Provenance


*The House-Barn Combination*

# 9. The East and West Reserves

*It was these Mennonites who first demonstrated the practicality of farming the open prairie and thus effectively opened much of western Canada to settlement* — JOHN W. GRANT.[1]

ONLY ONE-SEVENTH of the 50,000 Russian Mennonites whom Canada had hoped to attract chose the young dominion as their new homeland. But for them it was a very deliberate choice. Having been guaranteed by the government all the essential conditions of a happy settlement, they went about re-creating on their land the Mennonite commonwealth they had left behind. Little did they realize that many of the assumptions with which they began their Manitoba sojourn soon would be questioned from inside and outside of their communities.

The external questioning arose from the fact that for Manitoba and Canada the Mennonites were only a means to an end. The real purpose was to fill the prairies with a united Canadian society, which would prove the possibility of prosperous settlement there and, simultaneously, domesticate the lands in the face of Indian and Métis rebellion and discourage any American incursion, peaceful or otherwise. Whatever early concessions were made to separatist groups they were mainly to build the population base. The government had no intention of forever allowing or even

temporarily creating an endless series of unconnected ethnic islands on the vast prairie sea. Those prairies were ultimately intended for a single Canadian humanity premised on undivided British loyalty in politics and culture.[2] Support, and frequently agitation, for a militant prairie Canadianization program would come not only from the politicians but also from the English Protestant churches — Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian — which sought to homogenize the foreigners into their definition of "His Dominion."[3]

Internally, Mennonite individualism had never been totally forsaken for the benefit of community. Frequent uprootings, latent dissatisfactions or other unexpressed reasons contributed to individualistic tendencies sufficiently to make the re-creation of an unbroken commonwealth impossible. Furthermore, the single-mindedness and solidarity with which the immigrants appeared to decide upon Canada turned out to be more superficial and less enduring than required for Mennonite survival on the community pattern established in Russia. Accordingly, even as the new environment wanted to anglicize and integrate them, the Mennonite communities carried the seeds of their own dissolution.

When one examines the immigrants' new homeland, the internal differences are apparent. The area selected for and by them consisted of eight townships, 36 sections each, with 640 acres in each section. These began 30 miles southeast of Winnipeg and five miles east of the Red River. The land stretched between Niverville and Giroux and coincided with what became known as the Hanover Municipality. The area was then called the East Reserve (a reserve was an unbroken tract of land assigned for exclusive use, at least for a time, by a group of homogeneous settlers).

Two problems presented themselves immediately to the farmers just arrived from the Russian steppes: the heavy covering of brush and trees and the apparently inferior soils. This discovery, tentative at first but later confirmed, led to serious discontent and grumbling from the beginning; it was followed by accusations that the authorities had deliberately misled them. Complaints such as the following were common:

> On this land we drown; this land we cannot cultivate because it must first be cleared; this is no place to build, etc.[4]

Contrary to popular feeling, the authorities had not intended to deceive the immigrants, because water and wood, which the East

Reserve offered in abundance, were considered as essential for pioneer settlement as the ready-to-plough open, flat and uniformly fertile grasslands farther west. Indeed, the best place for poor people to begin life in a new country was where there were a variety and abundance of natural resources. Most of the settlers arriving from Ontario would desperately avoid the treeless flatlands stretching, it seemed, endlessly southwest of Winnipeg.

Yet the immigrants were given an area which even "the surveyors regarded as generally unfit for settlement."[5] The woods contained timber of only poor quality and the soils were generally inferior. Indeed, some townships had a great deal of gravel and sand, not to speak of stones and heavy boulders. Large acreages were little more than marshlands. In the words of a Manitoba geographer:

> The advantages gained during the first year or two of settlement were far outweighed by the 40 years of struggle which the Mennonites spent on land which simply was not suitable for farming.[6]

Not surprisingly, therefore, some 32 families, better positioned than the rest, turned their backs on the East Reserve from the outset, and arranged to settle on the west side of the Red River, farther south along the banks of the Scratching River. Others who could afford it looked at possibilities still farther south — to the treeless plain stretching some 40 miles west from the Red along the international border and from there scores of miles northward toward Winnipeg.

Application for a block settlement in the west was made in 1874 and settlement was permitted, but the West Reserve was not officially created, by Order-in-Council, until 1876. However, settlers directly from Russia as well as transfers from the East Reserve began to choose the West Reserve area in 1875. This dismayed other Manitobans, especially those in the Pembina Hills area, who knew it was foolish, if not impossible, to try to survive in open treeless areas, particularly in winter. But, as a chronicler of those years reported:

> In 1875 the few settlers at Pembina Mountain fondly hoped that in the course of 15 or 20 years this plain would become settled notwithstanding the absence of timber. Before the summer was over, a long line of camp fires, extending for miles and miles, announced one evening to the lonely settlers

that thousands of Mennonites were locating on seventeen townships.[7]

On both sides of the Red River the Mennonites laid out their settlements in village formations, just as they had done in Russia. There were a total of 59 villages in the east and 70 in the west, though the full number of them did not exist at any one time; some were quite small and incomplete. As the last ones were being founded near the turn of the century, some of the earliest ones had been abandoned (as, indeed, most of them were by 1900). Shantz had tried "to persuade them to abolish the village system," because the particular land area was not sufficiently uniform in quality to lend itself to a uniform distribution of population centres.[8]

