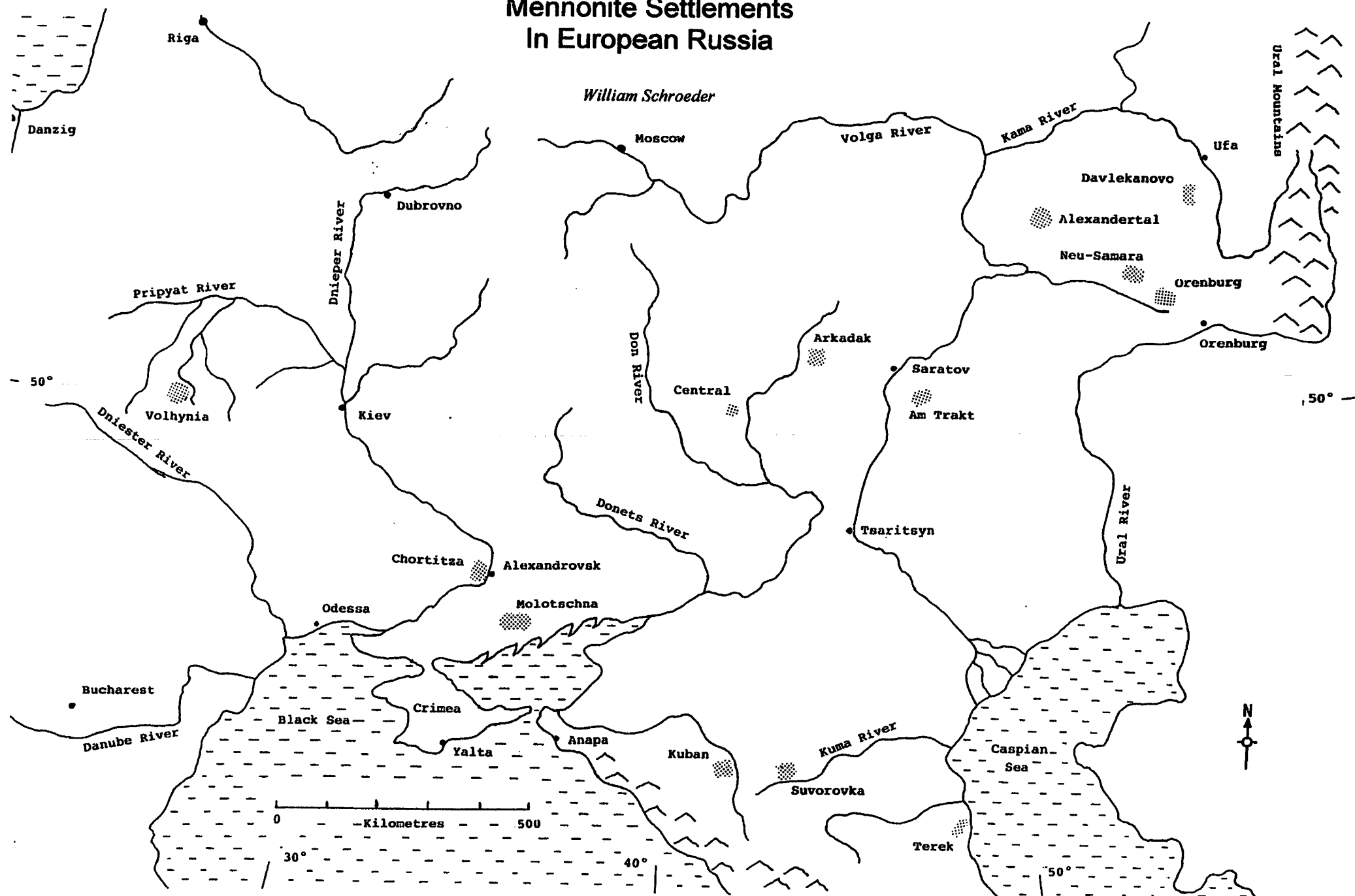


