors and friends wished them well on their journey. As they left Russia they sadly said, "Farewell dear fatherland, farewell to all we know."<sup>72</sup>

The first three groups followed the same route through Europe. They left on a train from Slavuti, but the Kotosufka congregation traveled two days to the station at Stolbanow. The Mennonites then traveled by train through Austria and into Breslaw, Germany (now in Poland). The Kotosufka Mennonites had to stay in Lemburg, Austria, for two days.<sup>73</sup>

The Stucky congregation faced many problems on the journey through Germany. They had many long waits in various cities. At these stops they heard rumors of scalping Indians, robbers and the scum of society lived in America. During the layovers people were sometimes misplaced and not seen again. The fear and anxiety

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71. Wedel, "A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites," p. 48.

72. Ibid., p. 50.

73. Ibid., p. 50; Graber, "The Swiss-Mennonites - Pretty Prairie," Mennonite Life vol. 5, no. 2, April 1950, p. 30.

heightened with the outbreak of quarreling. Some argued they should have stayed to die rather than go any further on the journey. The train conditions were uncomfortable because of the overcrowding of third class transportation.

All of the groups departed Europe from Hamburg, Germany, and sailed to Hull, England. The Kotosufka congregation had to walk as a group all the way across the British Isle to their departure point, Liverpool. The other groups had the financial means to travel by train. Schrag's advance group of fifty-two persons arrived in New York on May 18 via the S. S. City of Richmond. Names on the ship's log include Muller, Waldner, Schwartz, Hepner and Schaff.

The Horodisch and Waldheim congregations arrived in New York on August 24 aboard the S. S. City of Chester. Names on the ship's log include Kaufman, Schrag, Graber, Preheim, Gering, Stucky, Albrecht, Schwarz, Krehbiel and others.<sup>74</sup>

The Kotosufka group landed in New York on September 3 aboard the ship the S. S. City of Richmond. The majority of sources claim this group arrived on this date. However, the ship's log states they arrived on August 31st. Names on the log include Schrag, Kaufman, Strauss, Schwarz, Waldner, Penner, Stucki, Albrecht, Wedel, Flickner, Voran,

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74. Hiebert, Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need, p. 167, reprint of the ships log of the S. S. City of Chester; Wedel, "A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites, p. 41.

Grabner and Krehbiel.<sup>75</sup> They had a pleasant trip that was stormy only one day. Some discomforts did exist because of seasickness and overcrowding of the cheaper section they occupied.<sup>76</sup>

The decision to emigrate was a tough one. It was based on economic insecurity, as well as political and religious persecution. Although the military conscription law is sometimes used as the major reason for Mennonite emigration, it is only a secondary reason. Most Mennonites were satisfied with the liberal changes the government made concerning military exemption. However, a strong minority believed emigration was better than compromising their conscience.<sup>77</sup>

So the Swiss-Volhynians packed all they could and the rest was destroyed, sold or discarded. Many had carved a home out of the war-torn Palatinate; all had carved one out of the forests of Volhynia. Once again the Swiss Mennonites' desire to live as they wished forced them from their home. This time they were leaving Europe, the continent of their origin, crossing the Atlantic, to carve

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75. Hiebert, Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need, p. 172, reprint of the ships log of the S. S. City of Richmond; Wedel, "A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites", p. 56.

76. Wedel, "A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites," p. 56.

77. Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, p. 252.

their new home out of the wilderness of the American frontier.

### III

#### The Swiss-Volhynians in the Dakota Territory

In 1874 the Swiss-Volhynian Mennonites immigrated to the United States. The emigration process they went through in Europe was filled with barriers and hardships that caused frustration and fear among the Swiss. They turned to their religion and brethren to guide them on the journey. By traveling together they gained a sense of security that enabled them to face the dangers of the American frontier.

The Mennonite congregations came in four groups. The first two from Zahoriz, left Volhynia in late April. The Waldheim and Horodisch settlements left in July, while the Kotosufka congregation did not leave Russia until August.

Most of the Swiss-Volhynians settled in the southeastern corner of the Dakota territory. The first decade in America was filled with many hardships. The Swiss were forced to make psychological and moral adjustments to survive the difficulties. At the end of this period about thirty families decided to emigrate once again to Kansas, where many of their brethren from Kotosufka had settled. For these people, the Dakota hardships were too much to endure any longer.

Andreas Schrag's advanced group faced no severe problems on their journey to America and across the United States. After staying in Elkart, Indiana for a few days,



they decided to settle near Daniel Unruh's settlement in the Dakota territory. Unruh's Mennonite colony from Crimea had arrived in Yankton, Dakota, on the newly completed Dakota Southern Railroad in the fall of 1873. Schrag had met the Crimean Mennonites at the time of his departure from America in August of 1873. Unruh was well off financially and he settled in the area for two reasons. First, he disliked the cold regions around Fargo and Pembina and secondly, he heard reports that the best land in Texas and Kansas was already taken. After conferring with Unruh and exploring the area north of Yankton, Schrag decided to settle near Childstown in Turner County, Dakota Territory. The land was on the bottom lands of the Turkey Creek.<sup>78</sup> Childstown was a small town settled a few years earlier by James A. Childs.

Schrag and his group decided to stay in the area because of the noticeable success of the Unruh settlement and the good land that was available. They abandoned the plan of settling near Fargo. "The Poles," as they were called by American Mennonites and others, headed back to Yankton after they toured the region. They bought oxen, wagons and other supplies. It took three days to return to Childstown because of the uncooperative oxen. When they arrived in the town they began buying out the homesteaders

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78. John J. Gering, After Fifty Years (Marion, South Dakota: Pine Hill Printery, 1924), pp. 22-24, 40.

that were Unruh's neighbors. The Swiss-Volhynians immediately began breaking the sod and building houses. By the fall they successfully harvested some potatoes and Welsh corn. Homesteads became available because many prior settlers were leaving Turner County and returning to their homes in the eastern United States. In the summer of 1874 a swarm of grasshoppers arrived just as everything was turning yellow. About 4/5 of all the grain and corn were ruined, as were many homesteaders. This opened up much land in the area for settlement. Eventually, all settlers who had arrived before 1871 were bought out by Mennonites.<sup>79</sup>

The Swiss settled in an area of about eighty-five square miles between the James and Vermillion Rivers, with the heaviest concentration located around Freeman in eastern Hutchinson County extending into western Turner County. This was thirty miles north of Yankton and fifty miles west of Sioux Falls. The northern part of the region was even and flat. The southwest corner extended to the steep "Turkey Ridge", riddled with deep ravines which ran for five or six miles. The Turkey Ridge Creek ran through the valley where the Mennonites settled. It supplied

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79. W. H. Stoddard, Turner County Pioneer History (Souix Falls, South Dakota: Brown and Saenger, 1931), p. 143, from Thomas R. Negus "Turner and Swan Lake Townships," New Era.

plenty of water as did the artesian and dug wells in the area.<sup>80</sup>

The third group to arrive in America consisted of the Waldheim and Horodisch congregations. They unloaded at Castle Garden in New York where they stayed several days. Several agents of various states approached the Swiss. The agents were trying to get the Swiss to come to each agent's home state. All of the Volhynians planned to go to Dakota, but Reverend David Goertz of Kansas convinced some to migrate to Kansas. The rest followed the route of Andreas Schrag to the East Freeman community in the Dakota Territory.

The special immigrant train that the Zahoriz, Waldheim and Horodisch groups used for travel across the United States was not one of comfort. The third group to arrive in America had a particularly rough time getting across the United States. The very poor accommodations consisted of a train outfitted with hard wooden benches and no other sleeping facilities. The only stops the train made were for water and refueling, and the passengers were not allowed to leave the train. The crew appeared not to care much about the needs of the traveling Mennonites.

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80. Edwin P. Graber, A Social Change in a Sectarian Community, An Analysis of the Nature of Social Change in the East Freeman Mennonite Community in South Dakota, M. A. Thesis, Department of Sociology in the Graduate School, University of South Dakota, 1933, pp. 7-9.

On the way to Chicago the train caught fire and some baggage was destroyed. Although no lives were lost, it caused a great deal of anguish and frustration on the part of the passengers. They arrived in Chicago shortly after the great fire and witnessed the charred result of that catastrophe. By the time the Mennonites arrived in Sioux City, Iowa, the Mennonites had had enough of the poor treatment they were receiving. They were out of food, and the Swiss decided to send some men to get food. Enmasse the Mennonite men left the train. The engineer of the train threatened to leave, blowing the whistle several times to intimidate them. The train pulled away only to return to pick up the Volhynians who had stubbornly ignored the whistle and obtained the necessary supplies.<sup>81</sup>

They reached Yankton by early evening, and because of their large numbers no housing was available. The colonists spent their first night in Dakota under the open sky using their baggage as beds. The next day they found a place to stay in a building owned by Peter Seydel. A delegation went to locate the Schrag/Unruh settlement, while the rest of the immigrants purchased wagons, oxen and lumber in Yankton. Those who had the money laid claim to some land in the Turkey Creek valley, and after a two-day trip they immediately began building homes. Again the oxen

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81. Gering, After Fifty Years, pp. 27-28.

caused a delay, and they were forced to sleep under the stars another night. Some Mennonites stayed in Yankton and hired out as laborers. Many of them worked for the Milwaukee, Chicago and St. Paul Railway. There were some Volhynians who rented homes near Swan Lake because they could not afford to buy land.

The group had to prepare quickly for winter because of their late arrival. Most of the Swiss were now out of money, and since there were no trees, most of them built sod huts. The few that bought lumber in Yankton built houses. It was too late in the season to plant crops because the frosts had already set in. The Swiss felt a lack of security and began keeping an eye open for the possibility of finding work. The Mennonites realized they needed money to buy supplies for winter. Neighbors at Swan Lake and south toward Yankton sometimes hired the Swiss as day laborers.

By September there were about sixty Swiss-Volhynian families living in townships of Monroe, Dolton, Childstown, Rosefield, Norway and Marion, Dakota Territory, in addition to those living at Swan Lake and in Yankton.<sup>82</sup> The family names for the Swiss were Albrecht, Flickinger, Graber, Goering, Kaufman, Krehbiel, Mueller, Preheim, Ries, Schrag, Senner, Stuckey, Swartz and Waltner.

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82. Ibid., p. 31.

When the Kotosufka congregation arrived in New York, they were not decided on where to settle. They were also met by representatives for many states including Wilhelm Ewert and David Goertz from Kansas. The Kansans helped change the Mennonites' Russian rubles to American dollars and convinced the majority of them to settle in Kansas. The presence of Pennsylvania German settlements in the area, as well as the other Russian Mennonites there, convinced them Kansas was a secure environment to live in.

Some of the people had relatives from Waldheim and Horodisch who had gone to Dakota, and as a result nine families went to Dakota. Many of the Kotosufka people were poor and owed debts to those who had paid their passage to America. These Mennonites went to work in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois to work off their debt. Some Mennonites feared these people had been sold into slavery, but later they all went to Kansas.

The remaining thirty-five families under the leadership of Jacob Stucky traveled by train to Peabody, Kansas. After staying in Peabody for about a month they found a place to live and settled near the land station of Christian in McPherson County twelve miles northwest of Halstead on land owned by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. There were some sections of land populated with homesteaders who were discouraged and ready to leave

Kansas.<sup>83</sup> The Swiss Mennonites bought the land at fifty percent reduction of the appraised price with ten percent interest. The railroad also agreed to erect an immigrant house.<sup>84</sup> The post office at Christian was discontinued in 1887 and the building of a railroad caused the town of Moundridge to be formed. Stucky organized the Hoffnungsfield or Hopefield Church, which after his death in 1895, split into two churches. The Mennonites built a new church, Eden, one and one half miles away from the more conservative Hopefield.<sup>85</sup>

Meanwhile, the Swiss in Dakota were suffering severe hardships during their first year. A prairie fire struck the area in the fall of 1874. Some who had managed to build homes upon their arrival lost them and their contents. Together they built dirt firebreaks and sought

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83. P. P. Wedel, A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites Who Migrated from Wolhynien, Russia to America and Settled in Kansas in 1874, n. p. Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin B. J. Goering, in 1960, pp. 57-58; Menno Kaufman, "Reflections from the Past," in Addresses and Other Items of Interest Connected with the 75th Anniversary Services of the Swiss Mennonites Held on September 5, 1949, ed. Harley J. Stucky (North Newton, Kansas: 1950), p. 23.

84. "Agreement of the Land Department with Jacob Stucki and Andreas Kran," October 1, 1874, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company, Land Sales to Mennonites 1873-1875, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

85. J. Neale Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, vol. 1 (1962), vols. 2 & 3 (1974) (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press), 2:674.

shelter in wells, cellars or dugouts. No Swiss Mennonites died in the fire.<sup>86</sup>

The first winter was a bitter experience on the Dakota prairie because of its early arrival and severity. The first snowstorm arrived in October and the new settlers were not fully prepared. They were crowded into little shanties or dugouts which did not protect them from the fierce wind. The windows and doors were fitted poorly. They had no heaters and fuel was scarce. Only a small amount of hay which was twisted together was available for use in their stoves. They also had a low supply of clothing, bedding and food. The pioneers felt very insecure as each family huddled in bed most of the time to stay warm. The blizzards blocked roads to markets, and sometimes snowdrifts blocked exits of homes for several days. Soon most of the supplies ran out, and they lived only on cornbread and water produced from melting snow.

The coming of spring was not any help because the Mennonites were so poor they could not buy food. A desperate Mennonite, head of one of the starving families, decided to travel to Yankton to try to obtain food without any money. After three days his malnourished oxen gave out, and he spent a the night with a farmer. The next morning the started out again after the farmer took his

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86. Gering, After Fifty Years, pp. 30-31.



coat for payment of breakfast and room. The farmer felt sorry and returned the coat. The Mennonite had no luck getting flour at any of the stores until he met a Mr. C. Buechler, a German storekeeper, who gave him flour and other supplies on credit. He also gave him fifty cents to pay back what he owed the farmer.<sup>87</sup>

Many Mennonites were not so fortunate, and as a group the Dakota Mennonites applied for aid from the Mennonite Committee of Relief made up of old Mennonite settlements in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Indiana. Andrew Schrag, Daniel Unruh and Derk Tieszen, from the nearby Molotschna settlement, were appointed to head a committee that surveyed the needs of the people and distributed the flour that was received from the eastern relief committees.