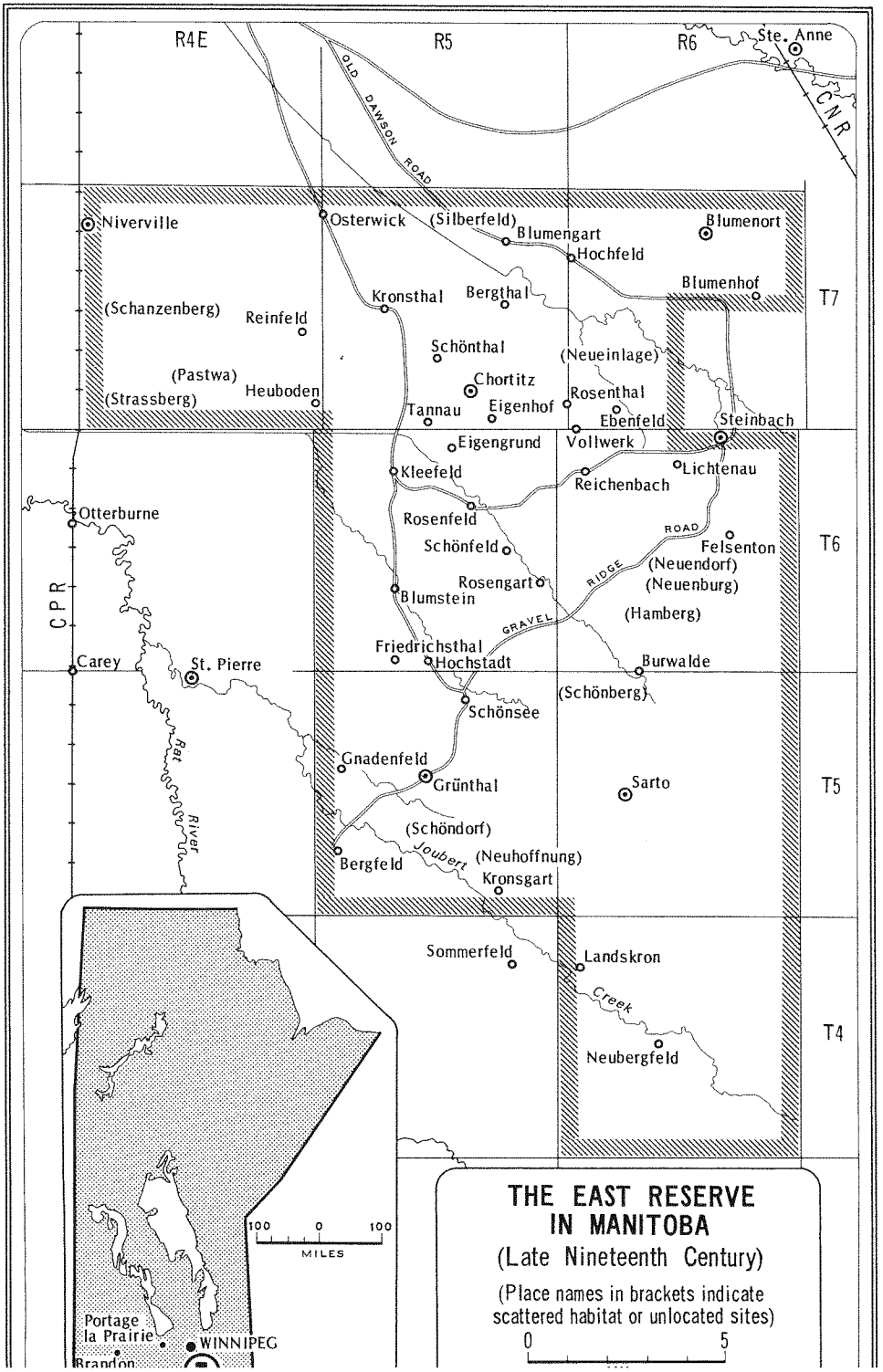
However, one of the reasons the Mennonite leaders selected Manitoba instead of the United States was precisely the possibility of block and village settlement. Not only did such settlement represent some distinct economic and sociological advantages, but it also permitted the village communities to set up their own schools and the religious leaders to guide their people more closely. The bishops of three church organizations represented in the immigration (see Table 1)[9] were as insistent on the village system as their delegates had been on block settlement. To them the Manitoba settlement made sense only in those terms.

TABLE 1

MANITOBA IMMIGRANT CHURCHES AND LEADERSHIP

| CHURCH | NO. | LOCATION | BISHOP |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kleine Gemeinde | 700 | East Reserve and Scratching River | Peter Toews |
| Reinlaender Church* | 3,240 | Western part of West Reserve | Johann Wiebe |
| Bergthaler Church | 3,403 | East Reserve and eastern part of West Reserve | Gerhard Wiebe |

* Reinlaender Mennonite Church was the official name. It is often referred to in literature as the Fuerstenlaender or Old Colony group, after the Russian colonies of their origin.


R4E
R5
R6
Ste. Anne
C N R
OLD DAWSON ROAD
Niverville
Osterwick
(Silberfeld)
Blumengart
Blumenort
Hochfeld
Blumenhof
Kronsthal
Bergthal
T7
(Schanzenberg)
Reinfeld
Schönthal
(Neueinlage)
(Pastwa)
Chortitz
(Strassberg)
Heuboden
Rosenthal
Tannau
Eigenhof
Ebenfeld
Steinbach
Eigengrund
Vollwerk
Kleefeld
Lichtenau
Reichenbach
Otterburne
Rosenfeld
ROAD
Felsenton
T6
Schönfeld
(Neuendorf)
RIDGE
Rosengart
(Neuenburg)
Blumstein
C P R
(Hamberg)
GRAVEL
Friedrichsthal
Carey
St. Pierre
Hochstadt
Burwalde
(Schönberg)
Schönsee
Bat River
Gnadenfeld
Grünthal
Sarto
T5
(Schöndorf)
Joubert
(Neuhoffnung)
Bergfeld
Kronsgart
Sommerfeld
Landskron
Creek
T4
Neubergfeld
100 0 100
MILES
Portage la Prairie
WINNIPEG
Brandon
THE EAST RESERVE IN MANITOBA
(Late Nineteenth Century)
(Place names in brackets indicate scattered habitat or unlocated sites)
0 5

