Provenance

Arrival in Manitoba

8. Mass Migration from Russia to Manitoba

The church chose Canada because [*there*] *it stood under the protection of the Queen of England, and we believed that our freedom from military service could be better maintained and also that the church and school would be under our control* — GERHARD WIEBE.[1]

AT THE very moment when the Russian Mennonites were working out new spiritual and ecclesiastical destinies for themselves, their own and the Prussians' futures were being significantly affected by circumstances quite beyond their control. In the early 1870s, the tsar began to withdraw the eternal *Privilegium*; simultaneously, from across the Atlantic, the Mennonites were offered a new version of it. In the resulting negotiations and competitions the Mennonites were lured by at least three countries, including Russia. The majority chose to stay in Russia while many others opted for Canada and the United States.

Among the people to whom the clash between the Russian and Mennonite societies came as no surprise was Cornelius Jansen of Berdyansk, a southern Russian seaport. Jansen, himself a Mennonite, had served for nine years as German consul and as an international contact in general. He counselled the Prussian Mennonite delegation in 1870 to look to America rather than to Russia for their future, and before that he had received Quakers from

England. Upon their return, the Quakers wrote a letter of admonition, saying that the Russian Mennonites "should be instrumental in spreading the truth of the Gospel of Christ"[2] — in other words, become more mission-minded. Jansen tried to get the letter printed for wide distribution, but Russian authorities prevented this, leading him to the conclusion that the future of Russia looked bleak for nonconformists. He then turned his attention to investigating the prospects for a better homeland, which, according to the best information available, was America.

The Mennonites themselves were not quite ready to plan for such an exodus. Instead they sent a delegation of elders, teachers and administrators to St. Petersburg to remind the authorities of Tsar Paul's *Privilegium*. However, their case was weakened by the fact that neither Elder Leonhard Sudermann of Molotschna nor Elder Gerhard Dyck of Chortitza, the leaders of the delegation, could speak Russian. The president of the imperial council, who received them, declared that failure to learn the Russian language in 70 years of Russian residence was a sin. A promise to correct the neglect met with the rejoinder, "It's too late!"[3] In another sense, however, the delegates had arrived too *early* since the government was still in the process of policy formulation.

The delegates reflected little willingness to compromise, banking rather heavily on the *Privilegium*. When the president held out the possibility of a noncombatant service, the delegates expressed complete disinterest. They knew only what they would *not* do. Consequently, they offered no suggestions as to the kinds of national service they were prepared to perform. Finally, the delegates' defence of their nonresistance, their insistence that they could "embrace" their enemies if attacked, must have left the imperial authorities unmoved. After all, they were well informed on the lack of solidarity and love within the Mennonite colonies themselves — how the various conflicting parties had not been able to embrace each other.[4]

None the less, the members of the delegation were assured of the possibility of an alternative noncombatant service being arranged for their people. The Mennonites, however, doubted everything and wanted strong assurances of total exemption. To this end they attempted to see the tsar personally at his Crimean winter residence in January of 1872 and twice in St. Petersburg in 1873, all to no avail. They gained only a confirmation that Mennonites could be exempted from combatant service in exchange for an alternative form of service. Meanwhile, the Men-

nonites, having recognized the odds against special privilege, had proceeded to prepare for emigration to other lands, such as Turkestan, Palestine, Australia and the Americas. The tsar, alarmed by the possibility of losing some of his best agriculturalists, sent his special representative, General von Todtleben, to discourage these plans. But some Mennonites now felt it was their turn to say, "It's too late."

By that time migration plans were well underway and before the decade was out more than one-third of the 50,000 Mennonites had left for North America, along with other Mennonites from Poland and Prussia and Hutterites from Russia. That emigration was encouraged by the intense western competition for good agricultural immigrants, especially Mennonites. Not only were Canadian and American agents zealous in attracting them, but Mennonite leaders in both countries became intensely interested in a possible immigration from Russia. The main communications link for all of them was Cornelius Jansen. Beyond him, the British consul in Berdyansk, James Zohrab, and the American consul in Odessa, Timothy Smith, were eager to help.

The confluence of all these interests was instigated, as mentioned above, by the independent activities of Cornelius Jansen in 1870, before the tsar had made his ominous proclamation. Jansen had begun corresponding with Christian Krehbiel, secretary of the General Conference of Mennonite Churches in North America, and John F. Funk, the Elkhart publisher. Both gave strong reasons for choosing America as a place of settlement, and before long Funk was shipping hundreds of copies of *Herold der Wahrheit* to Russia to help persuade the masses.

Remembering the conditions of military exemption during the American Civil War, Funk assured Jansen that this could be obtained for the payment of 300 dollars per individual.[5] Jansen was pleased with what he heard and proceeded with personal plans to go to America, at the same time encouraging Mennonite leaders also to plan for mass emigration. After the disappointing attempt to see the tsar in the Crimea, Elder Sudermann became willing to examine the prospects. His first interest, however, was Canada, and in January 1872 he and 32 others asked Consul Zohrab about "exemption from all military service," about "grants of land," and about the desirability of dispatching a delegation.[6] In forwarding the inquiry to Earl Granville, the British foreign secretary, Zohrab suggested the resettlement in Canada not only of all the Mennonites, but also of "Germans and other

denominations." United States interests were already wooing them and every effort should be made by Canada to gain this "valuable acquisition." Zohrab added:

> The departure of the Germans will, undoubtedly, be a serious loss to the country for they are not only much greater proficients in agriculture than the native population, and consequently produce heavier crops and finer qualities but they are very hard working and, therefore, in proportion to each man, they bring a much larger quantity of land under cultivation and thus increase the produce of the country. They employ large numbers of Russian peasants or farm laborers and their villages are patterns of cleanliness and good order.[7]

A similar inquiry had been made to the United States consul. In April 1872 Timothy Smith told the Mennonites that compulsory military service did not exist in the United States and that lands were available either as free 165-acre homesteads or at about $1.25 per acre if purchased from governments and railway companies. He proposed that a small delegation be sent to inspect the situation.