Mennonite communities were not the only ones hurt. The bad times hit other new settlers in southeast Dakota Territory. There was so much destitution in 1874 that every organized county in Dakota conducted relief work. The territorial legislature tried to help the situation by issuing \$25,000 in January in 1875 to provide grain to those in need. The United States Congress also provided \$150,000 for the distribution of food to the frontier in

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87. Ibid., p. 42.

the spring.<sup>88</sup>

The Mennonites survived the "starving time" of 1874 and began turning the sod. But the troubles had not yet ended. During the next ten years the Swiss faced more cold winters, prairie fires, grasshopper plagues, floods and other problems that would threaten their ability to succeed.

One of the first problems they encountered was the very stony soil that was in most of the Turkey Creek region. It often took four oxen to pull a plow through the rough terrain. The work was slow and difficult, and many Mennonites relied on help from their neighbors since generally few of them had four oxen. The Swiss sowed the rye and wheat and planted Welsh corn and potatoes. There was plenty of moisture and sunshine and their first crop grew well. The settlers' hopes were dashed when the grasshoppers arrived.

During the 1870s Dakota and other Midwest states were plagued with hordes of grasshoppers which destroyed many crops. The grasshoppers usually came out of the northwest clouds traveling seven hours per day. They stayed about six to eight days to feed and lay eggs. The eggs hatched the following spring and were easier to control as young

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88. Herbert Samuel Schell, History of South Dakota, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 120.

grasshoppers were wingless. The majority of farmers in Turner County harvested their crops before the grasshoppers arrived in 1875. The Mennonites were not so lucky, and only a little of the crop was saved. They produced some potatoes and hay and only a little wheat.

In 1876 the grasshoppers arrived two weeks before harvest on July 27. Their stay was lengthened because of a strong southerly wind. They often tried to leave but could not make any progress. These grasshoppers were more numerous and destructive than in previous years and destroyed most of the crops, except for some grass that was turned into hay. The farmers valiantly began harvesting as the insects settled in but eventually had to give up. Grasshoppers also ate wood, protective clothing and vegetables. After the loss of their second crop, many Volhynians wished they could return home, but they were now destined to fight it out on the frontier. In 1877 the hoppers returned again, but in numbers too small to do major damage.<sup>89</sup>

The biggest problem these Dakota pioneers faced was the severe, cold winters. The shanties were patched up and more fuel was obtained. The winter of 1875-1876 was just as rough and cold as the year before, but there was less suffering. Food was scarce again so the Mennonites were

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89. Goering, After Fifty Years, pp. 34-37.

very conservative in its use. The fall and winter of 1876-1877 was filled with misery. The grasshopper plague brought the need for food and money, and work was hard to find. The winter was a severe one, and in some homes families burned the furniture to stay warm. Some Swiss journeyed into Nebraska in January for about two weeks hiring out as woodcutters at rates of seventy-five cents a cord. When a warm spell hit, they quickly returned before the ice on the Missouri River melted and made crossing difficult. There was also a severe blizzard in April of 1878 that caused similar problems.

One of the most severe blizzards took place in October of 1880. The first storm hit on October 14 and lasted three days. When it struck, most settlers were not yet prepared for winter because it was still fall. As a result, the Dakota settlers witnessed the most severe blizzard in the territory's history. A settler was quoted as saying, "The oldest Indian does not report a harder winter."<sup>90</sup>

The October snow stayed on the ground until late April. It totally covered some of the low buildings. The blizzards continued throughout the winter, occurring nearly every week. Two or three families often moved into one house to save on fuel. Soon travel became impossible and

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90. Stoddard, Turner County Pioneer History, p. 439, from "Incidents About 1879, 1880, 1881."

fuel supplies ran low. Many settlers burned the floors of their houses to stay warm. They used railroad ties for fuel as well. By early winter most of the settlers' flour supplies ran out. Most settlers, if they made it into town, could not afford flour at the current price of twenty dollars per barrel. Sometimes they tried to grind wheat with small coffee mills or just boil it and go without bread. Meat and canned goods were scarce and there was no butter nor eggs.

Animals suffered greatly during the winter of 1880-1881. Thousands of Dakota cattle perished from starvation, the cold and suffocation. The settlers would often bring the cattle hides to towns to trade them for items of need. The deep snow and hard winter drove buffalo, wolves and deer to settlements looking for food. The number of buffalo in the area was not as high as deer and antelope. Wolves as well as men slaughtered many deer. A Dakota newspaper reported, "Wolves have become so hungry and fierce that they are attacking people."<sup>91</sup> When antelope began nearing settlements Tom Preheim of Rosefield Township convinced his neighbors Jacob Senner and Jacob Schwartz to hunt antelope for food. They chased and killed fourteen, but Jacob Senner almost froze to death after

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 434, from "Newspaper clippings pertaining to the hard winter of 1880-81."

stopping when he became tired.<sup>92</sup>

The worst month that winter was February. There were as many as fourteen blizzards reported. The first lasted seventy-two hours and dumped three feet of snow. The wind blew and the snow drifted almost everyday after that. At times the temperature reached forty degrees below zero. The snow later became crusted hard, and communication and travel ceased. It was reported that no train had been able to reach the area since January 12. Even in towns little activity was present. Often people would huddle together to stay warm instead of working. Mail service was very slow because of the suspended train service. The railroad company was offering one dollar a day to people shoveling snow. Snowplows were constantly going, but often such work was in vain because it usually snowed shortly afterward.

Many people suffered a great deal. One young child had a hand frozen one night just because it was uncovered. Mrs. Albrecht and her children died from starvation and freezing after a February blizzard. Her husband spent the winter in jail at Yankton for stealing. Some leading businessmen in towns often formed relief committees to help needy settlers.

Many Mennonite settlers survived the famine and hard

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92. Ibid., p. 44, from "When Antelope Roamed Turner County," New Era, February 19, 1925.

winter of 1880-1881, only to face a new threat in the spring. The flood in the spring of 1881 was one of the worst in the Dakota Territory's history. There were also other terrible floods in the 1870s. During 1874-1884 floods occurred with regularity and with devastating effects. In 1876 there were frequent and heavy thunderstorms that caused dugouts to be filled completely with water in low lying areas. One newly arrived settler had his a sod house completely washed away one day after completion because the rains saturated the dirt on the roof. This proved to be too much weight for the light rafters to support and the roof caved in followed by the walls.

The flood of the West Vermillion River on July 23, 1879 was extremely disastrous to the Mennonite community. By this date the Mennonites living in the West Vermillion valley had built a prosperous settlement, and the most improved plots were located on the lowlands of the river bottom. During the summer months there were many cloudbursts, some of which were quite destructive. The July flood hit about midnight during one of the heavy thunderstorms and left eight persons dead and all the crops in the area destroyed. It filled many houses to the eaves on the roof; water was as high as thirty feet in places. Four of the seven dead were from Jacob Goering's family. Two others were children of David Ries. Jacob Gossen was

also carried away with the water and drowned. Other families living on the river bottoms escaped with their lives, but not their property, most of which was lost. Jacob Goering ended up losing one son, two daughters and his wife. He survived by grabbing a feather comforter that was floating by.

In addition to excessive rain, floods were also caused by melting snow. After the severe winter of 1880-1881, the warm spring sunshine caused major flooding in the area. In April the three feet of packed snow and ice began to melt. Most of the winter's snow melted in two days. The Turkey Ridge Creek overflowed its banks and destroyed much property. There were ponds in most low places, and the mile wide Vermillion was gorged with chunks of ice. The few bridges in the area washed away, including the railroad bridges. Mill dams in the towns of Finley, Turner and Centerville were all washed out. The Missouri River overflowed its banks as well. Few people lost their lives, and this time no Mennonites were reported missing.<sup>93</sup>

Prairie fires were among the hardships of many midwest pioneers. In addition to the fire in the fall of 1874, several others plagued the Dakota settlers. Once prairie fires got started, they were very hard to stop. They could be extinguished easily when the fires reached a river, lake

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93. Ibid., p. 191, from "Floods," New Era.



or large plowed areas. Usually, the fires would spread so suddenly that settlers left their homes and belongings behind and fled for their lives.

One of the most disastrous fires occurred in late March, 1879. It lasted one week, burning many homes and much property. Hundreds of farmers were financially ruined. The fire spread to the town of Sioux Falls, parts of which burned as well. There was also a severe prairie fire near the Mennonite settlements in early spring, 1883. Cows and hogs perished in the flames and some houses were destroyed.<sup>94</sup>

For several years the Mennonites battled the frontier hardships, fires, winters, grasshoppers and starvation, and yet some still prospered as the population grew. Other Mennonite groups settled the area near the Swiss-Volhynians. In addition to the Tobias Unruh congregation from Poland, there were several families from the Molotscha colony on the Black Sea. Some of these were members of the Mennonites Brethren and some belonged to the Krimmer Brethren. The earliest Hutterite group led by Cornelius Vogt joined the Swiss-Volhynian community and settled in or near the towns of Freeman, Marion, Menno and

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94. Ibid., p. 111, from Harry J. Kaufman, "Childstown Township," pp. 187-188, A. W. Appleby "Reminiscences of Pioneer Life in Turner County," p. 442, From "Items of Interest Referring to Pioneers."

Bridgewater. All told, about two hundred Mennonite families arrived and settled in Dakota in 1874. Kansas was the only state or territory in the United States that received more Mennonite immigrants (600). Emigration to Dakota and other Mennonite areas continued for a few years, but it soon ended.<sup>95</sup>

When the Mennonite emigrations ended, there were three ethnic groups in the Freeman region. 1) East of Freeman were the Swiss-Volhynians and some low Germans; 2) the Hutterite Brethren lived west of Freeman and; 3) the Avon settlement in Bon Homme County southwest of Freeman was a mixed Mennonite settlement made up mostly of the earliest Hutterite arrivals.<sup>96</sup>

About a thousand Russian immigrant families arrived in Dakota between the years 1873-1878. However, it was the ability of the Mennonites to cultivate the land, not their numbers, that made them important to the territory. Their success was a major factor for the recognition of the territory as an exceptional agricultural region.<sup>97</sup>

The citizens of Yankton took the main responsibility of

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95. Stoddard, Turner County Pioneer History, pp. 348-349; Schell, History of South Dakota, pp. 117-118.

96. J. D. Unruh, "Mennonites of South Dakota," Mennonite Life vol. 5, no. 3, July 1950, p. 1.

97. George W. Kingsbury, History of the Dakota Territory: South Dakota, Its History and Its People, 3 vol. (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 1:711.

encouraging Mennonites and other German-Russians to come to the Dakota territory. The townspeople provided temporary care for newcomers until land was obtained. The citizens enlisted the aid of private immigration agents to do most of the work in luring immigrants to Dakota. Usually, they were local merchants on business trips to the East.

The Dakota legislature was also active in the encouragement of settlers to come west as early as 1869. James S. Foster, the first Commissioner of Immigration in Dakota, published pamphlets and organized a few emigration societies on the east coast but accomplished little. The "Great Immigration" of Russian-Germans began in 1873, and Yankton citizens put a greater effort into bringing Europeans to the area. The legislature also responded in December, 1875, by creating an immigration bureau. The bureau and the town of Yankton both began constructing immigrant houses to shelter the newcomers. The bureau proved to be too expensive and inefficient. The legislature eliminated its funding in 1877.<sup>98</sup>

Mennonites from eastern states also sent commissioners searching for more colonists and available land for them. The Press and Dakotan reported that five men from Lancaster, Pennsylvania visited the Mennonite settlement and were convinced that Dakota had the best land anywhere.

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98. Schell, History of South Dakota, pp. 117-118.

They found the "Mennonite settlement already. . .thrivingly situated."<sup>99</sup> During the following years not all reports were as favorable, but this type of article did convince many to settle near Yankton. The end of Mennonite immigration was in 1877. In Russia the military panic had lost its thrust, and fewer Mennonites emigrated after that. Many Mennonites accepted non-combative service in the army.<sup>100</sup>

The hard work of the legislature, Mennonite groups and Yankton citizens failed to bring the majority of settlers to Dakota. There were several negative points about the land in the territory, such as lack of good water and the stony soil. The inability to grow Indian corn because of the extreme cold dissuaded many colonists from settling in the area. Many of the settlements were near Indian reservations, which frightened some colonists.

Rumors spread around the territory and as far as Europe concerning the inevitable war with the Indians. However by the time the Mennonites began settling, most of the Indians had moved out of the area. There were groups of Indians living around Swan Lake, on the James River and on the

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99. Clarence Hiebert, ed. Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need, A Scrapbook About Mennonite Immigrants From Russia, 1870-1885 (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1974), p. 157, reprint of Press and Dakotan June 18, 1874.

100. Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 3:80.

Missouri River near Yankton. These settlements were some distance away from the Mennonites and caused little fear among the European settlers. After the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876, rumors quickly spread that the Sioux were finally going to destroy the white people. It was said the Indians were on their way into the area plundering everything and murdering everyone in their path. This caused paranoia among the settlers and even convinced some people to pack up and leave. A large fort was built at Yankton, but there were few reports of Indian sitings.<sup>101</sup>

Other rumors existed that kept many Mennonites and others from choosing Dakota. One report claimed Yankton had sunk in a flood and all the people were starving. Many of these stories originated in Kansas to make that state more attractive.

Many colonists chose Kansas over Dakota because Dakota was not yet a state. Railroad companies did not yet promote Dakota and immigrants could reach the territory by only one short line. These facts convinced some immigrants not to settle in Dakota Territory. Also, much of the land was available as homesteads. In order for immigrants to settle there it was a requirement to initiate the procedures for becoming a United States citizen. This

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101. Gering, After Fifty Years, pp. 42-43.

persuaded many immigrants not to settle in Dakota.<sup>102</sup>

The success of the Dakota community was reflected in the success of the church, which was the center of Mennonite life. The church services in the Swiss-Volhynians' congregation were held first in the home of the Christian Kaufman family and later in the homes of the Joseph Graber and Jacob Mueller families, until the first church was built in 1880. The Salem Church building was constructed by the men of the congregation and paid for by all. The women and children sowed, plowed and harvested the crops until the men finished the church.