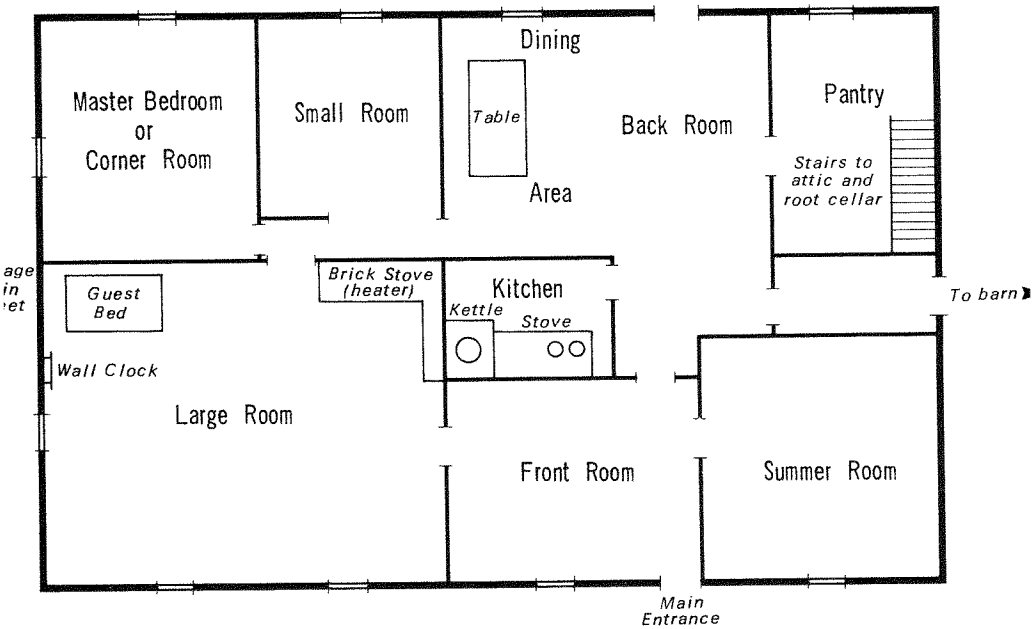
The villages were normally laid out in such a way that the buildings of the individual farm units were placed about 200 feet apart and about 100 feet away from the streets to give ample space for trees, gardens, and fences. Unless a village was laid alongside a creek, to which all the farmers wished to have access, the farm buildings would appear on both sides, with lots reserved for schools and/or churches. Hence, they were known as *Strassendoerfer* (street villages).

The farmers of a given village would cultivate the strip of land immediately adjacent to their lots and other similar strips in each of the quarter sections assigned to the village. In that way all farmers had access to the good land and also were obligated to farm some of the poor lands. At the end of a village, a quarter section or more would be reserved for a common pasture, in which all the animals would be cared for by a single cowherd who in winter might also be the village school teacher.

The farm homes constructed later were according to the style to which the Mennonites had become accustomed in Europe. The house, of which the gable end faced the street, was divided into two parts consisting of the *Vorderhaus* (front house) and the *Hinterhaus* (rear house). In the front house was a bedroom or two for the girls and smaller children, as well as the parents' room, which sometimes doubled as a living room. In the rear was the large kitchen/dining room, and a large utility room which might double as the boys' bedroom.

The earliest housing of the immigrants was very primitive. Upon their arrival temporary protection had been provided by shelters erected on the banks of the Red River. Slightly more permanent were the larger sheds, each 20 by 100 feet and divided into 12 rooms, and placed five miles inland near the later site of Niverville. Here mothers and children stayed while the men and boys went out to look over the land, to select village sites, and to dig the first more or less permanent family dwellings. For the most part, these first homes were built of sod — the Russian Mennonites were not accustomed to building log houses. The huts consisted of pits two feet deep surrounded by three-foot sod walls, across which poles were extended to support a sod roof. A normal hut would be about 15 feet wide and 35 feet long, of which a space of 15 square feet might be reserved for livestock. Another early dwelling type consisted of a 25-foot-square area covered by a steeply pitched thatched roof, which touched the ground on one end and was supported by high poles on the other.

## TYPICAL FLOOR PLAN OF MANITOBA MENNONITE HOME




Early agricultural methods were harsh and crude. The land was cleared mostly by hand and with an axe. The first ploughing was done with oxen, as recommended by Canadian authorities. At $60 — one-third of the price of good imported horses — oxen were cheaper. They were better able to survive the winter and resist disease, and more ready to forage for themselves. They were also stronger, though admittedly much slower, often quite stubborn, and predictably thirsty after one or two rounds, but none the less able to break up to one acre of land a day. Horses, of course, were recommended as soon as money, shelter, and feed were available.

In 1874 only very small acreages were ploughed; the next spring seeds were spread by hand and then worked into the soil with small sections of wooden-tooth harrows. The earliest harvesting was done with scythe and flail, but mowers, reapers, twine binders and threshing machines were all introduced within a decade of settlement. In the second year over 5,000 acres were ready for seeding with wheat, oats, barley, rye, flax and potatoes. Some wheat seeds were brought along from Russia, and Canadian grain exchanges became quite excited by the large hard kernel of the Russian wheat. It needed about two weeks longer to

mature than the more popular Red Fyfe, however, and therefore soon fell into disfavour when the fall frosts arrived before the grain matured.

The discovery that low-quality lands had been selected was aggravated by the actual physical hardships which the settlers experienced. Crops failed and there was little cash with which to buy supplies. The 7,000 immigrants had brought with them approximately half a million dollars, about $75 per person, but that was barely sufficient for necessities. Besides, it must be remembered that the earliest immigrants had to await a later liquidation of their assets (refer to Table 4, Chapter 8).[10]

During the first winter food was scarce and most meals at best consisted of poor-quality potatoes and bread. Some ministers travelled regularly through the sparse settlements, encouraging the settlers, ensuring that there was no starvation, and otherwise strengthening the conviction that the move from Russia to the East Reserve had been the right one.