About two weeks later the official Canadian bid was ready. A Privy Council report quoted from the statutes the Mennonite entitlement to exemption from military service[8] and offered "a free grant of 160 acres of the best land in the possession of the Dominion of the Province of Manitoba, or in other parts of the Northwest Territory . . . to persons over the age of 21 years . . ."[9] The government offered all these possibilities to the Mennonites and expressed readiness to pay the expenses of an official delegation.

Thus, the competing bids for the prospective immigrants had been placed, but before any official delegations were sent a clarification of the military question was requested. The United States consul had avoided speaking to the matter of conscription in time of war. In the Canadian reply, the words "exempt from military service when balloted in time of peace or war, upon such conditions and such regulations as the Governor-in-Council may from time to time prescribe" caused confusion. Bishop Sudermann wanted to know what was meant by "such conditions and such regulations." The termination of "eternal privileges" in South Russia within less than 100 years had made him and all Mennonites wary and extra cautious.

In August the leaders had the opportunity to question directly a personal representative of the Canadian government. He was William Hespeler, a German who had emigrated to Canada in 1850 and who since then had been engaged in business with his brother Jacob, the founder of the Ontario town of Hespeler. An occasional traveller to Europe in search of more immigrants, he arrived in South Russia as an official agent to deliver the government's provisions and invitation in person. He assured them that Mennonites were "absolutely free and exempted from military duty, either in time of peace or war." The Governor-in-Council could prescribe "no conditions or regulations" under which, in any circumstances, these people could be compelled to serve.[10] This interpretation of the military law left no loopholes, and the Mennonites seemed satisfied.

Hespeler remained in South Russia until the police began to interfere with his illegal activities. The British ambassador in St. Petersburg had kept the Russian government informed about the emigration discussion and, though he experienced no obstacle at first, Hespeler soon found himself without the proper permit to carry out his work. Having convinced himself that the Mennonites were immigrants worth having and having arranged for a delegation to visit Canada, he returned home, where he was made a Commissioner of Immigration and Agriculture and placed in Winnipeg to oversee the anticipated immigration. About the Mennonites he wrote to his superiors:

> They are a hard-working, sober, moral, and intelligent people, a great number have accumulated large means, and are owners of from ten to fourteen thousand acres of land . . . they are superior agriculturists, occupy excellent dwellings and have good farm buildings, all erected in brick. In their homes, which excel in order and cleanliness, I found prosperous merchants, manufacturers, and mechanics.[11]

Hespeler's positive assessment of the Mennonite character was further indicated by his reluctance to appoint an agent from among them, as suggested by Ottawa. Such an agent, according to Ottawa, should be paid "a remuneration of $2 per capita for all Mennonites immigrating and settling in Canada." It would not create a favourable effect, Hespeler said. Besides, such an agent would probably not be accepted by any of them "as according to my experience of them, I find them more conscientious than their confessionalists in Canada or the United States. It would in their

eyes look too much like dealing in human beings . . . they are a reasoning, thinking, cautious, and to a large extent, an educating people."[12]

The United States government did not send its own representative to Russia, although it seemed to be favoured over Canada. The task of enticing immigrants was left to zealous railroad and land agents. The result was that some Mennonites seemed to choose America before all the evidence was in. In the summer of 1872 a group of four young men from well-to-do families set off on their own exploration of America. Among them was 25-year-old Bernhard Warkentin who travelled extensively in North America in search of the right place to settle.

Meanwhile Canada was becoming more determined. Hespeler had whetted the Canadian government's appetite for immigrants like these Mennonite agriculturalists, needed so badly to settle the new province of Manitoba which had joined the Dominion in 1870. The government hoped to build a railroad along which a chain of settlements was to tie the two ends of Canada together before the Americans could expand into the wide open spaces from the south. Earlier settlement attempts in Manitoba had not been very successful, and the Métis rebellion in that province under Louis Riel had signalled Ottawa not to take the region for granted. What was needed above all was a sizeable group of capable and permanent settlers. The Russian Mennonites appeared to be likely prospects.