The pioneer ministers were John Schrag, Peter Kaufman and Joseph Graber. These men were quite elderly when they arrived in America, and in 1878 Christian Kaufman and Christian Mueller were ordained. Reverend Kaufman served as elder and minister until he died in 1906. Reverend Mueller resigned in 1910 because of poor health.

In 1885 the Zion Church was built in Childstown, led by Minister Jacob Schrag and assisted by Joseph Kaufman. The Salem and Zion congregations united in 1895 to create the Salem-Zion Church.<sup>103</sup>

In the Dakota Territory each congregation had its own

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102. C. Henry Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites (Berne, Indiana: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), pp. 120-123.

103. Gering, After Fifty Years, pp. 38-39.

unique policies and practices. The Swiss-Volhynians continued their strict, almost Amish ways, that they had practiced in Russia. However, shortly after their arrival representatives of Mennonite conferences tried to convince the Swiss to join a conference. These conferences consisted of seventeen different Mennonite groups, formed shortly before the Swiss-Volhynians arrived in America.

The conferences were formed in an effort to organize and promote the religious and educational interests that Mennonite congregations had in common with each other. The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America was organized on May 28, 1860 at West Point, Iowa. Its goal was the "union of all Mennonites in North America."<sup>104</sup> This organization took a liberal attitude toward church doctrine from the very beginning. The covering of women's heads in church services, the isolation from the rest of the world, footwashing and the separation of the sexes at church were beliefs the conference placed less emphasis on than did the American or "Old Mennonites" that lived in America since colonial days.

The Swiss Mennonites stressed religion over all else. They believed in strict, individual interpretation of the Bible to guide them to the "correct" way of living. Even so, after joining the General Conference, they gradually

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<sup>104</sup>. Graber, "Social Change in the Sectarian Community," p. 7.

became more liberal. The Swiss-Volhynians joined the Northern District Conference first, in an effort to join with other Mennonites. Because of the influence of Reverend Samuel Springer and several others, the Salem congregation later joined the largest conference, the General Conference, in 1881. Eventually, all of the Mennonites from Volhynia that settled east of Freeman belonged to the General Conference. Other Mennonite groups joined the conference and in doing so helped to promote the assimilation of Prussian, Galacian and Swiss congregations into one Mennonite group in the Dakota region.<sup>105</sup>

The education of the Swiss-Volhynian children was similar to that of other Mennonite and non-Mennonite colonists of the 1870s. The Swiss opened their school soon after their arrival in Dakota. For several years school was held in private homes, and the teacher was usually a member of the family in whose home the classes were held. At first, the terms were from two weeks to two months. Most Mennonite parents believed it was necessary to keep their children home to help with farm work during the busy season. Later, a teacher would travel from place to place teaching about four weeks at each place.<sup>106</sup>

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105. C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), pp. 656-657.

106. Graber, "Social Change in a Sectarian Community," p. 29.



There was a public school system established in Childstown Township in 1872, but by 1876 only about one half of the total number of children in the district attended the school. This was partially because the Mennonites taught their children themselves. As late as 1879, there were only three school districts in Turner County and no school houses. The people were too poor to build a schoolhouse because of crop failures, and the school districts had no money or credit in which to build school houses either.<sup>107</sup>

The Mennonites taught their children the basics only. They studied German and religion, much as they had in Russia. The school district was very lenient, and the Swiss were left to teach what they deemed necessary. English was also encouraged by church leaders so the Mennonites could better survive in the American environment.

In 1878 the territory began educational improvements financed through a five percent tax on the assessed valuation of property in order to encourage immigration into the territory. During 1879 six schools were completed in the county. Many of the Mennonites were upset over being taxed to pay for public schools. Peter Unruh led a

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107. Stoddard, Turner County Pioneer History, pp. 215-218, reprint of article, Louis N. Alberty, "Turner County School History."

petition meeting in 1880 but ran into problems when very few in attendance could speak English. Unruh stated that parents should pay for their own schools.

Even though some of the Mennonites argued about school district policies, Mennonites continued to see the need for education. The school districts in the East Freeman area had trouble getting started. There were only four children attending in the winter of 1874-1875. By 1879 the student population had grown to nineteen. A school house was finally completed in 1881, but it accidentally burned down when some hay used in the stove caught the building on fire.<sup>108</sup> John Albrecht, an early leader in education, helped form the Rosefield School District in 1882. Unfortunately, there were no school buildings and only high taxes could build one. The first school house was constructed in 1884. The Swiss-Volhynians' concern for the education of their children continued to grow. They founded Freeman College in 1903.

In addition to the slow educational growth, the Swiss-Volhynians' agricultural growth was hindered upon their arrival. They brought a very small amount of farm equipment from Volhynia, and the farmers lacked the money to buy up-to-date machinery. As a result, the Mennonites

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<sup>108</sup>. Stoddard, Turner County Pioneer History, pp. 210-211, from "Early History of School Districts."

used the old methods of farming they used in Russia. Oxen supplied the power, and occasionally horses were used if they could be afforded. When the Swiss-Volhynians first arrived, oxen-pulled wagons were the only form of transportation available, except for walking. This caused many problems as the oxen were always extremely hard to control. The settlers used a simple lumber wagon until they could afford to replace them with horse drawn wagons with spring seats. The crude walking plow was used at first, but later the more well-to-do Mennonites bought sulky plows.

When the Mennonite family arrived in Dakota, the husband and wife farmed using the same simple tools they had used in Russia. They would usually work in the morning and in the evening when it was cooler. Soon after their arrival the Swiss began using a threshing machine. It was pulled by a team of six to eight horses that were hitched to a propeller with a platform at the center, which the driver sat on. It took three to five men to keep it operating continuously. A single Mennonite family could not afford a machine such as this so usually, about three neighbors would buy a machine together.

During this period the Mennonites did much work together. They helped harvest each other's crops and thus avoided having to pay for hired help. On the Dakota frontier the slow financial growth forced the Mennonites to

work together to succeed. After the population increased significantly, one of the first settlers invested in a steam-powered threshing machine and a large grain separator, which then did most of the threshing in the community.<sup>109</sup>

The Mennonites claim a great deal of their later economic security was due to the cooperation they shared in the early pioneer years. They depended on each other for many things. The Mennonites lent their machinery free of charge. They provided their labor and asked for no pay.

Economic security was hindered by the grasshoppers, the bad weather and the other disasters the Mennonites faced on the Dakota frontier. Even with their skill at farming and prevalent rainfall of the 1870s, progress was slow. They had to adjust to the new environment and learn the appropriate tilling techniques for the area. It took a few years of small crops before pioneers could produce a yield.

One of the complaints about Dakota was the lack of good water. This was especially true for those settlers who did not live adjacent to Turkey Creek. Shallow dug wells were often not reliable. When these gave out, settlers often found themselves hauling water from the distant creek, and those in the northern part of the county obtained water

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109. Graber. "Social Change in a Sectarian Community," pp. 19-20; P. P. Wedel, A Short History of the Swiss Mennonites, p. 95.

from Silver Lake. A few settlers who lived on the good, level ground in the north chose to move to the stony ground near the creek bottom for better water.<sup>110</sup>

During the seventies many homesteaders became destitute. The grasshopper destruction combined with the depression of 1873 made it difficult for the pioneers to obtain credit. During 1875 and 1876 many farm foreclosures occurred and Dakota newspapers reported frequent sheriff's sales.<sup>111</sup> Actually, very little capital was needed to obtain an average farm. The Swiss bought as much of this foreclosed land that they had money for.

The Mennonites endured the frontier hardships with courage and still suffered immensely. Many found they needed credit to survive. Dakota pioneers usually obtained credit from town storekeepers, farm implement dealers and bankers. Many times bartering took place in stores because the colonists had no money. The Swiss-Volhynians were similar to other homesteaders in their credit needs. They usually had only enough credit to obtain land and maybe the first year's seed. In 1873 and 1874 the interest rate dropped from 24% to around 18%, and in 1875, the legislature imposed a limit of 12%. But with the recurring

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110. Gering, After Fifty Years, p. 38.

111. Schell, History of South Dakota, p. 122.

pestilence, the number of foreclosures increased.<sup>112</sup>

The Mennonites had good credit with many storekeepers, but many Swiss-Volhynians were in debt to other Mennonites. Some of Andreas Schrag's church members had borrowed money from their brethren in the East to pay for passage to America. This debt was not paid quickly. Three years after their arrival, many of the Volhynians were out of money and seed. Schrag and Reverend Joseph Graber made a trip to see the relief committee in the east and succeeded in raising \$7,400, which they loaned to the settlers.

As soon as the Mennonites began to produce larger crops, another problem faced the settlers of the area. Using oxen it took a farmer two days to haul his grain to Yankton, the nearest market and railway. With the increased load, this trip was found to take too much time and the cost was prohibitive. Finally, in 1879, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway sent its tracks through Freeman.<sup>113</sup> In 1883 the Dakota Central Railroad went through Turner County.

The Swiss found themselves in a position to profit from their crops only to be frustrated by crop failures which kept them from buying seed for spring planting. After the winter of 1881-1882, Andreas Schrag's letter was published

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112. Ibid., pp. 122-123.

113. Gering, After Fifty Years, p. 39.

in the Mennonite Publication, Herald of Truth. It stated reasons why Mennonites in Dakota could not pay their debts to their brethren in the east:

Bear with us a little longer; as it is not possible for these brethren (who owe you) to pay up at present. For several years the crops have failed, and especially last year, so that most of them had to buy bread, and have no seed to sow. Many are discouraged. . . they look to the future with fear.<sup>114</sup>

The problems with debts were not solved the next year either, as Schrag wrote:

Generally speaking we here in Dakota had a good harvest this year. But the largest number of our brethren had no seed in the spring, and as it was very high in price they were not able to buy much and could sow but a little, so that they do not all have enough even for bread through the year, and harvested a middling crop. . . no one can make payments to Mennonite debtors except 82 year old Jacob Ries, \$78 and still owes \$39.<sup>115</sup>

In the midst of these disasters and inconveniences, the Mennonites made overall improvements in the lowlands of the river bottom, and by 1878 through their industriousness they built a peaceful and prosperous community.<sup>116</sup>

Social gatherings were common in the Mennonite community. Often, because of poor economic conditions, two

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114. Hiebert, Brothers in Deed, p. 400, reprint of Herald of Truth, April 1, 1882.

115. Ibid., p. 407, reprint of Herald of Truth, January 1, 1883.

116. Stoddard, Turner County Pioneer History, p. 193 reprints George W. Kingsbury, History of Dakota.

or three families would live in the same house if it had two or three rooms. This made social gatherings easy to organize. Since more than one family lived in a house, more visitors came by. The Mennonites brought with them from Russia the custom of frequent visiting which was an important part of their social life.

Families, relatives and neighbors often went in large groups to town to get supplies or take grain for sale. During their migrations in Europe, the Swiss Mennonites had traveled this way also. This "clannish" behavior caused the Mennonites to be the objects of much discussion and derision in both Europe and America. However, in Dakota there was less critical perception of the Mennonites from other settlers. This was the case because the territory was sparsely populated and there were few non-Mennonites living near the Mennonites.<sup>117</sup>

The economic strife and hardship of pioneer life made the church and the home dominant factors in social control. In the pioneer days, there was little time for recreation, and children found themselves working in the fields with adults. When machines came on the scene, children had some free time to play games.

Mennonite women in Dakota had various gender-specific responsibilities including cooking, housework, helping in

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117. Tim Stucky, A Chanter (Pretty Prairie, Kansas: Prairie Publications, 1980), p. 45.



the fields, caring of the children and maintaining the gardens, which were always near the house. The wide variety of vegetables and fruits were very important to the pioneer family. The mother was also responsible for teaching the daughter to perform the duties of a woman efficiently and with pride. After a wedding was arranged by the parents the bride received a cow, a horse, some hay, some chickens and perhaps, some household goods. It was customary for a man to divide his land among his sons.<sup>118</sup>

During the first decade in the territory the Dakota Swiss Mennonites' social practices changed little from the days in Russia. The Mennonites' main concern was achieving economic security. Only a few attained that goal by 1883. In the early 1880s some of the Swiss-Volhynians had had enough of the grasshoppers, poor crops, fires, floods and most of all, the cold winters. These Mennonites decided it was time to leave, and obvious reasons were stated for doing so. Many Dakota Mennonites realized they were no better off than when they arrived nine years earlier. However, most migrating Mennonites remembered that the main reason for emigration from Dakota was the hard winters.<sup>119</sup> It was in the early 1880s, after the severe winter of

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118. Graber, "Social Change in a Sectarian Community," pp. 24-28.

119. Interview, Emma Kreibel, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, July 29, 1986; and Dora and Bernhard Swartz, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, July 29, 1986.

1880-1881, that many Mennonites thought of leaving and going to a warmer climate.

The ten year stay in the Dakota territory changed the Swiss. They were hard and more united than ever. These Swiss had come to America to find a new place to live. They found in Dakota a wilderness they could not bear. The Mennonites decided to migrate once again, as their ancestors had done in Europe. Their hope for an ideal life lay in Reno County, Kansas, near the small town named Pretty Prairie.

#### IV

#### The Migration of the Swiss-Volhynians to Pretty Prairie, Kansas

From 1874-1883 the Swiss Mennonites who lived in Dakota suffered many frontier hardships. Hordes of grasshoppers, damaging floods and fires and bitter cold winters convinced some of the Dakota settlers to leave and settle in a more desirable location. Although the Swiss Mennonite community as a whole had made accomplishments, many Mennonites were poor and in no better shape than when they arrived in America. For these settlers economic security had not been achieved.

Tired of the struggle on the Dakota frontier, the Mennonites sought aid from their brethren in Kansas. During the bad times in Dakota their Moundridge, Kansas relatives had sent aid repeatedly in the form of supplies. Based on the knowledge accumulated from the Kansas Mennonites, the Dakota Swiss in 1882 decided to send a contingent sought to survey the lands in Kansas. Their relatives in Moundridge had made much progress in achieving the goal of economic security during their stay there so the Dakota Mennonites sought to go to Kansas and settle near their former Russian neighbors on land the railroad was selling at low prices. With the help of their Kansas relatives, the Swiss decided that the land in Reno County was most suitable.