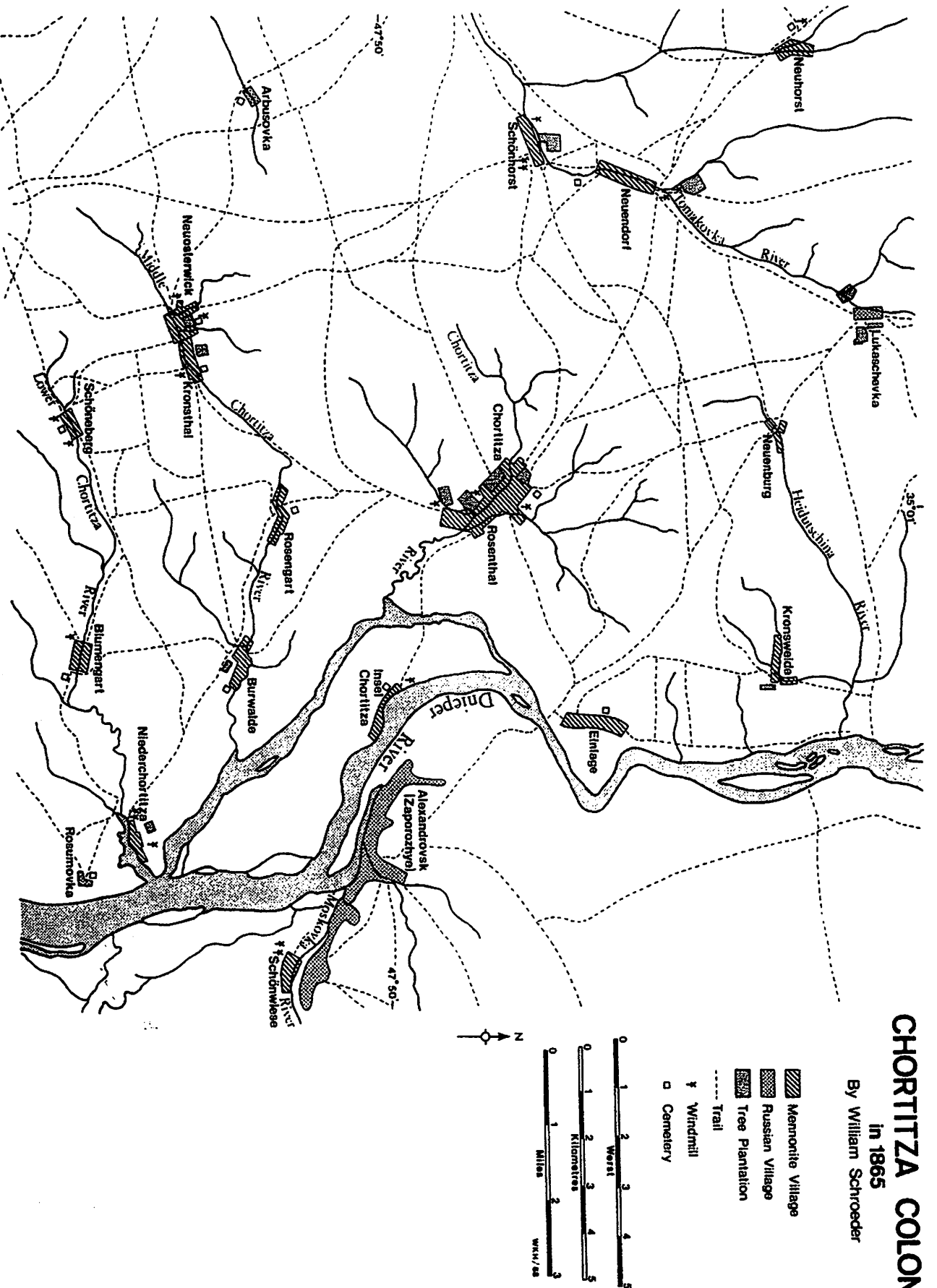
Mennonite Settlements In European Russia