To help persuade them to choose Canada the government needed other Mennonites, and so Jacob Y. Shantz, farmer, businessmen and school board trustee of Berlin (later Kitchener), was selected to inspect Manitoba with a view to recommending its suitability for settlement. He made the first of 27 trips in the fall of 1872 in the company of Bernhard Warkentin, who with Shantz had been invited to Ottawa to discuss the plan. Although his three companions had already returned to Europe, Warkentin accepted the Canadian invitation to inspect Manitoba; but then he decided on Kansas, where he settled to prepare the way for other immigrants. Apparently he had not been overly impressed with Manitoba, with its many mosquitoes, untamed Indians, long cold winters, and lack of railroads, though he admitted the land quality to be above his expectations.[13]

Determined to promote Manitoba, Shantz and Hespeler had their work cut out for them. Shantz's 19-page *Narrative of a Journey to Manitoba* served the promotional purpose well; the

Department of Agriculture subsequently had it translated into several European languages and distributed several hundreds of thousands of copies. His five reasons for settlement in Manitoba, expressed in terms of preference over the United States, were as follows: (1) lots of prairie land not requiring clearing and yet plenty of timber near by, (2) land not broken up by land grants to railway companies, making possible compact settlement near transportation arteries, (3) good water communication and navigation and rail lines in prospect, (4) free land grants and options to purchase adjacent areas for one dollar, (5) drier and steadier winters.

Shantz recommended Manitoba as a place for settlement in the strongest possible terms. The "large grants of land *en bloc*" would allow settlements large and compact enough for the Mennonites to "preserve their language and customs."[14] Convinced that Manitoba was the right choice, he now prepared the Canadian government to offer attractive terms. No time was lost in preparing the case. By the spring of 1873 several delegations, as previously recommended, were formed, representing not only Mennonites but also the Hutterites in South Russia, as well as the Swiss and Dutch-German Mennonites in Polish Volhynia and West Prussia (see Table 1).[15]

TABLE 1

MENNONITE DELEGATIONS FROM RUSSIA IN 1873

ELEGATION NO.	DEPARTURE DATE	PLACE OF ARRIVAL	MEMBERS	REPRESENTATION
1.	February	Montreal	Heinrich Wiebe	Bergthal
			Jacob Peters	"
			Cornelius Buhr	himself
2.	Early April	New York	Cornelius Toews	Kleine Gemeinde
			David Klassen	"
			Paul Tschetter	Hutterites
			Laurence Tschetter	"
3.	Late April	New York	Jacob Buller	Molotschna
			Leonhard Sudermann	"
			Tobias Unruh	Volhynia/Poland
			Andreas Schrag	"
			Wilhelm Ewert	West Prussia

Hespeler had alerted the Canadian government to the keen American competition for the immigrants and advised them to be ready and waiting in New York since American agents would surely be there to direct them away from their Canadian destination. "Overbalance the inducement," Hespeler counselled, showing exactly what might be done and how the Canadian offer might be stated. He advised, moreover, that they should help representatives to assist and direct the delegates at the European point of embarkation.[16] At Hamburg, therefore, the Canadian government had its servants waiting so that the delegates would not be "surrounded by ever so many agents and runners."[17] Yet those very agents, whose "official duty it was to take care that the Mennonites were not swindled," had allowed the money broker to charge not five per cent commission, which would have been high in any case, but twenty per cent, which was "downright swindle." The result was that delegates paid $495 in exchange on 2,400 American dollars' worth of 3,000 Russian government rubles. The incident was related to, and verified by, a representative of the German society in Montreal who felt that Canada should reimburse the delegates as this would "greatly enhance their confidence in our Government."[18] The special agent in Hamburg denied a swindle, saying that paper, as opposed to silver rubles, fluctuated too much to allow for a more favourable exchange rate.[19]

The first of the three delegations stopped in Berlin and Elkhart to be briefed by Jacob Y. Shantz and John F. Funk, respectively, before going on to Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and Texas. The other two followed, stopping en route in Pennsylvania and Indiana, then joining the first group on June 9 at Fargo, North Dakota, for a joint inspection of the northern states and the province of Manitoba. Competing salesmen travelled with them, all doing their part to praise the lands they represented. Hespeler and Shantz promoted Canada; Funk and the representatives of several railroad companies thought that the United States would be best. In his *Herald of Truth* Funk had presented a three-fold reason for the immigrants' choosing the United States over Canada: the milder climate, proximity to commercial centres for the discharge of produce and the republican form of government. On the latter point he said:

> We have examples where, under monarchical governments, particularly the Mennonites have lost their dearest, religious privileges. . . . Here in the United States, all the oppressed followers of Christ have an asylum of the fullest, religious

> liberty . . . where they [the Russian Mennonites] may feel measurably secure that their privileges will not soon be taken from them.[20]

The four-day trip into Manitoba was made by boat on the Red River, winding some 300 miles toward Winnipeg. At the end of the journey the Governor, his entire ministry, five teams, wagons and light camping equipment were waiting to take them to inspect eight townships of uncultivated prairie lands 35 miles southeast of Winnipeg. The sales pitch included liberal references to Queen Victoria, herself a German, and to her daughter, who had married the heir to the German crown. The trek was a discouraging one for most of the delegates. It was the rainy season, the trails were extremely scarce and poorly travelled, the mosquitoes were thick, and much of the land was swampy. Before half the land had been inspected, the delegates asked to be returned to Winnipeg, and immediately the Hutterite, Polish and Prussian delegates returned to the Dakotas. Six days later the Molotschna delegates (Sudermann and Buller) had seen enough of the land along the Assiniboine River west of Winnipeg and also headed for the States.

The Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde delegates, having previously inspected the States, seemed to be deciding for Canada, even before Shantz and Hespeler had shown them all there was to be seen. The disadvantages of what they saw were obvious but for them the disadvantages did not outweigh the advantages. The lands in Manitoba were free and available in large exclusive blocks. Exemption from military service was guaranteed to be absolute; there would be no objection to the use of the German language. All of these provisions, plus the prospect of living under the British monarchy, John F. Funk notwithstanding, appealed to the representatives of these poorer and more conservative colonies.