In January of 1884 John Stucky, Peter W. Kaufman, John Senner and Jacob Preheim inspected the area and decided on Reno County rather than nearby Kingman, Harper and Pratt counties. Shortly after the four men returned to Dakota with their report, a second group consisting of Jacob Wedel, Andrew Goering, Peter Gearing and Christian D. Krehbiel went to Reno Country to purchase land and reported the Santa Fe tracts in Albion Township where they would settle.<sup>120</sup> The Santa Fe Railway company offered raw land for sale at six dollars an acre and fenced prairie for seven dollars an acre. This offer was so cheap, it convinced some Mennonites from the Moundridge settlement to move there.

Odd numbered sections were owned by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company. J. B. Brown and Bigger, a real estate firm established in 1872, was also the land agent for the railroad company. Company agents showed the land to the Dakota and Moundridge Mennonites in January 1884. Brown and Bigger took fifty people to the area and convinced the Mennonites the land was suitable. They reserved the land in eight sections of Albion Township and later purchased it.

The land was located just east of the small community

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120. Jonas A. Stucky, Epochs of History of First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie, Kansas, 1884-1954 (Pretty Prairie, Kansas: First Mennontie Church, 1955), p. 9.

of Pretty Prairie. The town had been settled in 1872 by Mary Collingwood, her six sons and three daughters. She had sold her boot and shoe company in Indiana and brought her family to Reno County to start a new life, homesteading the northwest quarter of section eighteen of Albion Township. Since the family had the first house built in the area, it became a stopover place for buffalo hunters and others who needed a place to warm up. As a result the Collingwood home became a post office on January 26, 1874, and Mary Collingwood became postmistress of the freight and stage lines, founded in 1873, running from Hutchinson to Medicine Lodge. When Deputy U. S. Marshal Charles Collins asked Mrs. Collingwood to name the post office, she looked out across the vast rolling prairie and decided to name it after the beautiful sight. Thus, the town became Pretty Prairie, instead of Collingwood, which was the name suggested by Collins.

Soon it became a major stopping place where horses could rest and feed. The Collingwood home was the post office, cafe, grocery store and livery stable. The operation soon outgrew the Collingwood home, and in 1880 the Collingwoods relocated the post office one mile west and one mile south where it could better meet the needs of the travelers. In 1889 the town again moved one and one half miles east and one mile north to the Hutchinson Southern Railroad line, a subsidiary of the Santa Fe

Railway Company. Mennonite and non-Mennonite farmers gave rights of way freely to the railroad, or the line would go around them. "Old Pretty Prairie" was eventually disbanded.<sup>121</sup>

The town grew slowly on the new site, and there were few homesteaders nearby when the Collingwoods heard that the Mennonites were going to settle east of town. Names of some of the residents who lived in the Pretty Prairie community then included Mercer, Smith, Young, McClellan, Hegartys, Field, Hobson, Hemphill, Robinson, McCowens, Nicholson and Bramwell, one of the first settlers. The Collingwoods had heard of the industriousness of the Mennonite farmers and happily welcomed the new residents. The Collingwoods hoped the Mennonite presence would help build the town. The family was always concerned with the needs of the community and saw the Mennonites' arrival as a sign that the community might become more successful. The Swiss-Volhynians saw the Pretty Prairie community and surrounding farmland as their second chance in America.

Not all Mennonites who emigrated from Dakota went to Pretty Prairie. Some moved as far as Oregon, while some settled in Harvey County, Kansas. The McPherson Republican reported in 1884, "About forty Mennonites arrived at Atchison on their way to Harvey County. They are from

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121. Alma L. Graber, Pretty Prairie U. S. A. Fact and Hearsay, n. p., n. d., p. 10.

Dakota, where they have been living for the past nine years, but they are concluded to locate in a warmer climate."<sup>122</sup>

The Swiss made preparations for moving immediately upon the various contingents' return. The migration to Kansas began that same spring. The first settlers include the families of Jacob K. Graber, John Albright, Jacob Preheim, John Senner, Joseph Zerger, Jacob Stucky, Joseph Stucky and John Stucky, the latter owning land. During the summer months and into the fall, the Mennonites trickled into Albion and Ninnescah Townships, and by October, 1884 thirty families lived in the area. Mennonites continued to immigrate to Kansas from Dakota throughout 1884 and 1885. Families who emigrated from Moundridge and Dakota included other Mennonite names such as Schwartz, Flickner, Goering, Kaufman, Krehbiel, Flickinger and Vogt. Some Mennonites with non-Swiss names arrived as well, Kopper, Schmitt, Schroeder and Wenzel.<sup>123</sup> (see chart A)

The emigration from Dakota was as frustrating as the emigration from Volhynia. Usually, if the settlers owned land in Dakota Territory, they were forced to sell at low prices, or when not able to sell it, they mortgaged it. The Mennonites were forced to dispose of their Dakota farms

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<sup>122</sup>. Hiebert, Brothers in Deed, p. 416, reprint of McPherson Republican, January 31, 1984.

<sup>123</sup>. Stucky, Epochs of History, p. 10.

for as little as three dollars an acre, and then they were able to sell their land because of the aid of the railroad company, which looked for potential immigrants.<sup>124</sup> But, even the wealthy Mennonites were financially hurt by having to sell their land at such a low price.

Upon their arrival, the Mennonites used the Purity post office, two miles south and one-half mile east of the Mennonite church, to do business, rather than Pretty Prairie further to the west. The only nearby towns were Hutchinson, Kingman, Cheney and Haven. These were some distance away, and heavy supplies, such as lumber and building materials were hauled slowly and inconveniently.

The community of Pretty Prairie was a very small rural town. It remained this way after the Mennonites arrived because of their use of Purity. When the railroad was built near Pretty Prairie, the importance of Purity waned. The Mennonites began using Pretty Prairie to obtain most of their supplies, because of the economic growth the railroad fostered for the town. The Purity post office was discontinued in July, 1893. Mennonites eventually took

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<sup>124</sup>. Hiebert, Brothers in Deed, p. 442, reprint from Parsons Memorial and Historical Library Magazine, January, 1888.



over most of Pretty Prairie.<sup>125</sup>

The Swiss continued their traditional clannishness they had practiced in Europe. This behavior, a result of the pressures of European society and the emigration from Russia to America, continued in Dakota. On the Dakota frontier, the behavior was necessitated by the lonely hardships, which made security possible only by group cooperation. The Mennonite children were taught to avoid other settlers and seek security among their Mennonite brethren.

The Mennonites turned within for strength. Their dual kingdom philosophy enabled them to face non-Mennonites by avoidance and desperation. This ethnocentricity was evident upon their arrival in Reno County. The Swiss Mennonites kept the same clothing styles and customs they had in the old days in Russia. A Pretty Prairie journalist reported, "Their dress, their food, their language, and the customs were purposely designed to keep them aware of the breach between them and the outside world."<sup>126</sup>

In Reno County, the pressures of society were not nearly as severe as they had been in Europe. Throughout their

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125. J. Neale Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, vol. 1 (1962), vols. 2 & 3 (1974) (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press), 2:74; Robert Baughman, Kansas Post Offices (Topeka, Kansas: Kansas State Historical Society, 1961), p. 105.

126. Tim Stucky, A Chanter (Pretty Prairie, Kansas: Prairie Publications, 1980), p. 45.

migrations, the Swiss Mennonites were trying to find a place to live in a closed community and in peace. This desire was always a factor that pushed the Mennonites to decide to emigrate from one place in Europe to another. Their location in Pretty Prairie did not feature a desire for isolating, at least not to the degree it had in Europe. The non-Mennonite citizens of Pretty Prairie accepted the Swiss. These Americans patiently tolerated the Mennonites, and eventually the two groups began to function as a community.<sup>127</sup>

The lonely frontier life in Dakota seemed to be the right environment for the Mennonites to practice their way of life without being bothered. It was similar to Volhynia, Russia; however, there were fewer people and more available land in Dakota. Unfortunately, the fierce weather in Dakota had often kept them from visiting their Mennonite neighbors. Kansas, however, was settled earlier and more people lived within traveling distance in Reno County. The weather was less harsh in Kansas, which made visiting easier. The Swiss-Volhynians' relatives in Moundridge lived about forty-five miles to the northeast. Other Mennonite groups lived the same distance away to the east, and more lived further on. There were some

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127. Arthur J. Graber, "The Swiss-Mennonites--Pretty Prairie," Mennonite Life vol. 5, no. 2, April, 1950, p. 34.

Pennnylvania-Germans who settled in southeast Reno County also. In 1881 a group of Swiss Mennonites from Galacia consisting of twenty-two families settled around the town of Arlington. This settlement was about fifteen miles northwest of Pretty Prairie. Transportation was better for visiting in Kansas. A railroad connected Pretty Prairie to Hutchinson and McPherson. The closeness of Mennonite neighbors made life much more pleasant for the Pretty Prairie Mennonites.

The openness of the Pretty Prairie residents was noticed by the Mennonites and religious differences did not create much of a problem. Many residents in the community were Methodists. The Mennonites saw no problem with that fact, and the two groups got along well. In the early years of settlement the Mennonites avoided and shunned their Catholic neighbors. According to an early settler, the Catholics had a similar attitude. "There was a time . . . when the Catholics did not think the Mennonite religion was any good."<sup>128</sup> No serious problems arose, and eventually these two religious groups ended their suspicious attitudes towards each other.

Some Kansans perceived the Swiss' clannishness negatively. However, the effect was too indirect to bother the Pretty Prairie Mennonites. Actually, contempt from

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<sup>128</sup>. Interview with Lonnie McCubbin, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, July 30, 1986.

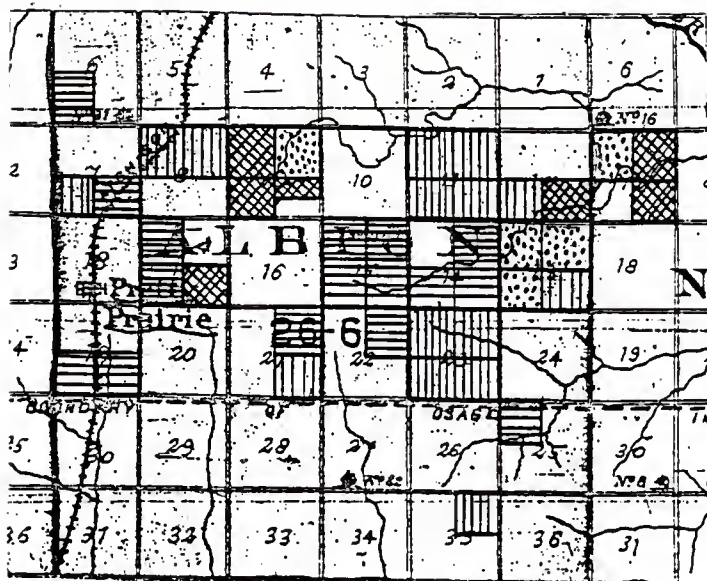
other Americans had little effect on the Mennonites. In one case the seemingly clannish behavior was a result of their indebtedness. A McPherson newspaper reported, "A gentleman from a southern town (said) the Mennonites were a detriment to our country because they didn't spend any money."<sup>129</sup> This was a fact. The largest portion of a Mennonite farmer's income went to pay for his land. The Mennonites tried not to spend money in order to be self-sufficient. They made many items themselves. If anything was needed, credit or barter was the method often used to obtain it. Thus, thrift became synonymous with the clannishness.

The Mennonites continued to buy land that had been reserved for them by Brown and Bigger over the next several years after their arrival in Albion Township (see map 2). The sections reserved were 7, 9, 13, 15, 21, 23 and 25 in Albion and 7 in Ninnescah to the east.<sup>130</sup> The even numbered sections were not owned by the railroad but was government land settled by homesteaders. Some of this partially improved land was bought by many Mennonites as

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129. Clarence Hiebert, ed., Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need, A Scrapbook About Mennonite Immigrants From Russia, 1870-1885 (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1974), p. 416, reprint of McPherson Republican, March 27, 1884.

130. Jonas A. Stucky, Epochs of History of First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie, Kansas, 1884-1954 (Pretty Prairie, Kansas: First Mennonite Church, 1955), p. 72.



Land Purchases, 1884.



Additional Purchases, 1885.



Additional Purchases, 1886.



Additional Purchases, 1887.

Map 2-Land Purchases in Albion Township by Pretty Prairie Mennonites, 1884-1887.

well. Some of the homesteads had been abandoned and were easily taken over.

The Mennonites were noted for their uncanny ability to pick good farm land. The land they chose was located between the north and south forks of the Ninnescah River and was flat rolling prairie with very little rough ground. The Arkansas River was to the north and east of the settlement, and there were a few small streams with narrow valleys. There was a very small amount of timber, but the soil was fertile, not sandy. Much of the soil in neighboring lands was considered unacceptable and was not chosen.

The Mennonites brought very little cash from Dakota because they were poor, and as a result some had to borrow money for the down payment on their land purchases. Most of the Mennonite settlers' neighbors were also debtors. Some of the wealthier Mennonites in Moundridge bought the land and rented it out to those who could not afford to buy their own land.<sup>131</sup> Much of this land was eventually bought by the renter or some other wealthier Pretty Prairie Mennonites. Sometimes the immigrants were not able to make their payments and were forced to give up their land.