The first crop years were almost total failures, with grasshoppers flattening the small plantings in 1875[11] and frosts badly damaging the East Reserve grains in 1876. The result was that the settlers, especially the poorer ones, had to draw heavily on the $100,000 federal government loan negotiated early in 1875 by Jacob Y. Shantz and his Russian Aid Committee, also known as the Committee of Management of Mennonites of Ontario. The loan was guaranteed in varying amounts by a host of Ontario Mennonites. It applied mainly to the purchase of provisions and seed grains. There was an additional $70,000 "for transporting Mennonites and $190,000 toward assisting immigration and meeting immigration expenses" already approved.[12] Although some members of the Canadian Parliament had their reservations about the loan, it was passed as a normal and proper aid to successful competition for immigrants. The assets and reputation of the Ontario Mennonites and the promising role of the immigrants in the economic life of the prairies no doubt contributed to the positive vote. As it was written into the record of Parliament by the loan's promoters:

> The Mennonites in Waterloo and elsewhere, who had become personally responsible for the repayment of this loan, were some of the wealthiest people in the country . . . An excellent class of immigrants . . . bound together by religious and social ties . . . shoulder to shoulder in every difficulty [and] pledged morally to repay it . . .[13]

The Mennonites were not without their own internal arrangements for mutual aid and assistance to the needy. One such church institution was the *Waisenamt* (literally "orphans bureau"). In the old country it had originally served in the financial care of orphans and as a manager of estates but the bureau had gradually grown to incorporate such functions as savings, credit, banking and lending. Each of the three churches had a Waisenamt which was supplemented by the charities administered by the deacons, who collected and distributed these funds quite anonymously and privately to protect both donors and receivers.

Another economic institution was a fire insurance program administered by the *Brandaelteste* (literally "fire bishop," but meaning district fire chief) and aided by village representation. Through this insurance a farmer could recover two-thirds of his fire loss, which was collected on a pro rata basis from all other insurers.

The internal commitment to mutual helpfulness made the Mennonites very reluctant to go elsewhere for help. Yet sometimes the poorer members were overlooked, especially in the early months and years when everyone wanted to get a good start. The wealthy settlers were apparently the most eager of all, recognizing the importance of a strong beginning.

The government loans, therefore, were a great encouragement to the pioneers, who proceeded to increase the acreage under cultivation, to purchase more seed grain, and even in 1876 to erect four grist mills in the East Reserve, three of them driven by wind and one by steam. For a while all seemed to proceed according to plan. The increased aid from the government also meant increased attention from government officials, who as early as 1877 looked upon the Mennonite settlements as show places for what could and should be done with the untamed west, thus convincing both themselves and the Mennonites that they had done the right thing.

Heading the list of an unending stream of distinguished visitors as early as 1877 was the Queen's own representative, the Governor General of Canada, who viewed the Mennonite development with "unmitigated satisfaction."[14] Lord Dufferin recognized the tremendous sacrifices made for their religious convictions. Their brave facing of uncertainties rather than surrendering their "religious convictions in regard to the unlawfulness of warfare" qualified them, he said, for another great struggle, "a war, not against flesh and blood, a task so abhorrent

to Mennonite religious feeling," but "against the brute forces of nature." In the name of Queen Victoria and the empire, Lord Dufferin extended the hand of brotherhood and fellowship, "for you are as welcome to our affection as you are to our lands, to our liberties and freedom." He expressed hope that the Mennonites would flourish and extend in wealth through countless generations, and that

> Beneath the flag whose folds now wave above us, you will find protection, peace, civil and religious liberty, constitutional freedom and equal laws.[15]

For the settlers these assurances, repeated many times since negotiations with Canada had begun five years before, were welcome words indeed. At that point they did not seem too unrealistic. Manitoba was very distant from the wars of Europe and, as far as relations with the United States were concerned, Lord Dufferin had spoken of "an indissoluable affection" between the two countries, both concerned with common interests and the advance of civilization, not as rivals but as allies.

The settlements which Lord Dufferin had come to inspect on the East Reserve had only been under way three years, but before a farewell banquet for distinguished citizens in Winnipeg he lauded "so marvellous a transformation," explaining that he had seldom beheld any spectacle "more pregnant with prophecy, more fraught with promise of an astonishing future." A great ovation was offered by those assembled, as he praised Mennonite industry and British benevolences:

> . . . in a long ride I took across the prairies which but yesterday was absolutely bare, desolate, and untenanted, and the home of the wolf, the badger, and the eagle, I passed village after village, homestead after homestead furnished with all the conveniences and incidents of European comfort and a scientific agriculture . . . I felt infinitely prouder in being able to throw over them the aegis of the British constitution, and in bidding them freely share with us our unrivalled political institutions, our untrammelled personal liberties.[16]

The Mennonites were not present at that celebration, and it is doubtful that they read the *Free Press* which reported the proceedings in detail. None the less, the way Canada had wooed and welcomed them was etched deeply in their hearts, so that the

slightest change in public sentiment or policy was sufficient to stir their basic distrust of governments. For the time being, however, they went about keeping their part of the bargain — proving the agricultural potential of Canadian prairie farmland and the rightness of a liberal immigration policy.

In spite of the progress that was made and the cash that began to flow into the settlements, life on the East Reserve continued to be filled with hardships, except for the few who had settled on good land and started off with ample personal resources. To improve their lot, about 400 families, half of the entire reserve, moved to the west side of the river between 1876 and 1882. Many others, too poor to attempt another uprooting, accepted their misfortune as inevitable and reverted to subsistence agriculture.

The settlements on the West Reserve, on the other hand, though more handicapped in the early years because of lack of timber, made progress more rapidly thereafter. Lacking coal and firewood, they mixed cow dung with straw and dried it in six-inch blocks, burning it as they had been accustomed to do in Russia. This barnyard by-product was a high-heat fuel, clean and without an unwholesome odour. Lumber for building was hauled whatever distance necessary from the groves of the Red River in the east or from the Pembina hills in the west.

In the East Reserve, dairy products, readily marketable in Manitoba's single large trading centre, provided financial resources. The West depended more on poultry products, though both reserves produced both. The dairy and poultry industries helped the women and children to become agricultural producers in a direct way, all of them working with the men and boys from early morning until late at night.