An incident, however, that took place at White Horse Plains, 24 miles west of Fort Garry, on July 1, Dominion Day, threatened to ruin the prospective migration to Manitoba. Apparently the incident arose when a Métis struck the faces of horses belonging to a half-breed in Hespeler's party. The drunken Métis, who constituted the majority of the inhabitants in the village, attacked the group so that "the Mennonites, who are noncombatants, were in imminent peril." Their hotel was "surrounded by an infuriated mob,"[21] reported Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to Ottawa. William Hespeler said that if he had not stood guard with pistol and sword while the attackers tried to break into their

hotel, the delegates might never have lived to tell their Russian brethren about the land and freedom awaiting them. The government, having been notified of the incident by a fast rider, had immediately dispatched the Fort Garry Chief of Police and a body of troops, who arrested and imprisoned the five ringleaders of the mob. Mr. Hespeler believed that only inclement weather had prevented large numbers of half-breeds from gathering to reinforce the cordon, which had already succeeded in cutting off all roads around the hotel. Attempts to break through that cordon would have been disastrous, perhaps fatal. The Lieutenant-Governor believed the clash to have been unpremeditated, and yet he could not close his eyes to the fact "that expressions of strong hostility were used towards the Canadians, who are crowding into the province in large numbers, by the parties concerned in the affray."[22]

The delegation itself proceeded to Ottawa where, on July 23, 1873, Mr. John Lowe, the Secretary of Agriculture, placed into the hands of Klassen, Peters, Wiebe and Toews the 15-point version of the Canadian Privilegium. It offered the following "advantages to settlers": an entire exemption from military service; eight townships of land available free in quarter-section quantities or less to males 21 years old and over; exclusive use by Mennonites of the reserved land; additional townships if needed and exchange privileges for another eight townships; purchase rights at one dollar per acre of an additional three-quarters to make a section of 640 acres; full exercise of religious principles and education of children without restriction; the right to affirm instead of to swear in taking the oath; transportation credits in the years 1874–1876 of up to 30 dollars for adults (no more than 40 dollars up to 1882) from Hamburg to Fort Garry; and supplies for the sea voyage.[23]

Although most of these provisions were part of the standard immigration policy, some, such as the right to exclusive block settlement and the right to educate their own children, were new.[24] This latter provision was actually outside of federal jurisdiction, education being a mandate of the provinces according to the British North America Act. Its inclusion in the federal offer led to very serious misunderstandings in years to come. Three days after the Privilegium had been handed over, John Pope, Minister of Agriculture, eliminated the education provision from the official document, having recognized its legal discrepancies. The document was placed before the cabinet for approval

without advising the Mennonites of the change.[25] The very important military exemption had existed before in the sense that it was provided for in the first post-Confederation military service act in 1868. There it was written:

> Any person bearing a certificate from the Society of Quakers, Mennonists or Tunkers, or any inhabitant of Canada, or any religious denomination, otherwise subject to military duty, but who, from the doctrines of his religion, is averse to bearing of arms and refuses personal military service, shall be exempt from such service when balloted in time of peace, or war, upon such conditions and under such regulations as the Governor in Canada may from time to time prescribe.[26]

Although Russian authorities had granted the Mennonites ten years to comply with its new laws or to emigrate, they had apparently placed their bet on compliance. As the evidence mounted that they might lose their wager, they discouraged emigration by every means possible. Hespeler's movements, as already pointed out, were controlled and limited. His attempted visit to the colonies of 100,000 German Lutherans in Bessarabia, Cherson, and Crimea, for instance, was cut short by the harassments and "watchfulness of the police." When it was discovered that the real culprit might be Cornelius Jansen, he too was sent out of the country and Zohrab, the British consul, was warned of the severe penalties provided by the law for "those who seek to induce Russian subjects to emigrate," penalties from which his official position would not protect him.[27] Later, St. Petersburg advised London directly to be cautious. To stifle the emigration the Russian imperial government could grant "such a relaxation of the future military law of service as may satisfy the religious scruples of the German Mennonite colonies." Besides, the British were told, the Mennonites themselves should be assessed for their clever strategy. On the one hand, they were exercising

> pressure on the Imperial Government by a threat of emigration in order to obtain the fulfillment of their wishes whilst, on the other hand, they were simultaneously in communication with the Governments of Canada and of the United States with the view in case of failure with the Imperial Government, to secure the best conditions for their future emigration.[28]

On one occasion, when secret and confidential papers from

Ottawa, which were intended for British agents in Berdyansk, reached St. Petersburg through the Russian Post Office, the Canadian government was severely criticized for negotiating with the prospective immigrants without the "sanction of the Russian government." The American government, it was explained, was more prudent.[29] To be sure, the United States officially maintained a non-involvement profile, but immigration activity and promotion was quite considerable. Timothy Smith of the American consulate in Odessa had cultivated excellent relations with the German-speaking peoples in South Russia and, in the fall of 1872, 120 German Lutheran families were on their way, and additional hundreds were preparing to leave in 1873. Consul Zohrab complained that Smith, who knew the Germans and their language well, had a clear field to work in and could therefore "use his influence unchecked to direct current emigration."[30]