The number of farmers being sued for non-payment of notes and mortgages in Mennonite populated Kansas counties

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<sup>131</sup>. McCubbin interview.

increased in the mid 1880s. In 1883 there were six cases, in 1884, twenty cases; in 1885, thirty-four cases; in 1886, thirty-eight cases; in 1887, fifty-five cases; in 1888, ninety-four cases and in 1889 there were seventy-eight cases. In 1890 the number dropped to forty-nine and in spite of the hard times the amount decreased during the 1890s.<sup>132</sup> Some Mennonites sold out to avoid such a problem. Christ Stucky sold to Daniel W. Schmitt in 1889. Joseph Albright mortgaged to John W. White the following year, a debt which was taken over by Darrow Investment, a local investment firm, in 1892. Andreas Gehring's plot on southeast quarter of section nine was turned over to the sheriff by the mortgagers in 1886, and he did not own the southwest quarter for section nine after 1889. Peter P. Stucky mortgaged his northeast quarter of section twenty-five five times and finally sold out in 1890. Solomon Schwartz sold out in 1888. There are many other examples of similar transactions in Albion Township.<sup>133</sup>

Mennonites would sometimes sell or mortgage their land to other Mennonites to avoid losing control of the land.

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132. Cornelius Cicero Janzen, "A Social Study of the Mennonite Settlement in the Counties of Marion, McPherson, Harvey, Reno, and Butler, Kansas," (Ph. D. dissertation, Chicago, September, 1926), pp. 38-39.

133. Reno County, Kansas Register of Deeds, Deeds vol. 3, p. 352, vol. 36, p. 16, vol. 30, p. 457, vol. 53, p. 540, index.

Ownership changed frequently in some cases of the Mennonites in Albion. For example, Barbara Kaufman purchased the southwest quarter of section six of Albion Township in 1884. In 1885 she sold the land to Karl Graber, a recent arrival from the Moundridge area. The next year Graber sold it to A. M. Hettinger, who sold it in 1888 to Jacob Kaufman. In the early years such changes in titles of deeds occurred often.<sup>134</sup>

In addition to the economic problems that affected all farmers in the 1880s, the Mennonites faced difficulties farming. Economically, the first three years for the settlers in Albion Township were total losses. Since they were poor when they arrived, the dismal crop production from 1885 to 1888 put everyone deeper in debt. The heat shriveled the grain, and when the harvest of a bumper crop was predicted, excessive rains ruined the yield. This was followed by a drought. For three years the Swiss endured these problems and hardships in the same manner they had in the Dakota Territory. To borrow money was almost impossible. Several signers were needed, and if a loan were obtained, the signers had to struggle to pay back the loan at interest rates of 2% per month.<sup>135</sup>

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134. Ibid., vol. 14, p. 124, vol. 16, p. 460, vol. 20, p. 515, vol. 21, p. 140.

135. Graber, "The Swiss-Mennonites--Pretty Prairie," p. 34.



In spite of all the problems in the early years, the prosperity of the Swiss Mennonite community grew. Much of their success was because of the excellent farming techniques for which the Mennonites were famous. The Mennonites' neighbors were often mystified by their success. Immediately upon their arrival, the Mennonites plowed the dew under in the morning and night. They had learned this technique for moistening the soil in the arid regions in Russia. While it may have had little influence in itself, the extraordinary energy required and the long hours paid off. The most outstanding advantage Russian Mennonite had over other Kansas farmers was the use of Turkey Red wheat other Mennonites had brought from Russia. This type of wheat was preferred by most Mennonites over the softer wheat used by their non-Mennonite neighbors. The hard wheat stood up better to the cold Kansas winters. The hard wheat was more reliable and produced higher yields than the softer wheat. This was the greatest contribution the Mennonites gave to Kansas wheat farming.

In the early years of Mennonite settlement in Kansas, Turkey Red was a detriment to the success of the Mennonite farmer. Most mills were not equipped to grind the hard wheat, and as a result people discriminated against it. The hard wheat was better, but the farmers who used it did not get as much money for it as they would have had they grown the soft wheat. The demand for new inventions to

grind the wheat caused changes. Millers knew the value of the hard wheat and would often teach the public to appreciate it. By 1900 Turkey Red wheat became accepted.<sup>136</sup>

The Pretty Prairie Mennonites were determined to stay in Kansas and persevered when others gave up in the face of hard times. As the Mennonite settlement grew, so did their land-buying ability. By the turn of the century, the Swiss-Volhynians had accumulated additional property. In 1886 they owned 36 quarter sections, and sixteen years later the Swiss owned 65 quarter sections in Albion Township, alone. In addition, growth into other townships increased. The Pretty Prairie Mennonites owned seventeen quarter sections in Ninnescah Township, four quarter sections in Roscoe Township, west of Pretty Prairie, and three quarters were owned in Caselton Township to the north.<sup>137</sup>

The Mennonite homes in Albion were primitive in the early years, much as they had been Dakota. The houses were one or two bedrooms with some having dirt floors. The wealthier families had larger houses, some of which had a

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136. Floyd Benjamin Streeter, The Kaw, the Heart of the Nation (New York: Farrar and Rhinehart, 1941), from Stephen Vincent, ed., The Rivers of America (Benet and Carl Carmer).

137. Plat Book of Reno County, Kansas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Northwest Publishing Company, 1902), pp. 60, 61, 66, 68 and 70.

second floor. The structures were made of mud, wood or both. Other buildings were also small. The furniture was usually self made and in larger households, benches were used instead of chairs.

The settlers established the First Mennonite Church on October 10, 1884. At that time there were thirty families living in the area, and the church began with eighty-eight members. The minister of the church until 1919 was John J. Flickinger. He emigrated from Dakota Territory in 1884. In 1887 John G. Graber was ordained as the assistant minister and remained in the position until his death in 1917. Peter A. Graber was ordained as deacon in 1887.

The services were first held in the home of the Andreas Schwartz family and later in that of John J. Graber. The Mennonites purchased a building for eighty dollars in 1886 and moved it from Cheney, Kansas to a site three miles east of Pretty Prairie. They remodeled it to provide seating for 225. The continued growth of the church demanded a new building, which the community built in 1891, after selling the first meeting house. The capacity of the new building was 400 people. This structure, along with several farm buildings, was destroyed in 1897 by a tornado. The Mennonites immediately began rebuilding the church on the same foundation, using the same model. Tragedy struck again in 1905 when a fire destroyed the building. Once again they rebuilt the structure. This was their fourth

and largest church to date. The Pretty Prairie Mennonites completed a fifth, brick structure in 1928.

The Swiss Mennonite's concern for Mennonite education was evident by the organization of a Sunday school system shortly after the church was organized in 1884. The idea of Sunday school was developed shortly after the Mennonites' arrival in America. They adopted Sunday school after seeing other churches use it. The Sunday school was the first American religious institution employed by the Swiss Mennonites.<sup>138</sup>

The first vacation Bible School was started in 1886 in an effort to educate children in the Mennonite culture. The vacation, or German, school was held in the summer. It was conducted in the German language, and the students were taught reading, writing, spelling, grammar, multiplication, Church history, Bible stories, scripture verse memorization and singing. At first the Bible school met at the church, and after 1891 it was held in school buildings around the area.

When the vacation school first started, it had two-month terms. Later the public school increased from six-month to eight-month sessions, and the Bible school was

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138. Edwin P. Graber, A Social Change in Sectarian Community, An Analysis of the Nature of Social Change in the East Freeman Mennonite Community in South Dakota, M. A. Thesis, Department of Sociology in the Graduate School, University of South Dakota, 1933, p. 54.

reduced to meeting six weeks at a time. It was shortened to two weeks when public schools adopted a nine-month school year.<sup>139</sup>

The Swiss Mennonite Church was always very strict. For quite a while, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites stuck to their Amish-like traditions. The church was more concerned with a persons correct conduct rather than knowledge of doctrines. For example, it was wrong for a person to marry outside the church, and if someone chose to do so, he or she was excommunicated from the church. The Pretty Prairie Mennonites held on to many conservative beliefs, such as this, for many years.

The First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie joined the General Conference of Mennonites in 1887. The less conservative conference and the church's progressive Reverend Flickinger began to have an influence on the beliefs of the Mennonites. Their desire to separate from the world and live a quiet life continued. The Swiss were persistent in their beliefs of plain living, of struggling to do the right thing and facing adversity with integrity. Little by little the Swiss became less strict as the turn of the century neared. Gradually, the Amish beliefs obtained in France and Germany disappeared after the Swiss-Volhynian arrival in America and the consequent

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139. Stucky, Epochs of History, pp. 56-57.

joining of the General Conference.

In Europe the religious customs forbidding the playing of instrumental music in church was prevalent among Mennonite congregations. The change of this viewpoint was introduced early in Pretty Prairie Mennonite history. The Swiss were singing in Sunday school in 1884, and in 1890 the General Conference began publishing song books with notes. Some of the more conservative Mennonites did not approve of some changes, and internal disagreements occurred frequently. Many liberal diversions in traditional customs did not take place without increased tension.

By 1897 Mennonites were becoming prosperous in Albion Township. Most of the arguments over church doctrine were between the older and younger generations. The young people in church accepted the new, less conservative ways, while the elders refused to change. The elders had the financial strength, but their way lost in the end. When the elderly conservative leaders in the church died, the younger members' ways of doing things won out.

The Swiss Mennonites had been used to this type of problem since they arrived in America. Mennonites were often at odds with other Mennonite groups about church doctrine. The American Mennonites, or Old Mennonites had been in America since the 1700s and had become thoroughly Americanized during their long stay. They spoke a

different dialect and were perceived by Swiss-Volhynians and other mainstream Mennonites from Europe as very different. The General Conference was originally started by progressive defectors of the old Mennonite Church. When the many Russian-Mennonite congregations joined the conference, they ultimately changed the organization's character to one more in line with the Russian-Mennonite culture. Thus, the General Conference Mennonites were a completely different group than the Old Mennonites. When some of the more conservative Mennonite groups lived near general Conference Mennonites, tensions that they had experienced in Russia continued.<sup>140</sup>

These nationwide tensions were dwarfed in the minds of Pretty Prairie Mennonites in comparison with the tension that arose within their own community. On October 23, 1887, the New Jerusalem Church was established two miles north of Pretty Prairie by Henry Seibert. Jacob Schroeder was the first secretary, and Jacob P. Unruh was the first treasurer of the church. The church consisted of ex-Mennonites who had turned against their traditional customs. The New Church was dedicated to the divine wisdom of the Bible and the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, who was believed to have illuminated the word. These church

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<sup>140</sup>. Hiebert, Brothers in Deed. Introduction, pp. v-vi.

followers believed that strict church policy towards dogma and custom in America, where an individual is religiously free, was not needed as it was in Europe.

These Christians were much more tolerant towards "sinners" than were the Swiss Mennonites and allowed more freedoms, such as dancing. The Mennonites believed a person reached heaven merely through faith. Church law determined how one remained faithful. If a person broke church law, he or she was excommunicated and would go to hell. According to Vernon Krehbiel, the Swedenborgians did not believe in hell and thought anyone could get to heaven. They thought one's faith should be evaluated, and that action played a major role in the ability of someone getting to heaven. Although the New Jerusalem Church allowed much freedom, its teachings were very complicated. This became a problem later. The New Jerusalem members did not teach their children the intellectual philosophy of the religion. As a result, some of their children grew up in a vacuum, knowing very little about their church.<sup>141</sup>

At first the Mennonites thought the New Jerusalem members were a "bunch of weirdos."<sup>142</sup> The Pretty Prairie Mennonites often cast rude remarks at the new group. Actually, most Mennonites knew very little about the new

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141. Interview with Vernon Krehbiel, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, July 30, 1986.

142. Ibid.



church. The intellectual philosophy of its beliefs were too complicated, and often over the heads of the uneducated Mennonites.

Much of the conflict between the two congregations came about because relatives would belong to separate churches. In one incident a Krehbiel girl married a member of the New Jerusalem Church. Although both groups completely disagreed with each other's beliefs, the tolerant New Jerusalem Church accepted the couple. The Mennonite church and the girl's family shunned her.<sup>143</sup>

Around 1900 Dan Krehbiel married a Methodist and was excommunicated from the Mennonite Church. He joined the New Jerusalem Church and took half of his family with him. Generally, the family did not want to argue about religious beliefs and did not at home.<sup>144</sup> The two congregations became friends and socialized, but sometimes they argued, and it often became furious.

Once, two Krehbiel brothers, Dan, a member of the New Jerusalem Church, and Chris, a Mennonite, argued in public. The differences between the two were obvious. Dan spoke English well and argued logically to defend his position. Chris spoke with a rough German accent and usually quoted Bible verses when debating. They both cared for each

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143. McCubbin interview.

144. V. Krehbiel interview.

other, as most brothers do, but vastly disagreed with each other.<sup>145</sup>

Even after both churches became less strict and more similar, they continued to disagree. As late as 1912, the Mennonites and the new church became involved in community conflict. The Methodists normally got along with both groups, but on this occasion both the Methodist and the Presbyterians fell into disagreement over the organization and planning of the "Old Settlers Picnic." The disagreement occurred again in 1913. In its three year history, the four groups constantly argued about how to run the event. They all had different ideas on the matter. The Mennonites refused to take part in the picnic if the Reverend G. E. Morgan of the New Jerusalem Church gave the invocation, as he had the year before. The community gave the new church this privilege because it had been ignored in the past on many social happenings. The Methodists were reluctant to include the Mennonites at all. The Presbyterians believed the figurehead of the picnic, Judge Hamlin, should not be allowed to hold the honor because he did not attend church. The bickering halted long enough to have the annual affair.<sup>146</sup>

In spite of the many religious conflicts the Pretty

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145. Stucky, A Chanter, pp. 48-49.

146. Ibid., p. 35, and V. Krehbiel interview.

Prairie Mennonites faced, they remained in Reno County. They were determined to make Pretty Prairie their home. The Swiss suffered many financial and emotional hardships during the first decades they lived in Kansas. The Mennonites firmly established themselves during this time and became a financially secure in The Pretty Prairie community.

The Assimilation of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites  
into American Society

During the first fifteen years in Pretty Prairie the Swiss Mennonites became well established in the community. Initially, citizens welcomed the colonists from Dakota with open arms. But, in Kansas the Mennonites encountered once again the hardship of pioneer life, and on occasion, they fell into the conflict with other Christians in the area. These problems did not lead to mass emigration as it had in Europe.

The presence of other Mennonites nearby made the area more hospitable to the Swiss Mennonites. Overall, the assimilation of the Swiss-Volhynians from Dakota into American society was slower than that of other Mennonites. Their isolation in Dakota had separated them from American society, slowing the assimilation process. Once in Pretty Prairie, the Mennonites adapted to the Kansas environment quickly, though total assimilation continued through the first half of the twentieth century.