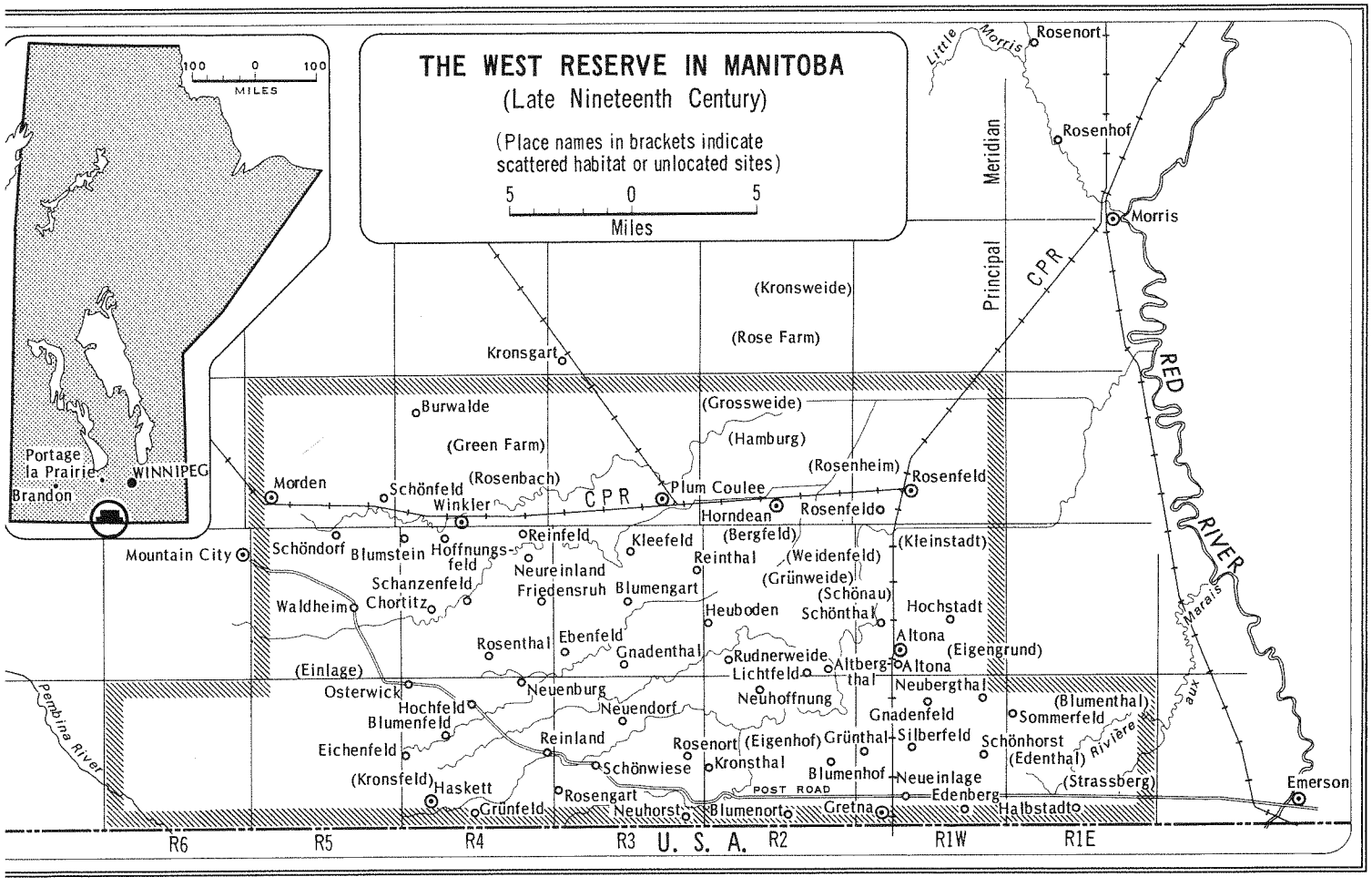
The village communities and building styles likewise contributed to agricultural success. The village protected the poultry from raids by hawks, wolves and foxes, while the heat of the stables encouraged the birds to produce. The joining of the house and barn had the advantage of greater warmth, comfort and protection for humans and animals alike, especially in winter. The disadvantages lay in the greater fire hazard as well as the increased problem of hygiene. Although the rumour was quickly spread abroad that the Mennonites were dirty, they cleaned the barns regularly, allowing no manure to accumulate. Eventually cleanliness was publicly recognized as one of their virtues. As one of the many travellers through the Mennonite colonies wrote:

> We had been told that they were bad settlers, unpleasant neighbours, and dirty in their persons and dwellings; but we were much pleased to find that the exact reverse was the truth . . . All was clean and perfectly neat; indeed it was more like a showhouse at an exhibition than an ordinary dwelling-room.[17]

Grain and seed shipments, however, became the main source of revenue. By 1878 the settlers were shipping seven carloads of flax to an oil manufacturing firm in Baden, Ontario, all of it hauled to market either at Emerson or at Winnipeg, respectively the southern and the northern shipping points on the Red River. While most of the grain produced in the 1870s was consumed locally by poultry, cattle and horses, or ground into flour for human consumption, some grain was shipped out. By 1883 the West Reserve had produced a surplus.

Healthy progress was also evident in other ways. The villages had become "gems of Sylvan beauty," turning the West Reserve into "one of the loveliest grove-dotted prairies that can be imagined."[18] Immediately after settlement, the immigrants had planted long rows of maple, poplar, and balm of Gilead trees, as decoration and for protection against snowstorms in winter and dust storms in summer. The Mennonite women introduced the dahlia to the prairies, and added to the family income by selling ever-blooming potted roses at Emerson and Morden, the new trading centre on the western fringe. The love for flowers was manifest in the names of villages. Generally brought from Europe, the names were frequently duplicated in the East and West Reserves — Blumenfeld (field of flowers), Blumenort (place of flowers), Rosengart (garden of roses), Rosenort (place of roses), Schoenfeld (field of beauty), etc. Some names, of course, were new — Schanzenfeld, in honour of Jacob Y. Shantz, was the prettiest village, nestled in a natural grove along the Plum Coulee. As time went on, the beauty of Schanzenfeld was surpassed by other villages through Mennonite beautification programs, and Schanzenfeld became a sort of byword among the villagers.