Hespeler and Shantz were aware of the strength of American influences, which is why they presented the benefits of Canada in comparison to those of the United States. Their trump cards were "block settlement" and "military exemption." Funk and his Mennonite ministerial colleagues, as well as the exiled Cornelius Jansen, who had already landed in America, were making an extraordinary effort to provide similar possibilities in their country. They appealed to members of Congress to make block settlement possible, not for speculation — "we beg you to prevent it" — but because the Canadian government had made such an offer, and the common pasture was essential to the Mennonite way of farming.[31]

Congress did not respond positively to the petitions, nor were the railroads in a position to give compact settlement guarantees since they owned only alternative sections of land. Neither were guarantees forthcoming on the matter of military exemption, in spite of the fact that the two Tschetters of the Hutterite delegation spoke to President Grant directly. They begged him to guarantee that they would "be free at least 50 years from everything that concerns war." They also requested other privileges, including the right to settle and organize communally and to have the full control of their own German schools. The president, reflecting the weakness of the federal government on these matters, replied that most of their requests relating to settlement and exemptions fell under state jurisdiction and that therefore he could make no promises. He felt, however, "that for the next 50 years we will not be entangled in another war in which military

service will be necessary."[32] This assessment of pacifist prospects under a republican form of government proved to be as much in error as that of John F. Funk.

If real assurances on liberty of conscience were lacking, why did the majority of migrating Russian Mennonites in the 1870s none the less choose America? One Canadian historian answers as follows: "Those who placed fertile land above sectarian freedom went to the United States, while those who insisted upon religious liberty at any price, came to Canada."[33] Another said that "some of the most ardent of all defenders of conscientious objection to military service went to the United States."[34]

It is also true that the legal protection of nonresistance and its very strict interpretation was no longer of the highest value to all Mennonites. An ambivalent outlook which had definitely emerged in Prussia also manifested itself in Russia. This ambivalence remained characteristic of those who stayed behind in both Prussia and Russia as well as those who migrated to America.[35]

The historical record of those who chose Canada is clear: their conscientious nonresistance and their German culture were of paramount importance, although they were not unhappy about the fact that both these values related to free land. The legal provisions were so important to them that they felt they could face any environmental handicaps to ensure them. Indeed, when 50 years later those legal provisions broke down, they again had the capacity to forsake the land, even in its developed state, in favour of their cherished values.

Other essential differences between those choosing Canada and the United States concerned economic, social and educational sophistication. The Canadian group consisted primarily of Chortitza people, descendants of those poor and simple pioneers who in the previous century had first left Prussia for Russia. The American group, largely from Molotschna, had not only made a stronger start in Russia but had also benefited more directly from the Cornies reforms in agriculture as well as in education.[36]

After the delegation had left Canada, the government officials felt that perhaps they had lost out to the United States in their bid, even though the delegates had given assurance that it was only a matter of organizing the first immigrants. New York newspapers which were quoted in London, Toronto, and Winnipeg suggested that the selection by the delegates of the "prairie provinces" had been premature and that in actual fact they favoured

the United States. The group returning to Russia from New York promised before their departure to "recommend Kansas as the most suitable locality for the 40,000 and that the first instalment of 2,000 will leave Russia next May." Asked the Toronto immigration office: "Which is correct, are there two colonies of Mennonites coming to America, one to Canada and one to the United States? And does each colony number exactly 40,000?"[37]

This was only another case of the newspapers and their readers confusing matters, but they revealed correctly the strong competition for, and high stakes in, the immigration. Canada knew that the final battle might come at points of disembarkation. Cornelius Jansen actually succeeded in persuading 30 families of the Kleine Gemeinde arriving in Toronto to go to Nebraska instead of to their planned destination, Manitoba. The various states and agencies in the United States were also outbidding each other. Several states quickly passed laws to exempt Mennonites from militia duties. The railroad companies eagerly employed Mennonite agents, such as Peter Jansen, son of Cornelius, and others were given free railroad passes and gifts of land to help persuade their brethren.

When the delegations returned to Russia in the fall of 1873 with the report that an abundance of land was available on liberal terms and that there was freedom of religion, emigration fever increased. For those who wanted to migrate immediately there was the difficult question of the sale of land and their properties. Many emigrants sold their properties for half the value or less. Securing the necessary passports permitting emigration was even more difficult. Not only were the fees high, but considerable administrative delays caused problems. Indeed, the imperial government did not really want to grant exit visas until the tsar's personal representative, General von Todtleben, had spoken to the Mennonite leaders to persuade them that their best future lay in Russia. When it became clear that some had their minds made up, he wished them well and sped them on their way.

Sensing the real problem which the Mennonites had with the emerging Russian law, the imperial government acted in 1874 to make concrete the assurances and concessions that Todtleben and other spokesmen were promising. These provisions were that the original Mennonite settlers and their descendants should be exempted from military service but be subject to an alternative service in hospitals or forestry camps where they could work in compact and exclusive groups, in times of both war and peace.

However, new immigrants arriving after enactment of the law, as well as converts, were to be excluded from these privileges.