Much of the adaptation to American ways by the Swiss Mennonites began before the turn of the century. The rugged, but brief, stay in the Dakota Territory and the relative success found in Reno County spurred changes in the old way of life that would lead to the complete Americanization of the Swiss in the twentieth century. By

1897, with the community continually growing, additional land was bought, and as the amount of available land decreased, the price went up. The American spirit of travel freedom combined with the Mennonite search for economic and religious security led some Pretty Prairie Mennonites to settle on cheaper land elsewhere. Some went into Kingman County, and others went further south into recently opened Oklahoma where there was more cheap land. Mennonites moved to other places in Kansas as well, including nearby towns such as Hutchinson.

With the growth of the Mennonite community, other Mennonite families came. They came from states such as Illinois and Indiana to settle with their brethren. Relatives from Moundridge bought land if it was available, because it was cheaper in Pretty Prairie than in Moundridge. There were even homesteaders in the area who sold their land after a single bad crop and returned to their former homes. Eventually, Mennonites owned most of the land on all sides of Pretty Prairie. They would buy land whenever it was put up for sale.

In a strange way this economic success helped slow their early assimilation into American society. In Dakota Territory and the early years in Reno County, The hard conditions of farming made resistance to the impending

American culture difficult.<sup>147</sup> It took sometime for the Mennonites to adapt to the American methods and tools. Swiss Mennonites were constantly forced to change ancestral customs to new American ways to financially survive. In Reno County, they found prosperity and discovered they did not need to grasp all American customs to survive. Since crop production was high, it was easier to remain self-sufficient. There were no major highways or roads coming through the area, and the closest railroad was in Pretty Prairie, still some miles away from many people. As a result, the Swiss became very isolated and their assimilation was slowed.

The early success of the Moundridge Swiss-Volhynians enabled that group to become a very compact Mennonite society by 1890, while the Pretty Prairie Mennonites took about a decade longer to achieve that goal. After 1893, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites assimilated more and more into American culture. They began deviating from their original beliefs to adapt to the progress of the changing American society.<sup>148</sup>

Kansas Mennonites, on the whole, chose modernization

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147. J. Neale Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, vol. 1 (1962), vol. 2 & 3 (1974) (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press), 2:109.

148. Cornelius Janzen, "Social Study of Mennonite Settlement in the Counties of Marion, McPherson, Harvey, Reno and Butler, Kansas," (Ph.D dissertation, Chicago, September 1926), p. 150.

over traditional methods of doing things. Eventually, they had model farms with the most advanced machines, many cattle, much wheat, and large buildings and houses. The Swiss-Volhynians were even less tied to tradition than other Mennonites and were more willing to use modern agricultural technology.<sup>149</sup> As these Mennonites grew prosperous, they began to take pride in having the ability to buy modern or new items. To have such items meant a person was wealthy. One Mennonite woman who grew up in the first decade of the 1900s stated, "My dad had to have something else, that the other people didn't have. . . We had a surrey with fringe on the top."<sup>150</sup>

The Swiss kept their own business enterprises at a minimum until the neighboring towns began to grow. When the price of land in the area became so high that few could afford to buy it, some Mennonites began to learn new vocations. As a result, Pretty Prairie received a large number of businesses that benefited both Mennonites and non-Mennonites. The Mennonites who left farming to go to larger towns and cities, eventually did very well. John P. O. Graber established Graber's Furniture of Hutchinson in 1913. This became the town's oldest furniture store and

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149. Harley J. Stucky, A Century of Russian Mennonite History in America (North Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Press Inc., 1973), p. 27.

150. Interview with Emma Krehbiel, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, July 29, 1986.

had a very successful history.<sup>151</sup> It was only recently that the economic conditions forced the store to close.

These business and farming successes are examples of the Americanization of Mennonites. Upon their arrival in America, Mennonites were attracted by American materialism and capitalism. Mennonite land buyers sometimes purchased land solely for investment purposes. Unfortunately such actions drove families from their homes. By the early 1900s, the Swiss Mennonites were increasingly integrated into contemporary culture. They found themselves associating with many classes of people during business dealings, visiting, and to some extent, the church.<sup>152</sup>

Still the Pretty Prairie Mennonites retained some of their clannish behaviors in the first half of the twentieth century. They quickly abandoned the common field and village way of life, and established their homes on individual plots of land. The Swiss acquired the American individualistic approach to ownership and control of land, but socially and economically the attitude of sticking together remained. The Mennonites believed they must work together to survive.

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151. Willard Welsh, Hutchinson, A Prairie City in Kansas, 1946, p. 139.

152. Victor C. Seibert, History of the Kansas Mennonites with a Study of their European Background, M.A. Thesis, Fort Hays Kansas State College, 1939, p. 93.



In the early 1900s, the Mennonites habitually went to town on Saturday. The women wore the traditional bonnets and black dresses, while the change to a modern style occurred by generations. Each young generation was more liberal in its clothing styles. Many of the older ladies wore the traditional garb until they died.

First impressions brought many non-Mennonites to view the Swiss as clannish, since the immigrants did things differently, spoke a different language and were usually seen traveling in large groups. As the Mennonites assimilated into American society, these clannish behaviors were less obvious, yet, the Swiss retained many practices that made them uniquely Mennonite. For example, present-day Mennonites still take pride in an orderly and productive farm. The buildings are usually surrounded by tall bushes. The garden is still next to the main house as were those in Russia. These beautiful farms are easily recognized as distinctly Mennonite. What once was thought as a method of separating themselves from the world is today regarded as custom.

Mennonites traditionally worked together, a pattern not uncommon for closely related people. In the early 1900s, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites continued to cooperate as a group. Customarily, they would all get together and help someone who was in trouble. This pattern of cooperation through the Mennonite disaster relief was given to

non-Mennonites as well as that of their brethren, as they became more Americanized. For several years, the Swiss were perceived by Pretty Prairie residents as people who helped people in need, regardless of whom they might be. Though the Mennonites were considered clannish, they were also believed to be hardworking, progressive people.<sup>153</sup> As with other traditions, group cooperation faded in importance. Eventually, individualism, and to some extent, greed became the main concerns. In America, the Swiss-Volhynians realized people did not need group security to the extent that the Mennonites had historically. They found they did not need the help of their brethren. The fellowship that the group cooperation produced remains in the Mennonite community, but not to the same degree.<sup>154</sup>

The clannishness was often noticed mostly by those who knew their Mennonite neighbors well. One on one, a Mennonite was perceived the same as any other person. Other Pretty Prairie residents believed that when the Mennonites were in a large group, they were not as easy to get along with. Mennonite children were raised to act as proper Mennonites should, emphasizing that they should associate only with their brethren. During the first fifty

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153. Interview with Lonnie McCubbin, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, July 30, 1986.

154. E. Krehbiel interview.

years in Pretty Prairie, this traditional belief, reinforced by peer pressure, enabled many to ignore their non-Mennonite friends, whenever other Mennonites were around. These friends were often treated as outsiders at social functions, because Mennonites traditionally talked to other Mennonites and paid little attention to the outsiders.

Regardless of the unique cultural patterns displayed by the Mennonites in the years of assimilation, the Mennonites gained the respect of their fellow settlers. Their success at farming and survival was noted by all Kansans. As the clannish, cliquish ideals of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites disappeared, the traditional role of the family remained strong. Mennonites stressed the importance of the family, and its role in the control of the Mennonite society. They kept the traditional patriarchal family system, a major role in social control, but to a lesser degree than earlier.

Mennonite custom allowed parents to help their sons choose wives. When a strong, healthy woman was found, the families would meet and discuss the cost of the engagement. A large wedding followed with a celebration involving the entire community which lasted for days. After the Swiss assimilated, these marriage customs disappeared as did many other traditional customs. Parents by the mid-twentieth century had little to say about their child's marriage.

The wedding became smaller and less extravagant, with only family members involved.

The marriage custom that changed slower was the permission of marriage to someone outside the church. In the early 1900s, Mennonites were still being excommunicated from the church for this practice. Later, intermarriage became more accepted. The change came about in Pretty Prairie for two reasons. Because of the practice of marrying cousins to stay within the church, Mennonites began producing children that had genetic defects. Children were born hunchback, mentally retarded or sometimes overly intelligent. Mennonites began to realize they needed new blood or they were doomed.<sup>155</sup>

The actions of some of the elder Swiss Mennonites forced the church leaders to change the church bylaw prohibiting marriage outside the church. The issue requiring a change occurred when a deacon decided to marry a woman who was not a Mennonite. This caused a heated discussion, and the church decided to amend the bylaws instead of excommunicating the elder. Like most immigrant settlements, intermarriage by Mennonites with outsiders became more numerous as the community got older.<sup>156</sup>

Accepted social interaction determined by the church

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155. Ibid.

156. Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 2:68.

and family, also changed during assimilation. In the first decade of this century, dancing was frowned on by Pretty Prairie Mennonite parents. The young people found ways around this. On Sunday evenings the young people would get together for "play parties" at the homes of various Mennonite families. Mennonite and non-Mennonite youth would socialize, and sometimes dancing occurred.<sup>157</sup>

Children began playing games more often at school and in their spare time. Baseball, basketball and football were popular with the youth. There was immediate opposition to these activities by the church. There were many Mennonites who claimed the school basketball uniforms were indecent. Fathers often thought the children's time was being wasted, and bailing hay was better exercise. Both girls and boys spent many hours working in the fields. They helped plow, worked in the cornfield and shocked wheat. Often young people did not have much spare time to get involved with school sports. These activities were eventually accepted by the adults. Baseball could be played in conjunction with other church activities. However, church leaders often were opposed the playing of the sport. In the early 1900s church leaders decided to watch a ball game, where they witnessed some boys getting angry during the game and put an end to it. No baseball

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157. McCubbin interview.

was played for a while, but soon the boys were playing again.<sup>158</sup> Mennonite men began playing baseball on Saturdays, but they were not allowed to play in town on Sundays. Younger boys would often sneak away and play in the fields.

Liquor and tobacco had long been a part of Mennonite social life. In the middle 1900s, staunch Mennonite leaders complained of poor discipline in the areas of smoking, drinking and carousing on the part of young people and adults alike. Mennonites had been producing their own liquor and tobacco since their arrival in America. Some men enjoyed a home brew, which they usually kept in the cellar. A few Mennonites grew their own tobacco in their garden. There is some evidence that they brought the seed from Russia. They rolled their cigarettes or used a pipe.<sup>159</sup>

Mennonites were always cautious in accepting new ways of dealing with events in everyday life. Funerals are an example of such a discrete change. When a family member died before 1900, Mennonites called no undertaker, and no embalming was done. The body was kept at the home until a coffin was made and the deceased was buried. While the

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158. Interview, with Bernhard and Dora Swartz, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, July 29, 1986.

159. H. Stucky, A Century of Russian Mennonite History, p. 25.

body was in the home, the Mennonites held a wake. They kept the lights burning all night while young people sang songs. Burial took place as soon as the grave was dug.

Even in the second decade of this century, Mennonites feared embalming. Only after the pleading of a funeral director, did one Mennonite allow a corpse to be embalmed. It was done at the home in a separate room. A Mennonite was required to watch to be sure no damage was done to the body.<sup>160</sup>

One traditional custom the Americanization process failed to affect was the social occasion, the Sunday visit. Sunday visits were organized at church, and were often spontaneous. Because of the impulsive decisions, hectic preparations had to be made at the homes where the event was to take place. Families would go to their friends' and relatives' homes, have a nice dinner and discuss various matters in a very casual atmosphere. Some Pretty Prairie Mennonites would attempt to visit their cousins in Moundridge on occasion. This was rare until transportation became faster. Moundridge and Pretty Prairie Mennonites then began socializing frequently. The children in the two communities grew up knowing each other. One Pretty Prairie Mennonite woman who grew up in the 1930s, claimed she knew her husband from Moundridge when she was a child. She also

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160. McCubbin interview.

knew other people from Moundridge.<sup>161</sup> The visiting event was such a popular occasion, it spread to the Pretty Prairie community. Mennonites would visit their non-Mennonite neighbors on the pretense of just being good neighbors. The custom caught on and soon the entire community practiced Sunday visiting. The traditional Swiss-Volhynian custom was assimilated by name only. It became an American custom.

Learning the English language was one of the largest obstacles foreigners faced. Throughout their movements in Europe, the Swiss Mennonites had taken pride in speaking their Swiss-German dialect. The Swiss who went to France never lost their mother tongue, while those who went to Germany lost their Swiss dialect, but not their mother tongue. In Russia, very few Mennonites learned the Russian language, and only a few Russian words were added. The Swiss spoke the German language regularly in Dakota. The number of English language influences were lessened by the isolation. Some of the settlers learned English and the importance it served in America. In Kansas the Swiss-Volhynians and other Russian-German immigrants were constantly subjected to the English language influence from the very beginning. However, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites remained more isolated than other immigrants. Pretty

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161. Interview with Debbie Pitzer, South Hutchinson, Kansas, July 16, 1986.



Prairie never became a German-speaking community because most German-speaking Mennonites lived in the rural areas.<sup>162</sup> The Mennonites who moved into town spoke English so that they could do business with English-speaking Americans.

The German influence was very strong in the central Kansas area when the Dakota Swiss arrived in Reno County. The influence was concentrated enough to support a German language newspaper in Hutchinson for a brief time. The Herald was published from 1888 to 1890.

The German element in Mennonite communities began to decline after 1900. It took almost three generations to make a complete switch from the German language to English. German was commonly taught and spoken in the Pretty Prairie Mennonite home. The role of the mother as teacher and homemaker in the Mennonite family prolonged the use of German. Women, having less contact with outsiders, preserved the language longer than men.<sup>163</sup>

The English language spread through the Mennonite community many ways. Mennonite men who dealt with most of the business and economic matters realized the economic and social advantages of speaking English. Because of this belief, the switch to English developed much quicker in

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<sup>162</sup>. Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 2:69-73.

<sup>163</sup>. Ibid., 3:1204.

business life. However, Mennonite businessmen continued to speak German during business transactions with fellow Mennonites until assimilation was complete.