William Schroeder



CHORTITZA COLONY

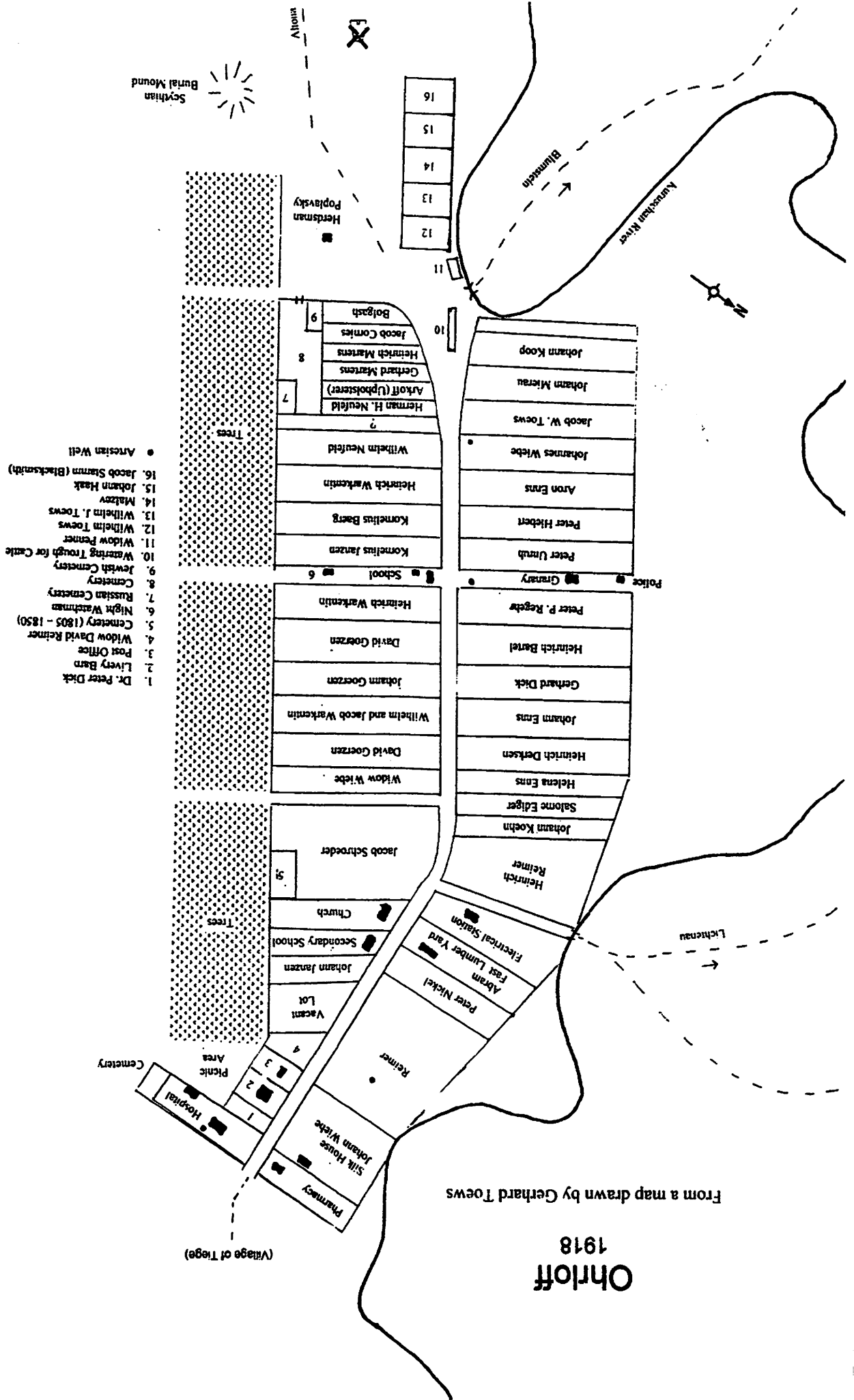
in 1865
By William Schroeder



Ohrlöf

1918

From a map drawn by Gerhard Toews



(Village of Tiege)

The **Russian Mennonites** (German: "Russlandmennoniten" occasionally **Ukrainian Mennonites**)^{[1][2][3]} are a group of Mennonites who are descendants of Dutch Anabaptists who settled for about 250 years in West Prussia and established colonies in the south west of the Russian Empire (present-day Ukraine) beginning in 1789. Since the late 19th century, many of them have come to countries throughout the Western Hemisphere. The rest were forcibly relocated, so that very few of their descendants now live at the location of the original colonies. Russian Mennonites are traditionally multilingual with Plautdietsch (Mennonite Low German) as their first language and lingua franca. In 2014 there are several hundred thousand Russian Mennonites: about 200,000 in Germany, 100,000 in Mexico, 70,000 in Bolivia, 40,000 in Paraguay, 10,000 in Belize and tens of thousands in Canada and the US and a few thousand in Argentina, Uruguay, Belize, and Brazil.