These assurances were probably related to the fact that in the end only one-third of the Russian Mennonite population emigrated in the 1870s. Among those who decided to stay, there were strong objections to the emigration propaganda. Missionary Heinrich Dirks, for instance, insisted that even in the worst of cultural and political circumstances the Mennonites had a missionary obligation to remain in Russia. The world could not always provide an escape for the Mennonites. He wrote from Sumatra:

> Should there, finally, by the new order of things, much that we highly prize, be lost; should the German element more and more lose itself in the Russian, . . . and should it finally be that most of the Mennonite young men, instead of performing hospital service, would voluntarily join the ranks of the combatants, it will no doubt, even then yet be possible to worship God in spirit and in truth. Hence, whatever the result may be, I decidedly advise not to emigrate . . . Those who advise too much to emigrate, positively do not know the world, neither the character of this present time, otherwise they must know that that from which they propose to escape will overtake them wherever in this wide world they choose to settle.[38]

Johann Epp, a minister at Saratov, similarly voiced his objections in a strong article to John F. Funk. Epp insisted that the acceptance of an alternative service, unrelated to the war ministerium, was truer to the Christian confession than payments for substitute military recruits. His position on these matters was not an isolated one. The extensive assistance given by the nearby Mennonite colonies during the Crimean War in matters of food, medicine and transport suggested itself as a real alternative to direct military service. In Epp's opinion most of the departing emigrants represented elements forever dissatisfied and forever seeking an Eldorado which would eternally satisfy all their desires. His charges support the suggestion that at least some of the migration was motivated by material considerations and perhaps even by Mennonites seeking relief from one another.

> We hear them speaking not so much about freedoms with respect to military service awaiting them there but rather about the fair, fertile, and cheap lands, and the unusual fundamental rights and other worthy institutions of America which eliminate all strife and conflict.[39]

Epp conceded some value in the emigration. Not only were the colonies thereby purified of restless elements but the landless also had the opportunity to obtain land in Russia cheaply. But faith or conscience was not a reason for leaving Russia, in his opinion. On the contrary, the Scriptures were clear that Christians had obligations to their country and to the whole of society. This debate over the necessity and desirability of immigration in the 1870s never came to an end. Among those who stayed in Russia, a sizeable number felt the impulse to move into central Asia, as followers of the zealous Claasz Epp, or into Siberia, as pioneers of daughter colonies. Later, the Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath led some to conclude that the failure to emigrate westward en masse at an earlier time had been a great historical error.

The earliest westward movements consisted largely of small groups leaving from the Crimea, from Volhynia and Prussia (see Tables 2 and 3). However, there were also some larger movements. The entire Alexanderwohl congregations from Molotschna, which had moved as a unit also from Prussia, settled in Kansas. The Canadian immigration consisted for the most part of resettlement of entire colonies, including the Borozenko colony of the Kleine Gemeinde as well as Bergthal and Fuerstenland. The latter two movements attracted others from Chortitza, the mother colony, and from related settlements.

The route for most of the immigrants went overland from Odessa to Hamburg since the imperial government did not permit any shipping companies to take immigrants directly from Russian ports. From Hamburg five shipping lines transported the immigrants either directly to New York, via Liverpool to Quebec, or via Antwerp to Philadelphia. The American groups stopped over either in Pennsylvania or at Elkhart, Indiana, or at both places, before going on to their ultimate destinations.[40]

The Canadian groups were first taken by train from Quebec and Montreal to Toronto. From there they went overland to Collingwood, then by boat to Duluth, overland to Moorehead, and finally by either the International or the Cheyenne Red River boats to their destination in Manitoba. Actually the Dominion government wanted to bring the immigrants over the Dawson Road, a Canadian route, to prevent the possibility of the settlers being sidetracked by American agents between Duluth, Moorehead and the Canadian border.[41] However, Shantz thought the route to the Red River Valley via Lake-of-the-Woods from Lake Superior too hazardous. Passable only from June to September, it

TABLE 2

MENNONITE IMMIGRATION IN THE 1870S TO THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

DATE	NUMBER OF FAMILIES*	ORIGIN	DESTINATION
		1. THE UNITED STATES	
1873, June	Several	Crimea	Illinois
1873, July	27	Crimea	Mid-west States
1874, April	10	Volhynia (Swiss)	Dakota
1874, April	Small number	Prussia Russian Poland	Kansas
1874, June	30	Crimea	Kansas
1874, August	216	Alexanderwohl Molotschna	Kansas Nebraska
1874, August	159	Volhynia (Swiss)	Dakotas, Kansas
1874, late fall	265	Volhynia (Dutch) Poland Russia	Kansas
1874–1879		Crimea Hutterite Bruderhofs	Dakota
1874, June	30	Borozenko (Kleine Gemeinde)	Nebraska
		2. CANADA	
1874, June	70	Borozenko (Kleine Gemeinde)	Manitoba
1874–1876	1,000	Bergthal Chortitza, etc.	Manitoba
1875	266	Fuerstenland	Manitoba

* Number of families is approximate in a number of instances. There were an average of five members in each family. See Smith, *Russian Mennonites*, pp. 92–131; Gerbrandt, pp. 68–9; Francis, p. 5, and Krahn, *ME*, III, pp. 457–66 (all in the Bibliography).