World War I made a big impact on the English language barrier. When the United States entered the war against Germany, the nationalistic attitude that pervaded America made many Americans suspect their German-speaking neighbors. In Pretty Prairie, the fear of reprimand by their non-Mennonite neighbors, swayed many Mennonites to stop using German. Mennonites tried to ease the tension by temporarily closing down the German summer school. Emma Krehbiel recalled from her days as young girl: "We had to quit German because of the war."<sup>164</sup> Afterwards, the practice of using English instead of German hastened.

The change to English was also quickened by the children. In Pretty Prairie, Mennonite children were constantly surrounded by English-speaking people. No matter what language their parents spoke, Mennonite children learned either perfect or imperfect English. Older school children taught their younger brothers and sisters, and thus sped up the language assimilation. Even if they mastered the German language, the children also learned English well and sometimes dropped the old language. Children who learned English found the German

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164. E. Krehbiel interview.

language hard to speak. As a result, they either completely forgot it or claimed to forget it.<sup>165</sup>

Schools had a great impact on the transition from German to English, but the effect was delayed. The public school system in Albion Township was organized by the time the Mennonites arrived. In 1877 Kansas passed a law which required all public schools in the state to use English as the basic language. The Swiss Mennonite children that attended school began learning English. However, before 1900 the Mennonites of Pretty Prairie had not been concerned with their children's intellectual development, and public schools were often neglected. Mennonite children wanted to learn to speak English to seek social approval. They wanted to learn to communicate with the English speaking children their age. Peer pressure encouraged Mennonite youngsters to speak the English language.

Some Mennonite parents always supported the education of children. In America, English was an integral part of that education. As the Americanization of the Mennonites progressed, more Mennonites grasped this idea. Younger parents wanted their children to be able to speak English so that they would not be handicapped in the future.

There were a few Mennonites who took an active part in

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<sup>165</sup>. Carmen, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 2:4, 72.

public education in the early 1900s. Dan Krehbiel was a school teacher at Albion School, and beginning in 1910, he taught at Pretty Prairie High School. His family suffered through privations to be able to save enough money to send at least one son to college. Since most Pretty Prairie Mennonites received an education similar to the one they had in Dakota, few students went to college before 1900. The few families who cared and could afford it sent their children to Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.<sup>166</sup>

Bethel College opened its doors on September 20, 1893. This Mennonite college was founded by David Goerz, Bernhard Warkentin and John J. Krehbiel. It was founded in an effort to maintain and perpetuate Mennonite culture. At Bethel the study of the English language was urged from the very beginning.

The public education system, as it grew from six, to eight, to nine months, affected the growth of the English language usage among Mennonites another way. For several years the German summer school encouraged the use of the German language, but the school was discontinued in 1940 because of a lack of available time. The children found the German language too difficult, and two weeks was not long enough to deal with the problem.

Religion had a strong influence on the retention of the

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166. V. Krehbiel interview.

German language for many years. The First Mennonite Church services continued to be in German until 1937. After that, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites began using the English language once a month, until 1940, when it was used twice a month. In 1945, English began being used three times a month. This practice lasted two years, and then services in German were held only on special occasions.<sup>167</sup> These events coincided with World War II. However, there is no evidence to suggest it was a significant influence on the decision to switch to the English language.

Most of the traditional Mennonites viewed religion as being closely tied to their language. This caused them to be very conservative toward language. The Swiss thought some of the meaning was lost from the church service when the language used was English.

In the decade of the 1910s, the number of young people using English increased. There was much discussion and debate over the use of English in church. This language disagreement caused disorganization in the Mennonite community, especially during the war years. Since some of the elders did not know English very well, communication problems resulted between them and the younger, more liberal generation. The younger people wanted English

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<sup>167</sup>. Carmen, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 2:1425.

spoken. The threat of the anti-German feeling of the World War I era caused many to speak out in favor of change. Some of the elders began to fear the young people would leave the church over the issue.

In a radical attempt to solve the problem all three ministers, John J. Flickinger, John G. Graber and Peter A. Graber, resigned in 1914. The men hoped the congregation would get younger and better educated men. They could serve both the English and German languages that way. This controversy was not solved immediately, and Flickinger returned until it was. After 1919, ministers were called from outside the community.<sup>168</sup>

The reorganization of church leadership in 1919 brought about distinct changes. Flickinger was the last lay person to hold a position of Reverend in the First Mennonite Church. He and his associates were not paid, but were religious men who farmed for a living. After the change, the minister was paid and was highly trained in both German and English. Some of these leaders were less conservative than the previous ministers. For example, Reverend Peter P. Tschetter of Halstead, Kansas led the move to speak only English in church services during the 1940s.

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168. Revered J. J. Flickinger, "Short Report of the Organizing and Progress of the Pretty Prairie Mennonite Church," Given October 14, 1934 at the 50th Jubilee of the First Mennonite Church of Pretty Prairie, Kansas, reprinted in J. Stucky, Epochs of History, p. 18.

Young people were using less and less German, but the language was still used at social gatherings. The young Mennonites of the 1930s and 1940s knew only a little German. They spoke a few humorous expressions when in groups of mixed ages. Among the next older generation, the person talking would usually switch back and forth between German and English.

Non-Mennonites in Pretty Prairie had various opinions about German speaking people. Often, the Mennonites were called German-Russians. This only confused the Pretty Prairie residents. Lonnie McCubbin remembers: "I couldn't tell if they were talkin' Russian or German."<sup>169</sup>

The English-German communication gap caused unfortunate incidents that often led to hard feelings. On one occasion in the 1940s an English speaking resident of Pretty Prairie was talking to Joe Kaufman, a local Mennonite banker. Kaufman was advising the person on financial matters when suddenly a Mennonite man walked into the bank and began carrying on a conversation with Kaufman in German. The non-Mennonite was terribly offended, even though he and Kaufman were dear friends. Because of this friendship, the non-Mennonite customer told Kaufman how he felt left out when German was spoken. Joe Kaufman was deeply upset, he

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<sup>169</sup>. McCubbin interview.

had not realized how people felt.<sup>170</sup>

Most local people did not like it when Mennonites spoke German in public. Many English speaking Americans believed it was rude and impolite. They thought the Mennonites were trying to hide something when they spoke German. Most people believed that to be ignorant of English was an absurdity. They believed a person must be stupid if he or she could not speak English and thought of them as animals. The Pretty Prairie citizens were embarrassed when their friends and neighbors did not speak English. When Mennonites spoke German, most people ignored it, but they did not believe it was right.

The German element in the town of Pretty Prairie grew as the Mennonite rural community became more Americanized. Pretty Prairie became a home for elderly Mennonites who had retired. As a result, the younger rural community began speaking more English, while the town acquired more German speaking people. The older people, however, began speaking more English the longer they lived in town because of the strong English element.<sup>171</sup>

The English language became a part of the Swiss-Mennonite culture quicker in some ways. Within twenty years after their arrival in Kansas, parents began

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170. Ibid.

171. Carman, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 2:69.



giving their children English or American names. Names such as Alice, Betty, Glenn, Marcia, Lucille, Lee and many others were used. In instances when a Mennonite married an English-speaking person, English entered the family system faster. English became the more prominent language spoken in the home.

There were many other customs and traditions tied to the church that lasted into the middle of the twentieth century. In the first half of this century, church policies and bylaws changed very little. It was not until the 1950s that Dr. Nyce, the minister, began to break down many barriers. At that time, shunning was still common for various church offenses. The congregation was shocked when Dr. Nyce proclaimed that an unmarried pregnant girl would not be shunned. He said the Pretty Prairie Mennonites had held on to this practice too long. One elderly Mennonite remembers that Dr. Nyce stated, "If I had known your constitution called for shunning, I would never have left Pennsylvania." <sup>172</sup> Some customs were church law for many years and many church members were excommunicated for breaking these laws.

The strict church organization the Swiss brought to America slowed internal changes. It called for a very formal religious life. While in church, there were simple,

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<sup>172</sup>. V. Krehbiel interview.

strict rules. If children broke any rules they were severely punished. Talking, gum chewing, looking glasses and women's compacts were prohibited. The men of the congregation sat on one side of the church, while the women and children sat on the other side. The women were in charge of discipline. The older boys sat in the choir, and if any trouble came from them, their fathers had to go sit with them.<sup>173</sup>

The reason for seating by gender and age was forgotten by the young Mennonites. It as a tradition that continued for years, and few people asked why. Eventually, the bylaws were changed to allow families to sit together. The Mennonites did this because they noticed other denominations changing, and they imitated them.

When the Swiss Mennonites came to America, they left their village system in Volhynia. As a result, the church, instead of the village, became the organizing power of the Mennonite community. The Vorstand, consisting of the council of elders, the deacon and minister, remained the power structure as it had been in Russia. Before the twentieth century, most of the council members were still the older conservative Mennonites and in the democratic majority. When the older members died, the younger, less conservative and Americanized Mennonites became a louder

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<sup>173</sup>. McCubbin interview.

voice in church decisions.

The organization of the church extended beyond the boundaries of Pretty Prairie, Kansas to the General Conference of Mennonites. By the early 1900s, the conference was heavily influenced by the German language and culture. Because of the conference's efforts to make all Mennonite churches homogeneous, it influenced the rate in which the Swiss Mennonites assimilated linguistically and religiously. The Pretty Prairie Mennonites wanted to be similar to other Mennonites, and thus, they gradually accepted the conference's liberal suggestions for change.<sup>174</sup>

As the Mennonite church started changing, some people left the church. In addition to those that were forced to leave for breaking church rules, some Mennonites left because they disliked certain changes. Some church members became angry and left the congregation when instrumental music began to be played in church.<sup>175</sup> Even though notes were added before the turn of the century, the choir did most of the singing. In 1909 an organ was used to accompany the choir for the first time. The next year the organ was used to accompany the entire congregation. The more conservative members disliked this practice.

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174. Carmen, Foreign Language Units of Kansas, 2:77, 94.

175. V. Krehbiel interview.

Many of the changes the Mennonites made were simply a reaction to and an imitation of other religious groups. The most revealing example of the assimilation into American society occurred because of imitation. During the Americanization period the Swiss Mennonites switched from adult baptism to child baptism. Adult baptism was one of the corner-stone beliefs on which the Mennonites had founded their denomination in the sixteenth century. Their ancestors suffered through many hardships to uphold this principle. This Mennonite belief gave credence to the idea that an individual must understand and believe in the religion before he or she could be baptized.<sup>176</sup> Children were taught the Bible before they were baptized, which took several years. The Pretty Prairie Mennonites chose to end adult baptism, not because of principle, but because they wanted to be like other churches in the area. The Swiss had a desire to fit in with their American neighbors, so they eliminated the centuries old custom.

Some changes occurred slowly, such as the use of German in church services, and some happened faster. Sometimes practices that assimilation changed were minor things, while others were major social and religious alterations.

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176. Edwin P. Graber, A Social Change in a Sectarian Community, An Analysis of the Nature of Social Change in the East Freeman Mennonite Community in South Dakota, M. A. Thesis Department of Sociology in the Graduate School, University of South Dakota, 1983, p. 45.

For example, women were not allowed to attend church business meetings until the 1940s. After this revolutionary step, Mennonite women gained more and more equal rights within the church, but these rights are limited even today. Some Mennonites frown on the idea of having women ministers.<sup>177</sup>

Much of the imitation occurred as a result of membership in the General Conference. Swiss Mennonites dropped old patterns for more modern styles. The dress of the General Conference Mennonites became indistinguishable from that of other Americans. The Mennonites gained a higher respect for other religious denominations than they had before assimilation. General Conference Mennonites were classified as the most modern group of Mennonites, and those in Pretty Prairie were no exception.<sup>178</sup>

Mennonites and their church promoted parts of their culture during assimilation, which strengthened some of their traditional and conservative beliefs. When the Pretty Prairie Mennonites entered the business world, they were taught in church to buy and sell among their brethren only or with non-Mennonites, if there was nowhere else to go.<sup>179</sup>

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177. E. Krehbiel interview.

178. Many of the changes are mentioned in Graber, A Social Change in a Sectarian Community, pp. 30-67.

179. McCubbin interview.

The Swiss still have a strong belief in the holiness of Sunday, the Lord's day. Traditionally, the Collingwood grain elevator stayed closed on Sunday during harvest because prominent Mennonites in the community demanded it, even during the busiest time. Mennonites refused to work in the fields on Sunday. However, in the best weather during harvest season, Mennonites continued their customary socializing. They were afraid of being ostracized or excommunicated because they knew that rain may come at any time and delay a good harvest. There is a bit of hypocrisy in all of this. Some Mennonites have been known to sell grain on Sunday to a competing elevator in a neighboring town which stayed open on Sunday during harvest.<sup>180</sup>

The Mennonite religion still holds many strong beliefs such as their opposition to lodges and other secret societies. They still fear and avoid idols or statues as a form of worship. The Swiss-Mennonites have also retained their strong belief of refusing to bear arms. The Spanish American War was too short to have any major impact on the Mennonites, although some volunteered to support the war in ways not involving military activity. Even so, the Mennonites came to believe that their patriotic contribution was inadequate. They were concerned about how to deal with the situation. However, the Pretty Prairie

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180. V. Krehbiel interview.

Mennonites were too far removed to be affected by that war and the issue was quickly forgotten.

World War I was the first time the question of military exemption came to be an issue for the Mennonites, as well as other pacifist groups, claiming to be conscientious objectors. Mennonites were not only exempt from fighting because of this, but were also opposed to all military training. They also refused to buy war bonds and were often considered unpatriotic citizens by English-speaking neighbors. They were not only pacifists during a patriotic war, but they spoke the language of the enemy.

Generally, there were no unpleasant incidents that occurred during World War I between Mennonites and non-Mennonites in Pretty Prairie. However, some citizens harassed the Mennonites for not buying war bonds. One Mennonite family received a painted yellow streak on their house.<sup>181</sup> These threats and others like them helped the Americanization of the Mennonites in two ways. They abandoned the use of the German language more quickly, and the Mennonites began to use politics to find a solution to avoid military service.