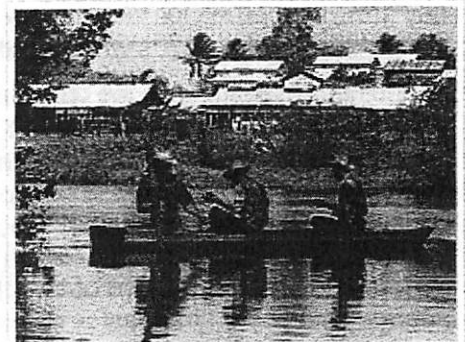
The term "Russian Mennonite" refers to the country where they resided before their immigration to the Americas and not to their ethnic heritage.^[4]

Contents

Origins in the Vistula Delta [edit]

Main article: Vistula delta Mennonites

In the early-to-mid 16th century, Mennonites began to flee to the Vistula delta region in order to avoid persecution in the Low Countries, especially Friesland and Flanders, seeking religious freedom and exemption from military service. They gradually replaced their Dutch and Frisian languages with the Low German language spoken in the area, blending into it elements of their native tongues to create a distinct dialect known as Plautdietsch. Today Plautdietsch is the distinct Mennonite language which developed over a period of 300 years in the Vistula delta region and south Russia. The Mennonites of Dutch origin were joined by Mennonites from other parts of Europe, including the German-speaking parts of what is now Switzerland. Some Poles also became Mennonites and were assimilated into the Vistula delta Mennonites.



Mennonites on New River, Belize

In 1772, most of the West-Prussian Mennonites' land in the Vistula area became part of the Kingdom of Prussia in the first of the Partitions of Poland. Frederick William II of Prussia ascended the throne in 1786 and imposed heavy fees on the Mennonites in exchange for continued military exemption.

Migration to Russia [edit]

Main articles: Chortitza and Molotschna

Catherine the Great of Russia issued a manifesto in 1763 inviting all Europeans to come and settle various pieces of land within New Russia, especially in the Volga River region. For a variety of reasons, Germans responded to this in large numbers. Mennonites from the Vistula delta region of Prussia later sent delegates to negotiate an extension of this manifesto and, in 1789, Crown Prince Paul signed a new agreement with them.^[5] The Mennonite migration to Russia from Prussia was led by Jacob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch. Their settlement territory was northwest of the Sea of Azov, and had just been acquired from the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War, 1768–1774. Many of the Mennonites in Prussia accepted this invitation, establishing Chortitza on the Dnieper River as their first colony in 1789. A second larger colony, Molotschna, was founded in 1803.

Mennonites lived alongside Nogais—semi-nomadic pastoralists—in the Molochna region of southern Ukraine starting from 1803, when Mennonites first arrived, until 1860, when the Nogai Tatars departed.^[6] Mennonites provided agricultural jobs to Nogais and rented pasture from them. Nogai raids on Mennonite herds were a constant problem in the first two decades of settlement.^[7]

Two Mennonite settlements on the Vistula near Warsaw, Deutsch-Kazun and Deutsch-Wymysle, came under Russian control when the border was readjusted at the Congress of Vienna. Some of these families emigrated to the Molotschna settlement after it was established. Deutsch-Michalin near Machnovka was founded in 1787.^[8] Many families from this settlement moved to nearby Volhynia in 1802. Swiss Mennonites of Amish descent from Galicia settled near Dubno, Volhynia province in 1815. Other Galician Mennonites lived near Lviv.

When the Prussian government eliminated exemption from military service on religious grounds, the remaining Mennonites were eager to emigrate to Russia. They were offered land along the Volga River in Samara and exemption from military service for twenty years, after which they could pay a special exemption tax.^[9] Two settlements, Trakt and Alt-Samara (to distinguish it from Neu Samara Colony), were founded in 1853 and 1861 respectively.