Although in many ways the Manitoba settlements arose as a continuation of the Russian commonwealth, the limitations of the emerging provincial laws and other imperfections appeared quite early. The laws of land ownership, for instance, worked against the Mennonite plan. Those laws provided for individual entitlement to quarter sections of land when the conditions of homesteading were met. These could not be properly fulfilled


THE WEST RESERVE IN MANITOBA
(Late Nineteenth Century)
(Place names in brackets indicate scattered habitat or unlocated sites)
5 0 5
Miles
100 0 100
MILES
Portage la Prairie
WINNIPEG
Brandon
Rosenort
Little Morris
Rosenhof
Morris
Principal Meridian
CPR
RED RIVER
Marais aux Rivière
Emerson
(Kronsweide)
(Rose Farm)
Kronsgart
Burwalde
(Grossweide)
(Hamburg)
(Green Farm)
(Rosenheim)
Rosenfeld
Morden
Schönfeld
(Rosenbach)
Winkler
Plum Coulee
Horndean
Rosenfeldo
Mountain City
Schöndorf
Blumstein
Hoffnungsfeld
Reinfeld
Kleefeld
(Bergfeld)
(Kleinstadt)
Reinthal
(Weidenfeld)
(Grünweide)
Schanzenfeld
Neureinland
Friedensruh
Blumengart
(Schönau)
Waldheim
Chortitz
Heuboden
Schönthal
Hochstadt
Altona
Rosenthal
Ebenfeld
Gnadenthal
Rudnerweide
(Eigengrund)
(Einlage)
Lichtfeld
Altbergthal
Altona
Osterwick
Neuenburg
Neuhoffnung
Neubergthal
Pembina River
Hochfeld
Neuendorf
(Blumenthal)
Blumenfeld
Gnadenfeld
Sommerfeld
Reinland
Rosenort
(Eigenhof)
Grünthal
Silberfeld
Schönhorst
Eichenfeld
Schönwiese
Kronsthal
(Edenthal)
(Kronsfeld)
Haskett
Blumenhof
Neueinlage
(Strassberg)
Rosengart
POST ROAD
Edenberg
Grünfeld
Neuhorst
Blumenorto
Gretna
Halbstadto
R6
R5
R4
R3
U. S. A.
R2
R1W
R1E

within the village system unless, of course, the Mennonite sense of community was strong enough to negotiate collective ownership. Otherwise one could live with neighbours and strip-farm with them on the basis of an understanding until the laws of ownership were changed.[19] For this reason, among others, Shantz had advised against the village system. His counsel was slowly but surely recognized as valid, and one by one the settlers, the most individualistic ones leading the way, abandoned the village system to locate on their own quarter sections, to which they added more land as soon as possible. Among the families moving to the West Reserve a fair number, especially on the eastern end, never settled in village formations at all.

Other obstacles to maintaining the village system were related in the East to marginal lands, as already indicated, and in the West to the advent of the railroads. The Pembina Line, which had built branch lines through Niverville in the East by 1879 and in the West Reserve shortly thereafter, had the option of selling odd-numbered sections of its lands, ten miles on either side of the railway line. In the West alone, 8,640 acres had been sold to Mennonites and others before the sales were temporarily halted in 1880 after the Mennonite leaders had expressed their dissatisfaction over this disruption of the Reserve.

The railway lines, in turn, led to further disruption through the establishment of trading centres. The five in the West Reserve all became flourishing railway towns (see Table 2).[20] The railway did not pass through the East Reserve, and trading

TABLE 2

TOWNS ARISING ALONG RAILROAD LINE IN WEST RESERVE

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Rosenfeld | 1883 |
| 2. Gretna | 1883 |
| 3. Plum Coulee | 1884 |
| 4. Winkler | 1892 |
| 5. Altona | 1895 |

centres such as Steinbach and Grunthal emerged not as "impositions" from the outside but rather as expansions of the most strategically located and trade-minded villages. The grist mills and cheese factories founded in such villages were followed by tanneries, machine shops, lumber yards, and general stores.

In both reserves, however, the trading centres had the effect

of breaking down the Mennonite way of isolated self-contained village life. They became the hubs of assimilation with and adjustment to the larger society. However, St. Pierre, Emerson, Winnipeg, and Morden had a clear non-Mennonite identity which Mennonites recognized as foreign and which, consequently, they learned not to adopt. Mennonite towns, on the other hand, could easily incorporate "foreign" elements as part of the total Mennonite culture, as long as this did not happen too rapidly and too completely. Thus, the arrival of German Lutherans, German Catholics, and Jewish businessmen, catering to the Mennonites, represented tolerable influences when compared to the English influence of Morden, the French presence in St. Pierre, or the Ukrainians moving into the southern parts of the East Reserve.

Meanwhile, other external threats to the Canadian Mennonite commonwealth appeared on the horizon in the form of municipal government and public schools. The reserve and village systems, as in Russia, had from the beginning allowed for a good deal of self-government. The village authorities provided for their own schools, common pastures, and streets, and the Reserve attended to the building of essential bridges and roads. The village government was headed by a *Schulze* or mayor and that of the reserve by a reeve or *Oberschulze*. At both levels, ministers and bishops had an important role, especially in the settling of disputes and the setting up of schools and churches. In 1879, however, the provinces passed the municipal act which divided the settled parts of the province into municipalities, with elected councils to run essential services. At first this meant the building of roads and bridges and some weed control, but municipal authority soon extended to where it overlapped with church authority as, for instance, in questions of law and order and the dispensing of charity to the poor.

Some of the Mennonites accepted municipalization while others resisted. The Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthaler bishops in the East were inclined to resist erosion of their autonomy, but since the Hanover Municipality was coterminous with the East Reserve, the problem was lessened by the geography. In the West, the Bergthaler church had among its ranks leaders quite prepared to accept change, while others were more reluctant. Most resistant were the Reinlaender church people in the western part of the West Reserve, especially when they discovered that the whole reserve had been divided into two parts in a way destructive to the

commonwealth. The Rhineland Municipality reached beyond the reserve in the west to incorporate English-speaking elements and the Douglas Municipality incorporated non-Mennonite communities up to the Red River at the other end. In due course the two municipalities were joined to become Rhineland and the non-Mennonite areas attached to other municipalities.