After World War I, Mennonites found two methods of displaying loyalty to their country without contributing to the war. Their voluntary benevolent program was set up to

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181. McCubbin interview; A. Graber, "The Swiss-Mennonite--Pretty Prairie," p. 34.

send relief aid to war victims and other sufferers. They also successfully established an alternative service program for conscientious objectors before World War II.<sup>182</sup> Mennonites remain conscientious objectors to military service today. However, Mennonites state that throughout the twentieth century, some Mennonites have volunteered to serve on the front line. Others chose non-combat duties during the various wars.<sup>183</sup>

The Mennonites had to have the knowledge of the United States' political institutions and use political skills to obtain exempt military status. This is one of the few examples of early Mennonite political involvement. The Mennonites political assimilation proceeded very slowly.

The rate of naturalization is an indicator of the political acculturation of immigrants. Often Mennonites would go through naturalization proceedings in order to vote. In Reno County records of naturalization show that in 1881, twenty-three Mennonites took out naturalization papers. In 1882 it was twenty-four, and it dropped to twelve the following year. These figures coincide with the arrival of the Galacian Mennonites in Arlington previously mentioned. In 1884, the year the Dakota Swiss began

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182. James J. Juhnke, A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1975), p. 155.

183. E. Krehbiel interview.



arriving, twenty-three naturalization papers were issued to Mennonites, and the number drops off after that.

Some Mennonites took on the responsibility of American citizenship immediately upon their arrival in Kansas, but most of them were hesitant about becoming involved in the political process. In Reno County 185 Mennonites became naturalized in 1906. The anticipation of a new process of naturalization, which was time-consuming and complicated convinced these Mennonites to become citizens. Also, the 1906 State Fair in Hutchinson coincided with the days that were set aside for naturalization. The event proved to be a factor in bringing Reno County Mennonites to the county seat. In the larger settlements of Harvey, Marion and McPherson Counties, Mennonites sought political involvement sooner. In smaller Mennonite communities such as Pretty Prairie, resistance to political involvement was stronger than in larger settlements.<sup>184</sup>

Before 1900, the Swiss Mennonites were seldom found at the election polls, but their voting practices increased during the progressive era as they became more Americanized. Although, before the Spanish American War many conservative Mennonite conferences disallowed voting and the holding of public office, some Mennonites took an active interest from the very beginning. Their voting

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184. Juhnke, A People of Two Kingdoms, pp. 33-37.

records usually stayed similar to the Kansas average. The Pretty Prairie Mennonites tended to support the Republican Party, as did most Mennonites, but their political stance was not as uniform as other immigrant groups in Kansas. They began a trend towards Republicanism during the McKinley era. Many Mennonites admired William McKinley a great deal. This belief continued through the Theodore Roosevelt years and well into the 1900s.<sup>185</sup>

Mennonites did not usually attempt to hold public office. Ferdinand J. Funk was the first Kansas Mennonite to hold a public office. He was from Peabody, Kansas, and was elected Register of Deeds of Marion County in 1887. Funk eventually became a state representative in 1894. Peter J. Galle of Halstead was elected McPherson County Attorney in 1888 and served until 1902, when he became a state representative. Both Funk and Galle eventually left the Mennonite church because of their political lifestyles. In Pretty Prairie the Mennonites did not seek public office. There have been exceptions in the twentieth century, but the few who sought public office eventually left the community.

The major reason Mennonites had a hesitant attitude towards politics was their conflict with the principle of the dual kingdom. The Swiss Mennonites grasped firmly the

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185. Ibid., p. 54.

old antibaptist church-state duality, which prevented any political involvement. They developed a distrust of national governments, as a result of their troubles with governments beginning with their days in Switzerland. The view began to change when the Swiss realized that the American government was different than the governments they had lived under in Europe.

Most of the emigrations in and from Europe had been partially caused by the involvement of a government body in their religious affairs. This and the fact that the dual kingdom theory proposes that governments should not have rule of the Mennonites' religious way of life led Mennonites to distrust all governments. However, the United States government not only maintained order in the "evil kingdom," but it also provided freedom and a good life. The Mennonites received no evidence to support their belief that they should be hostile to governments and politics. Gradually, the Swiss began to accept a positive image of the American government.

The Pretty Prairie Mennonites began to value democratic freedom along with many other Mennonite groups. They were so preoccupied with their religious and economic endeavors, they never took time to evaluate the changing relationship they had with the authorities.<sup>186</sup> The Pretty Prairie

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186. Ibid., pp. 26, 54.

Mennonites were busy arguing among each other about problems which distinguished one Mennonite congregation from another, rather than reacting to what went on in the world.

The Swiss Mennonites found themselves in a very frustrating situation politically. They discovered they loved America and wanted to be good Americans, "But they could not fill the requirements (of citizenship) without violating their consciences or abandoning the traditions of their forebears."<sup>187</sup> The Mennonites consistently tried to stay German-Mennonites and American at the same time. Americanism won out in the two decades following World War I.

### Epilogue

By 1950, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites had assimilated into American society. Remnants of their proud tradition were still present as a reminder of the old days. The Swiss came to accept and enjoy the American way of life. They discarded beliefs they and their ancestors held dear, yet retained some equally important ones. The Mennonites still refused to bear arms, a practice important since their beginnings. They discarded adult baptism, which was a belief on which the Mennonite religion was founded. So,

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<sup>187</sup>. Ibid., p. 156.

while the Pretty Prairie Mennonites became Americanized, they did not lose their ancestry, religion and tradition completely. They remained Mennonites and they became Americans.

In America, the Swiss found a place where they could practice their religious beliefs as they wished. Ironically, because of the content they found in Pretty Prairie, the Mennonites discovered they did not need the binding constraints their religion placed on them. Consequently, by compromising their cultural traditions, their integrity suffered.

The Swiss Mennonites migrated at least four times during their two hundred years in Europe. In Switzerland they migrated because of religious discrimination brought on by the radical Mennonites' view on Christianity. Those who went to the Palatinate acquired many German customs before leaving because of financial problems and religious persecution. In Galacia the Swiss again ran into economic distress and the fear of religious persecution. They were also arguing with the Amish in their community. Those who went to live with the Hutterites found they still could not practice their religion as they pleased.

The Swiss who emigrated to France, soon found their neighbors would not allow them to practice their faith as they wished. Migrating to Poland they suffered many economic problems, and chose to move once again. In all

the situations in which the Swiss Mennonites where involved, the governments of the countries were in the middle of their problems. The Swiss began to distrust and fear government. Because of all the religious difficulties they faced, the Mennonites took a similar attitude of distrust toward other religious groups.

During the short stay in Volhynia, the Swiss enjoyed relative economic success. Their contentment led to a less conservative view of the Mennonite religion, and many of their Amish ways were lost. But, the stay in Russia was short and fear of military service, forced Russification and recurring economic pressures convinced the Swiss to emigrate to America.

The years immediately preceding and during emigration to the New World filled the Swiss-Volhynians with fear. They turned to their religion and to each other for security. This enabled them to take the long, arduous journey through the "evil kingdom" to go to an unknown future and a chance for happiness. The Swiss had developed a strong tradition. Their beliefs were strong and firmly maintained when they arrived in America.

The immigration process left the Swiss-Volhynians destitute. The severe hardships they faced in Dakota kept many of the Swiss in this precarious situation during their entire stay in Dakota territory. The crops were destroyed by grasshoppers and floods. The floods, prairie fires and

severely cold winters endangered the lives and economic security of the Swiss. These hardships and economic problems kept the Dakota Swiss from becoming a successful Mennonite community. For instance, it took them six years before they could even build a church.

In this environment assimilation started immediately upon the Swiss Mennonites arrival, yet proceeded slowly. They were cautious and relied on their customs to obtain security. These beliefs had allowed the Swiss to survive the hardships in Europe, and they prayed for guidance on how to survive in the New World. After moving to Pretty Prairie and joining the General Conference, the Swiss-Volhynians became less conservative which spurred assimilation. But Pretty Prairie Mennonites were changed very little under the conference's influence in the Dakota Territory. There are five factors that are used to identify the assimilation of the Swiss-Volhynians: 1) the use of the English language over German, 2) the economic success of the Mennonites and their acceptance of American business and farming practices, 3) the liberal changes in the Mennonite faith, 4) the move toward more political involvement and 5) the increased social interaction between the Mennonites and their non-Mennonite neighbors.

The move to linguistic assimilation was hastened by these factors: the use of English in business transactions, the pressures caused by World War I, the

influence of the English-speaking community of Pretty Prairie, the socialization and education of Mennonite children, the pressure from the younger generation, the influence of the General Conference of Mennonites and the desire to succeed and grasp the American ideal. The progress was slowed by the promotion of German. The German language was part of the culture for so long because of its use at home, in church and by the older generation.

The financial hardship faced in Dakota and Pretty Prairie forced the Mennonites immediately to assimilate the American farming techniques. Pretty Prairie Mennonites used modern American technology as soon as they could afford it. The success they had enabled them to enjoy the financial benefits of being American. The desire of the young people to assimilate and the influence of the General Conference were the major causes of the changes in the social and church laws. These two groups made the First Mennonite Church more like the other American Protestant churches. The General Conference wanted Russian-Mennonites to step toward a new identity that was adapted to the American environment. When the older leaders began to fear the loss of members, the complete Americanization of the Swiss was inevitable.

Pretty Prairie Mennonite history is uniquely different from other Mennonite stories. The Swiss were never satisfied in Europe and left their friends and relatives to



find a better home. During their various migrations they were always reunited with other Swiss relatives. They wanted to live together to practice their faith. Even though in America they were divided in several settlements, Pretty Prairie and Moundridge, Kansas and Freeman, South Dakota, they sought to be together and always kept in touch. The decision of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites to move to Kansas was made because of the good land in close proximity to their relatives. Because they were more isolated and economically handicapped than their wealthier brethren in Dakota and Moundridge, Kansas, the Pretty Prairie Mennonites suffered hardships longer, and their assimilation was somewhat delayed.

In Pretty Prairie these Swiss finally found happiness and economic security. They and their non-Mennonite neighbors supported the distinctly American community. Also, enough elderly Mennonites retired to the town to give it a unique German element. During assimilation Swiss-Volhynians gave some of their customs and traditions to American society, such as Sunday visiting, and their systematically organized farms. This helped the Swiss to accept America while retaining their culture.

Table: Immigration of Mennonites to Pretty Prairie, Kansas

Head of Household	Year of Immigration to Kansas			Origin Moundridge, Ks. Dakota
	1884	1885	1886	
Albrecht, Joseph	X			X
Albright, Andrew		X		X
Albright, Jacob	X			X
Albright, John	X			X
Flickinger, Rev. J. J.	X			X
Flickinger, Jacob, Sr.		X		X
Flickinger, Jacob J.		X		X
Flickner, Jacob	X			X
Flickner, John		X		X
Graber, Carl		X		X
Graber, Christian	X			X
Graber, Jacob J.	X			X
Graber, Jacob K.	X			X
Graber, John B.		X		X
Graber, John C.	X			X
Graber, John G.			X	X
Graber, John J.	X			X
Graber, Joseph, Sr.		X		X
Graber, Joseph C.	X			X
Graber, Joseph G.	X			X
Graber, Joseph P.	X			X
Graber, Mary		X		X
Graber, Peter		X		X
Graber, Peter A.	X			X
Graber, Peter D.	X			X
Graber, Peter R.		X		X
Goering, Andrew	X			X
Goering, Daniel	X			X
Goering, Jacob, Sr.	X			X
Goering, John		X		X
Goering, Peter	X			X
Kaufman, Jacob	X			X
Kaufman, Joseph	X			X
Kaufman, Magdeline	X			X
Kaufman, Peter	X			X
Kaufman, Peter W.		X		X
Kopper, Peter		X		X
Krehbiel, Christian D.		X		X
Krehbiel, Daniel		X		X
Krehbiel, Jacob		X		X
Preheim, Carl	X			X
Preheim, Jacob	X			X
Preheim, Peter		X		X
Schmitt, Joab		X		X

Head of Household	Year of Immigration to Kansas			Origin Moundridge, Ks. Dakota
	1884	1885	1886	
Schroeder, Cornelius	X			X
Schroeder, David		X		X
Schwartz, Andrew	X			X
Schwartz, Jacob, Sr.		X		X
Schwartz, Jacob J.		X		X
Schwartz, Solomon	X			X
Senner, Jacob, Sr.		X		X
Senner, Peter	X			X
Stucky, Christian	X			
Stucky, Jacob J.	X			X
Stucky, John	X			X
Stucky, Joseph	X			X
Stucky, Lizzie		X		X
Stucky, Peter J.	X			X
Stucky, Peter P.		X		
Vogt, John		X		X
Wenzel, Ernest		X		X
Zerger, Joseph, Sr.	X			X
Zerger, Joseph J.	X			X

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WILLIAM PATRICK JANNER

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AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

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In the fall of 1884, after spending ten years of suffering and hardships on the Dakota frontier, thirty families moved to Pretty Prairie, Kansas. This small Kansas community was to be the permanent residence for many of these families. In the small town the Mennonites assimilated into American society. These families and their ancestors had been migrating from place to place throughout Europe and America looking for a place where they could live out their ideals.

The ancestors of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites first emigrated from Switzerland in 1671. Their migrations in Europe were caused by political, religious and economic pressures. By 1874, the Swiss Mennonites had rejoined each other in Russia, when once again these pressures forced the Mennonite to choose emigration. This migration proved to be the longest for the Mennonites as it entailed leaving the continent of their ancestors and journeying across the ocean to America. The Swiss-Volhynians suffered many bureaucratic, financial and emotional hardships. The Mennonites relied on each other and their faith to bind them together so they could better survive.

Most of the Swiss-Volhynians settled either in the Dakota Territory or Kansas. In Dakota the pioneers suffered many hardships. This led some of the more financially stricken Dakota Mennonites to move one more time in 1884. They migrated south to a warmer climate in Kansas. The small community of Pretty Prairie soon had a

strong Mennonite influence and within two decades the Mennonites became well established.

Although assimilation into American society began before 1900, the changes were slow and full assimilation did not occur until 1950. The assimilation of the Pretty Prairie Mennonites is identified by five factors: language, economic success, religious practices, political involvement and social interaction.