By 1870 about 9000 individuals had immigrated to Russia, mostly to the Chortitza and Molotschna settlements which, with population increase, numbered about 45,000. Forty daughter colonies were established by 1914, occupying nearly 12,000 square kilometres (4,600 sq mi), with a total population of 100,000.^[10]

Economy [edit]

The colonists formed villages of fifteen to thirty families, each with 70 ha (175 acres) of land. The settlements retained some communal land and a common granary for use by the poor in lean years. Income from communal property provided funding for large projects, such as forming daughter colonies for the growing population. Insurance was also organized separately and outside of the control of the Russian government.^[11]

Initially the settlers raised cattle, sheep and general crops to provide for their household. The barren steppes were much drier than their Vistula delta homeland and it took years to work out the proper dry-land farming practices. They grew mulberries for the silk industry, produced honey, flax and tobacco, and marketed fruits and vegetables for city markets. By the 1830s wheat became the dominant crop.^[12]

Expanding population and the associated pressure for more farmland became a problem by 1860. The terms of the settlement agreement prevented farms from being divided; they were required to pass intact from one generation to the next. Since agriculture was the main economic activity, an expanding class of discontented, landless poor arose. Their problems tended to be ignored by the village assembly, which consisted of voting landowners. By the early 1860s the problem became so acute that the landless organized a party that petitioned the Russian government for relief. A combination of factors relieved their plight. The Russian government permitted farms to be divided in half or quarters and ordered release of the village's communal land. The colonies themselves purchased land and formed daughter colonies on the eastern frontier extending into Siberia and Turkestan. These new colonies included Bergtal, Neu Samara Colony and the Mennonite settlements of Altai.^[13]

As wheat farming expanded, the demand for mills and farm equipment grew. The first large foundry was established in Chortitza in 1860 and other firms followed. By 1911 the eight largest Mennonite-owned factories produced 6% of the total Russian output (over 3 million rubles), shipped machinery to all parts of the empire and employed 1744 workers.^[14] The annual output of *Lepp and Wallman* of Schönwiese was 50,000 mowers, 3000 threshing machines, thousands of gangplows in addition to other farm equipment. Flour and feed mills were originally wind-powered, a skill transplanted from Prussia. These were eventually replaced with motor- and steam-driven mills. Milling and its supporting industries grew to dominate the industrial economy of the colonies and nearby communities.

Local government [edit]

Mennonite colonies were self-governing with little intervention from the Russian authorities. The village, the basic unit of government, was headed by an elected magistrate who oversaw village affairs. Each village controlled its own school, roads and cared for the poor. Male landowners decided local matters at village assemblies.

Villages were grouped into districts. All of the Chortitza villages formed one district; Molotschna was divided into two districts: Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld. A district superintendent headed a regional bureau that could administer corporal punishment and handle other matters affecting the villages in common. Insurance and fire protection were handled at the regional level, as well as dealing with delinquents and other social problems. The Mennonite colonies functioned as a democratic state, enjoying freedoms beyond those of ordinary Russian peasants.^[15]

In addition to village schools, the Mennonite colonies established their own hospitals, a mental hospital and a school for the deaf. They cared for orphans and elderly and provided an insurance program. By being largely self-sufficient in these local matters, they were able to minimize their burden on and contact with the Russian government.

Mennonites stayed out of Russian politics and social movements that preceded the Russian revolution. After the Russian Revolution of 1905 they did exercise their right to vote. Most aligned themselves with the Octobrist Party because of its guarantee of religious freedoms and freedom of the press for minority groups. Hermann Bergmann was an Octobrist member of the Third and Fourth State Dumas; Peter Schröder, a Constitutional Democratic party member from Crimea, was a member of the fourth Duma.^[16]

Education [edit]

At a time when compulsory education was unknown in Europe, the Mennonite colonies formed an elementary school in each village. Students learned practical skills such as reading and writing German and arithmetic. Religion was included as was singing in many schools. The teacher was typically a craftsman or herder, untrained in teaching, who fit class time around his occupation.

In 1820 the Molotschna colony started a secondary school at Ohrloff, bringing a trained teacher from Prussia. The Central School was started in Chortitza in 1842. Over three thousand pupils attended the Central School with up to 8% of the colonists receiving a secondary education.^[17] A school of commerce was started in Halbstadt employing a faculty with full graduate education. Those who wanted to pursue post-secondary education attended universities in Switzerland, Germany as well as Russia.

Religious life [edit]

Typically each village or group of villages organized an independent congregation. Cultural and traditional differences between Frisian, Flemish and West Prussian Mennonites were also reflected in those of their churches. They all agreed on fundamental Mennonite beliefs such as believer's baptism, nonresistance and avoidance of oaths. Pastors of Flemish congregations read sermons from a book while seated at a table. Frisian pastors stood while delivering the sermon.^[18]

Pastors were untrained and chosen from within the congregation. Unpaid pastors were selected from among the wealthier members—large landowners, sometimes teachers—allowing them to make a living while serving the congregation. The combined effect of respect for their position and material wealth gave them substantial influence over the community. The religious and secular leadership within a village often colluded against the poorer members.