Since the Mennonites refused at first to participate in the elections, the first reeves were Anglo-Saxon in Rhineland and German Lutheran in Douglas. Those church members who took part were penalized by the bishops or the church, frequently with excommunication, a rather severe social penalty, inasmuch as the excommunicated were debarred from communication with their own people. Living within the system, however, isolated them from effective association with non-Mennonite people. The penalty of nonconformity, therefore, could be quite a burden, and those who had the courage to invite and withstand it were certainly as heroic as those bishops who, likewise well-intentioned, sought to prevent at all costs the erosion of the commonwealth.

Among the first five Mennonite councillors, four were elected by acclamation. One of them, John Dyck of Osterwick, attempted to take a moderate stand. While accepting the civic position contrary to the church's wish, he sought to act in ways that would not further antagonize it. Responding to his reluctance to act, council not only appointed a replacement for him but also entered a civic prosecution against him. The fine was $40, which the church agreed to pay for him but, according to one source, never did.[21]

At the second election in 1881, Jacob Giesbrecht of Reinland, the largest village in the West Reserve, was elected as reeve. Thereafter the number of voters increased steadily in defiance of the church doctrine and discipline. Those who were excommunicated joined the Lutherans, Baptists, Adventists and other denominations, or waited for more tolerant Mennonite options. Joining other denominations, incidentally, was also a way of rejoining the Mennonites in a social way, because it removed the joiners from the full significance of the church ban and its resulting ostracism. At the same time, it was a way of getting back into the social circle without worrying about getting back into the church.

Another point of tension for the Mennonites was the school system. Although the major clash between the private and public school sectors did not come until some time later, the beginnings

of it must not be overlooked. The Mennonites had asked for and obtained from the federal government the permission to set up their own schools, as they had in Russia. Theirs were church-run schools with the emphasis on religious instruction and moral education, in addition to the three R's, all in the German language. The teachers were examined and appointed by the church — 36 in the East Reserve at one time in 1879, one for each village.

Before 1890 the public school system of Manitoba consisted essentially of two sets of officially recognized tax-supported schools, the French Catholic and the Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Mennonite schools could become part of the Protestant system and enjoy a fairer and more adequate tax support base, yet with little interference, simply by registering with the Protestant Board. In the East Reserve such registration took place until 1880, when the more conservative leaders of the West Reserve warned of the dangers and encouraged a united stand against the practice. The public school issue could, however, not be evaded forever, especially after 1890 and the organization of public school districts, which for the Mennonites meant double taxation. However, it also meant the possibility of better schools.

Separation within the Mennonite community and successful defiance of the church by scores of individuals, especially in the West Reserve, was further encouraged by the economic prosperity which came to the community before the end of the century. In 1898 the actual value of property in Rhineland Municipality exceeded six million dollars. Annually, it yielded more than two million bushels of wheat. Up to 100 pounds of butter per family were marketed every year in the Mennonite towns. In material wealth, Rhineland led the 74 municipalities of the province, though it was exceeded in area by at least 14.

The meaning of this prosperity for individual settlers is illustrated by information gathered in 1900. Peter Peters near Winkler had been in the country only 20 years when he owned two sections of land and could buy for cash a steam-threshing outfit costing $3,000. Gerhard Braun near Morden, who began in 1875 with $75, owned 1,600 acres of land, 24 horses and 20 cows, including purebred stallions and bulls. Jacob Siemens of Rosenfeld was worth $50,000. Bernardt Wiebe of Altona accumulated in 25 years what would have taken 100 in Russia. This list was only the beginning. Some, like W. Peters, had even been able to go back to Russia for a visit:

> I was in Russia ten years ago on a visit, and I will go again in a few years more. When I was there before a great many people were enquiring about this country, and wanted to know all about it. All my old friends who saw me after 10 years, said I looked healthy, as if this country had been good to me.[22]

This prosperity enabled the Mennonites to pay off their debts to the government and to the native Ontario Mennonites, who had advanced over $50,000 and who agreed to cancel some of its interest and principal in 1880. The government loan, of which $90,000 was used, was paid in full in 1892; $24,000 of this was rebated in consideration of the poorer elements. To the "brethren in Ontario" Bishop Johann Wiebe addressed the following words of thanks:

> All this which you have done for us humble people, and what the government has given us in land and money, and what is still more, that we with our children have the liberty of exercising our faith according to the teachings of our Saviour by the providence of God, so moves our hearts, that we are constrained in praise and thanks to exclaim, "O Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits," which the great God, the Canadian brethren and the Dominion Government have bestowed upon thee. The Lord of all grace, love, and peace be your shield and exceeding great reward. Amen.[23]

TABLE 3[24]

LOANS ADVANCED TO MANITOBA SETTLERS

| RESERVE | FROM ONTARIO MENNONITES* | FROM GOVERNMENT |
|---|---|---|
| East† | $23,638.52 | $35,329.83 |
| West | 26,000.00 | 54,670.17‡ |

* Repayable in eight years at six per cent but in 1880 balance of interest cancelled and principal reduced by 60 per cent.

† Including those transferring to the West.

‡ Francis says "presumably over $60,000," assuming that all of the $100,000 loan was used. In the repayment, however, a principal of only $90,000 is mentioned.

The prosperity also produced independence, which further accelerated the breakdown of the villages. By 1891 there were fewer than 25 villages functioning in the East Reserve, breaking up at the rate of one a year. Around 1900 there were not more than 18 complete villages left in the West Reserve.[25] Block settlement also broke down, the Mennonites having sold land to outside speculators. An attempt in 1882 by some leaders to obtain a government ruling, making such sales difficult, had failed. On the fringes of both East and West Reserves, farmers had availed themselves of the opportunity to sell their land if this could be done advantageously. It was also true that the Reserves were opposed by non-Mennonites who saw in them an unfair economic competition.

Recognizing that the Reserves had effectively come to an end, the government passed Orders-in-Council throwing them open for general settlement in 1898.[26] Meanwhile, the Mennonites had themselves been moving out of the Reserves (see Table 4).[27] While the majority of the 15,246 Mennonites then in the province remained in the original settlements, the two Reserves and the Scratching River settlement, hundreds had moved outside, albeit to areas bordering the original settlements. More serious than the population shift, however, was the gradual dissolution of the village system.