TABLE 3

MIGRATIONS TO CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES BY YEARS*

YEAR	CANADA	UNITED STATES
1873	—	150
1874	1,533	5,225
1875	3,261	1,400
1876	1,352	1,241
1877	184	800
1878	324	530
1879	208	726
1880	69	—
Total	6,931	10,000

* United States figures based on Smith and in some cases represent approximations. Canadian figures are compiled from Quebec Ship Lists (PAC, Record Group 76, Lists 9-11, Microfilm C4528-30). Annual Report of Agriculture, *Sessional Papers*, 1875–1881, has slightly different figures for six of the years but the total of 6,930 differs only by one.

took a week at the best of times, and therefore he "vetoed" the plan. Some groups also travelled overland from Toronto via Detroit and Chicago.

The immigrants arrived with a minimum of material goods with which to begin farming anew. While some settlers had come with small tools and implements and even farm wagons, the majority expected to purchase the elemental necessities on the spot, i.e. in Moorehead or in Winnipeg. Again, the agents in both communities, knowing that tens of thousands of dollars were involved, went out of their way to woo the immigrants. Upon the advice of Shantz and Hespeler, however, the first and most of the subsequent groups of immigrants bought their shovels, scythes, hayforks, stoves, coffee mills, frying pans, horses, cattle, flour and other provisions in Winnipeg. The first 65 families spent $20,000 in three days, the most costly items being wagons and horses.

The final point of Canadian disembarkation was the juncture of

the Rat and Red rivers, a French parish point called St. Agathe. From there the settlers walked or drove inland about four miles. Immigration sheds and tents had been set up by Shantz. As a reward for this and his many other labours, he received a free section of land on the western edge of the reserve.[42]

While the first group of 65 immigrant families brought with them an average of nearly $1,000 per family, most others did not fare as well. The second group of 85 families averaged less than $100 per family (see Table 4).[43] Not only were there very poor

TABLE 4

RUSSIAN MENNONITES HAVING EMIGRATED TO MANITOBA, THEIR NUMBER, ARRIVAL DATES, AND CAPITAL

COMPANY	ARRIVAL IN TORONTO	NO. OF FAMILIES	INDIVIDUALS	CAPITAL
1.	July 19, 1874	65	327	$63,000
2.	July 30, 1874	85	290	8,000
3.	July 31, 1874	100	504	30,000
4.	September 1874	24	120	22,000
5.	September 1874	23	166	20,000
6.	June 27, 1875	28	140	23,000
7.	July 3, 1875	135	664	68,000
8.	July 7, 1875	96	480	40,000
9.	July 15, 1875	111	555	27,000
10.	July 22, 1875	195	998	64,000
11.	July 29, 1875	72	362	20,000
12.	June 21, 1876	42	214	30,000
13.	June 26, 1876	44	224	11,000
14.	June 29, 1876	48	244	20,000
15.	July 12, 1876	14	68	(Branches of
16.	July 20, 1876	14	78	families who had been left in Liverpool due to sickness)
17.	August 1, 1876	82	511	58,000
18.	June 30, 1877	35	183	19,000
19.	July 1, 1878	48	270	—
20.	July 8, 1879	33	207	60,000
21.	August 4, 1880	14	69	7,000
Totals		1,281	6,674*	$591,000

* Based on Philip Wismer.

families in the immigration, but many had to wait for sufficient cash from the final liquidation of their Russian assets. To help meet the needs of the incoming immigrants, the American and Canadian Mennonites organized three aid committees.

In the west and midwest, the General Conference and the old Mennonites combined to form the Mennonite Board of Guardians, with its agent, Bernhard Warkentin, basing his work in New York. In Pennsylvania, both groups of Mennonites combined to form the Mennonite Executive Aid Committee; a similar organization, the Russian Mennonite Aid Committee, was organized in Ontario by Jacob Y. Shantz (see Table 5).[44]

These committees cooperated in the movement of the Russian Mennonites, attending to every detail and placing representatives in Hamburg, New York, and Toronto to make sure that no problem was overlooked and no need unattended to. Although no complete reports are available, it was estimated that the American committees raised up to $100,000 for aid in the early migration years and the Canadian committee, with the help of the Canadian Parliament, produced an equal amount.

In addition, the Ontario Mennonites meeting the immigrants in Toronto ensured that they were resupplied with food and other provisions for the balance of the journey since the Canadian government contribution ended at Collingwood. A group of immigrants arriving late in the fall of 1874 spent the winter in Ontario Mennonite homes before moving on to Manitoba. In 1875 Simeon Reesor of Markham accompanied a group of seven families all the way to Manitoba. The entire journey from Southern Russia to Manitoba took from six to eight weeks, including a sea voyage of about 20 days. The immigrants accepted the privations on the assumption that the new homeland would offer them not only prosperity but permanence with the desired freedoms.

TABLE 5

RUSSIAN MENNONITE AID ORGANIZATIONS AND ARRANGEMENTS

NAME	REGION	DATE FOUNDED	PERSONNEL	TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS
Mennonite Executive Committee*	Pennsylvania	April 14, 1874	Amos Herr, chairman John Shenk, secretary Gabriel Bear and Herman K. Godshall, treasurers Casper Hett, agent	Red Star Line Antwerp to Philadelphia
Mennonite Board of Guardians*	West and Mid-west	Nov. 7, 1873	Christian Krehbiel, chairman David Goerz, secretary John F. Funk, treasurer Bernhard Warkentin, agent	Hamburg-American and Inman Lines Hamburg to New York
Russian Mennonite Aid Committee	Ontario	Dec. 22, 1873†	Jacob Y. Shantz, secretary-treasurer Elias Schneider John Gascho Samuel Reesor John Koch Philip Wismer	Allan Line Liverpool to Quebec

* Both American committees were coordinating bodies for numerous local committees.
† Date of first collection.