Church discipline was exercised in the form of excommunication against those committing gross sins. The most conservative congregations practiced "avoidance", which entailed cutting all business and social ties with an unrepentant member.^[19] Because being part of a Mennonite congregation was required to enjoy the special benefits the Russian government provided to colonists, excommunication had broader implications. This was softened by the various internal factions, which allowed a person banned from one congregation to join another.

Kleine Gemeinde [edit]

Main article: Kleine Gemeinde

Klaas Reimer and a group of eighteen followers broke from the main group and formed the Kleine Gemeinde. Reimer's main complaint was that Mennonite leaders were straying from their traditional nonresistant stance when they turned lawbreakers over to the government for punishment while at the same time church leaders were lax in enforcing spiritual discipline. In 1860 a portion of this group moved to Crimea, adopted baptism by immersion and became known as the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. Today, the largest group of Kleine Gemeinde are located in Mexico.

Mennonite Brethren [edit]

Main article: Mennonite Brethren Church

Pietistic influences, introduced earlier among the West Prussian Mennonites, were transplanted to the Molotschna colony. The pastor of a neighboring congregation, Eduard Wüst, reinforced this pietism. Wüst was a revivalist who stressed repentance and Christ as a personal savior, influencing Catholics, Lutherans and Mennonites in the area. He associated with many Mennonite leaders, including Leonhard Sudermann.

In 1859, Joseph Höttmann, a former associate of Wüst met with a group of Mennonites to discuss problems within the main Mennonite body. Their discussion centered on participating in closed communion with church members who were unholy or not converted and baptism of adults by immersion.

The Mennonite Brethren Church formally broke with the main church on January 6, 1860 when this growing group of dissenters presented a document to the elders of the Molotschna Mennonite Churches which indicated "that the total Mennonite brotherhood has decayed to the extent that we can no more be part of it" and fear the "approach of an unavoidable judgment of God."^[20] The Mennonite Brethren movement spread throughout the Mennonite colonies and produced many distinguished leaders, particularly in Molotschna. By breaking religious and cultural patterns that had become a hindrance to Mennonite society, the contribution of the Mennonite Brethren allowed all Mennonites groups to pursue a more wholesome Christian life.^[21]

General Conference [edit]

Main article: General Conference Mennonite Church

The main body of Mennonites continued to be congregational in organization until 1882 when the *General Conference of Mennonite Congregations in Russia* was formed. Cooperation among Mennonite congregations throughout the empire became necessary for dealing with common interests such as publishing a hymnal, adopting a confession of faith, preserving the German language, education and running the forestry service, an alternative to military service. The conference adopted the motto *Unity in essentials, tolerance in non-essentials, moderation in all things*.^[22]

The Russianization program of Stolypin required the conference to publish its proceedings in Russian, certify all delegates with the imperial government and allow a government representative to attend all sessions. The conference found itself devoting more time to dealing with changing government policies and protecting the special privileges of Mennonites. An important task was to convince the government that Mennonitism was an established religion and not a *sect*, a label applied to small religious groups who were regularly mistreated within the Russian empire.

The group that immigrated to North America called itself the General Conference Mennonite Church. Today, the main branches of the former General Conference Mennonite Church has split into the Mennonite Church Canada (since 2000) and the Mennonite Church USA (since (2002).

First wave of emigration [edit]

As nationalism grew in central Europe, the Russian government could no longer justify the special status of its German colonists. In 1870 they announced a Russification plan that would end all special privileges by 1880. Mennonites were particularly alarmed at the possibility of losing their exemption from military service and their right for schools to use the German language, which they believed was necessary to maintain their cultural and religious life.