TABLE 4

LOCATION OF MENNONITES IN MANITOBA IN 1901

| DISTRICTS AND SUBDISTRICTS | MENNONITES* | OTHERS | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| BRANDON | 23 | 39,282 | 39,305 |
| LISGAR | 10,915 | 34,037 | 44,952 |
| Argyle | — | 3,869 | 3,869 |
| Dufferin | — | 5,527 | 5,527 |
| Carman, Village | 1 | 1,438 | 1,439 |
| Lorne | — | 3,286 | 3,286 |
| Louise | — | 4,208 | 4,208 |
| Pembina | — | 3,240 | 3,240 |
| Manitou, Village | — | 617 | 617 |
| Rhineland† | 8,864 | 1,027 | 9,891 |
| Plum Coulee, Village† | 119 | 275 | 394 |
| Gretna, Village† | 118 | 548 | 666 |

| DISTRICTS AND SUBDISTRICTS | MENNONITES* | OTHERS | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| Riverside | — | 1,601 | 1,601 |
| Stanley† | 1,812 | 3,357 | 5,169 |
| Morden, Village | 1 | 1,521 | 1,522 |
| Turtle Mountain | — | 3,523 | 3,523 |
| MACDONALD | 11 | 37,060 | 37,071 |
| MARQUETTE | 7 | 34,068 | 34,075 |
| PROVENCHER | 4,267 | 20,595 | 24,862 |
| DeSalaberry | — | 1,807 | 1,807 |
| Emerson, Town | 9 | 831 | 840 |
| Franklin | 73 | 4,617 | 4,690 |
| Hanover‡ | 2,373 | 630 | 3,003 |
| La Broquerie | 468 | 2,127 | 2,595 |
| Montcalm | 264 | 2,364 | 2,628 |
| Morris§ | 1,007 | 1,243 | 2,250 |
| Morris, Town | 1 | 464 | 465 |
| Ritchot | 5 | 2,035 | 2,040 |
| St. Boniface | — | 585 | 585 |
| St. Boniface, Town | — | 2,019 | 2,019 |
| Kildonan | — | 428 | 428 |
| Tache | 67 | 1,320 | 1,387 |
| Unorganized Territory | — | 125 | 125 |
| SELKIRK | 10 | 32,596 | 32,606 |
| WINNIPEG | 13 | 42,327 | 42,340 |
| TOTAL | 15,246 | 239,965 | 255,211 |

* Hundreds of Manitoba Mennonites moved to the Northwest Territories in 1891–1901.
† West Reserve Area.
‡ East Reserve Area.
§ Scratching River.

After 25 years it was clear that the Manitoba settlement of the Russian Mennonites had not quite turned out the way the leaders had planned it. Solidarity and total community had escaped the Mennonites, though the unique character of their original settlements was not to be erased for a long time. Internally, individualistic tendencies were obviously prepared to sacrifice

the Russian Mennonite model of community. The political, economic and social patterns of the surrounding peoples and the Manitoba government proved too forceful to resist.

Canada's further effort to assimilate these immigrants, especially through public schools, proved traumatic for many. Foreign religious influences, including multiple Mennonite intrusions from the United States, brought another round of fragmentation and disintegration into the communities. Some welcomed the influences as the source of a Manitoba awakening which none of the Mennonites should escape. Others viewed them as part of the growing worldly influence against which they were obligated to defend themselves or from which it was their duty to escape.

## FOOTNOTES

1. John Webster Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972). p. 33.
2. See D. G. Creighton, *et al., Minorities, Schools, and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969); and Lovell Clark, *The Manitoba School Question: Majority or Minority Rights?* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1968).
3. N. K. Clifford, "His Dominion: A Vision in Crisis," *Studies in Religion,* II (Spring 1973), pp. 315–26. See also Allan Smith, "Metaphor and Nationality in North America," *Canadian Historical Review*, LI (September 1970), pp. 247–75.
4. Quoted in letter by Peter Dueck, August 12, 1784, in *Gedenkfeier (75) der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada* (Steinbach, Man.: Festkomitee der Mennonitischen Ostreserve, 1949).
5. John Warkentin, "The Mennonite Settlements in Manitoba," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1960, p. 16.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
7. John F. Galbraith, *The Mennonites in Manitoba 1875–1900: A Review of their Coming, their Progress, and their Present Prosperity* (Morden, Man.: The Chronicle Press, 1900), p. 7 (adapted).
8. Canada, *Journal of the House of Commons*, 1886, Appendix 6, p. 34.
9. Jacob Y. Shantz, "From Manitoba," *Herald of Truth*, November, 1875, p. 169.
10. CGC, Philip Wismer, "A Record of Russian Mennonite Aid Committee for Lincoln County, Ontario, 1873–1880," unpublished manuscript, p. 7.
11. *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, July 10, 1875.

12. Ernst Correll, "The Mennonite Loan . . . ," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XX (October 1946), pp. 255–75; and *House of Commons Debates*, February 19, 1875.
13. *House of Commons Debates*, February 26, 1875, pp. 377–91.
14. C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), pp. 182–86.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 181–86; see also "The Vice-Regal Visit," *Manitoba Free Press*, August 23, 1877, pp. 1–2.
17. Henry W. Barneby, *Life and Labour in the Far, Far West* (London: Cassell & Company, 1884), pp. 358–60.
18. Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
19. The Dominion Lands Act was amended in 1876 to enable the Mennonites to settle as they wished, but individual ownership of a contiguous parcel of land was thereby not made easier.
20. E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), pp. 153–60.
21. Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
23. Johann Wiebe, "Address of Thanks from the Mennonite Brethren in Manitoba to their Brethren in Ontario," *Herald of Truth*, XXVII (August 15, 1890).
24. John Warkentin, *op cit.*, p. 213; and Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
25. Francis, *op. cit.*, pp. 138–39.
26. East Reserve — August 1, 1898, West Reserve — November 30, 1898, PAC, *Orders-in-Council*, Record Group 2, #1266, June 27, 1898.
27. Canada, *Census of Canada*, 1901, Vol. IV, pp. 26–8, 156–61.