FOOTNOTES

1. Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Amerika* (Winnipeg, Man.: Druckerei Der Nordwesten, 1900), p. 27.
2. Gustav E. Reimer and G. R. Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar: Cornelius Jansen and the Great Mennonite Migration, 1874* (Newton, Kans.: Mennonite Publication Office, 1956), pp. 36–7.
3. P. M. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Bruederschaft in Russland, 1789–1940* (Halbstadt, Taurien: Raduga, 1911), p. 493.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 494. See also Wiebe's commentary on spiritual coldness among and between the Mennonites.
5. Reimer, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
6. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Leonhard Sudermann *et al.* to J. Zohrab, January 15, 1872. Original, signed by 33, in Public Records Office, London, Foreign Office files, 65–842. Another similar letter from Fuerstenau, Molotschna, signed by 19 in same file.
7. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, J. Zohrab to E. Granville, February 3, 1872. The original, quite extensive Zohrab correspondence is lodged in the Public Record Office in London (PRO), Foreign Office files (FO): 65/842, 65/847, 65/852, 65/856, 65/892, 181/510.
8. 31 Victoria, chap. 40, sect. 17, "Act Respecting the Militia and Defence to the Dominion of Canada."
9. PAC, *Department of Agriculture General Correspondence*, Record Group 17, A1, Vol. 62, #5951½ and 5980. The same as Order-in-Council 827B, April 26, 1872.
10. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, William Hespeler, "Report of his Proceedings in Russia," August 28, 1872; and J. Lowe, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, to William Hespeler, September 16, 1872. See also PRO, FO 65/861, "Notizen ueber Amerika, 1872," a printed document from diverse sources on the matter of military service in Canada and the United States.
11. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, William Hespeler report to Canadian authorities on visit to South Russia.
12. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, William Hespeler to J. H. Pope, October 21, 1872.
13. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Bernhard Warkentin to J. H. Pope, November 28, 1882.
14. Jacob Y. Shantz, *Narrative of a Journey to Manitoba, Together with an Abstract of the Dominion Lands Act, and an Extract from the Government Pamphlet on Manitoba* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1873).
15. C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), p. 51.

16. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, William Hespeler to J. H. Pope, April 26, 1873.
17. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Letter from Special Immigrant Agent, Hamburg, to J. H. Pope, March 21, 1873.
18. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Dr. F. Fischer of the German Society of Montreal to Department of Agriculture, April 11, 1873.
19. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, J. E. Klotz, Hamburg, to John Lowe, May 10, 1874.
20. John F. Funk, "Minnesota and Dakota, or Manitoba," *Herald of Truth*, 1873, p. 25.
21. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, Fort Garry, to the Department of Agriculture, July 7, 1873.
22. *Ibid.*
23. PAC, *Orders-in-Council*, Record Group 2, #959, August 13, 1873. This order-in-council includes the letter of J. M. Lowe, Department of Agriculture, to David Klassen, Jacob Peters, Heinrich Wiebe and Cornelius Toews of July 23, 1873.
24. Norman MacDonald, *Canada Immigration and Colonization 1841–1903* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1966), pp. 197ff.
25. See E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), pp. 48–9.
26. 31 Victoria, chap. 40, sect. 17 (1868).
27. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Lord A. Loftus to J. Zohrab, April 16, 1873.
28. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Lord A. Loftus to Earl Granville, August 18, 1872.
29. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, Lord A. Loftus to Earl Granville, November 12, 1872.
30. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, J. Zohrab to Earl Granville, February 10, 1873.
31. See January 10, 1874, Petitions to Congress, in Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–8. Cf. Leland Harder, "The Russian Mennonites and American Democracy under Grant," in C. Krahn, ed., *From the Steppes to the Prairies* (Newton, Kans.: Mennonite Publication Office, 1949), pp. 54–67.
32. Reply to Hutterite Petition, Washington, September 5, 1873.
33. Carl Addington Dawson, *Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in Western Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 102.
34. Ernst Correll, "Mennonite Immigration into Manitoba: Documents and Sources, 1872, 1873," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XI (July 1937), p. 200.
35. J. Mannhardt, "Koennen und duerfen wir Mennoniten der von dem Staate geforderten Wehrpflicht genuegen?", *Mennonitische*

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36. H. J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith* (Altona, Man.: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1970), pp. 29, 33–4, 37ff.
37. PAC, *Shortt Papers*, M.G. 30, D45, Vol. 57, J. A. Donaldson in Toronto Immigration Office, September 1, 1873.
38. Quoted in "Something to Think About," *Herald of Truth*, 1874, p. 121.
39. AMC, Johann Epp, Koeppenthal, Saratov, to John F. Funk, January 7, 1875, in John F. Funk Collection.
40. For Canadian immigrants see Quebec Passenger Lists, PAC, *Immigration Branch Passenger Lists*, Record Group 76, Lists 9–11 (microfilm C4528-C4530).
41. Francis, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
43. CGC, Philip Wismer, "A Record of Russian Mennonite Aid Committee for Lincoln County, Ontario, 1873–1880," (unpublished manuscript), 7 pp.
44. C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), p. 108. See also H. S. Bender, *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, pp. 591–95.