Delegates were sent to Petersburg in 1871 to meet with the czar and appeal for relief on religious grounds. They met with high officials, but failed to present the czar with their petition. A similar attempt the next year was also unsuccessful, but were assured by the Tsar's brother Grand Duke Konstantin that the new law would provide a way to address the concerns of the Mennonites in the form of noncombatant military service.^[23]

The most conscientious Mennonites could not accept any form of service that supported making war, prompting their community leaders to seek immigration options. In 1873 a delegation of twelve explored North America, seeking large tracts of fertile farmland. This group consisted of Leonhard Sudermann and Jacob Buller of the Alexanderwohl congregation representing the Molotschna settlement; Tobias Unruh from Volhynia settlements; Andreas Schrag of the Swiss Volhynia congregations; Heinrich Wiebe, Jacob Peters and Cornelius Buhr from the Bergthal Colony; William Ewert from West Prussia; Cornelius Toews and David Klassen of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and Paul and Lorenz Tschetter representing the Hutterites.^[24] This group returned with positive reports of good land available in Manitoba, Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas.

The more conservative groups—those from *Kleine Gemeinde*, Bergthal and Chortitza—chose Canada, which promised privileges equal to those previously held in Russia and a large tract of land to reestablish colonies in Manitoba. The more liberal groups—those from Molotschna—and the Hutterites chose the United States. Entire communities such as Alexanderwohl and Bergthal prepared to move as a unit as well as many individual families from among the other Mennonite villages. They sold their property, often at reduced prices and worked through the red tape and high fees of procuring passports.

Realizing that 40,000 of Russia's most industrious farmers were preparing to leave for North America, the Russian government sent Eduard Tottleben to the colonies in May 1874. Meeting with community leaders, he exaggerated the difficulties that would be encountered in North America and offered an alternative national service that would not be connected in any way to the military. His intervention convinced the more liberal Mennonites to stay.^[25]

Between 1874 and 1880, of the approximately 45,000 Mennonites in South Russia, ten thousand departed for the United States and eight thousand for Manitoba. The settlement of Mennonites, primarily in the central United States, where available cropland had similarity to that in the Crimean Peninsula, coincided with the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869.^[citation needed] Others looked east, and in one of the strangest chapters of Mennonite history, Claas Epp, Jr., Abraham Peters and other leaders led hundreds of Mennonites to Central Asia in the 1880s, where they expected Christ's imminent return. They settled in the Talas Valley of Turkestan and in the

Khanate of Khiva.^[26] For those who remained in Russia, the military service question was resolved by 1880 with a substitute four-year forestry service program for men of military age.^[citation needed]

World War I [edit]

During the period of the 'Great War', the Mennonites in Russia were well advanced socially and economically. Many large agricultural estates and business entities were controlled by Mennonite interests. They had a reputation for outstanding efficiency and quality and were noted across Russia for their agricultural and organizational abilities. The precedent of non-resistance to national service had been established years before and the Mennonites therefore had a system to handle military service requests at the outbreak of war. During World War I, 5000 Mennonite men served in both forestry and hospital units and transported wounded from the battlefield to Moscow and Ekaterinoslav hospitals.^[27] The Mennonite congregations were responsible for funding these forms of alternative service, as well as supporting the men's families during their absence, a burden of 3.5 million rubles annually. During this time there was a progressive breakdown in the autonomy of the Mennonite colonies and social and financial pressure began to take their effect on the Mennonite people and their institutions. Property and possessions began to be confiscated for the war effort and certain industrial complexes turned to military production (some voluntary). Much of the Mennonite hope at that time was based on the preservation of the existing Russian Provisional Government. However, as the war progressed, the social tide turned against the existing power structure and Russia began a march toward structural discord.

The chaos that followed the collapse of the Russian Provisional Government was devastating to much of Ukraine, including the Mennonite colonies. The Red and White armies moved through the region, confiscating food and livestock. Nestor Makhno's anarchist army generally targeted Mennonites because they were thought of as "Kulaks" and an entity generally more advanced and wealthy than the surrounding Ukrainian peasants. The Mennonites' Germanic background also served to inflame negative sentiment during the period of revolution. It is also rumored that Makhno himself had served on a Mennonite estate in childhood and harbored negative feelings based on treatment he received while employed there. Hundreds of Mennonites were murdered, robbed, imprisoned and raped during this period, and villages including (and around) Chortitza, Zagradowka and Nikolaipol were damaged and destroyed. Many more lives were lost to typhus, cholera and sexually transmitted diseases, spread by the armies warring throughout the colonies.^[28]

Based on the tragedy unfolding around them, some of the avowed pacifist Mennonites turned to self-defense and established militia units (Selbstschutz) to ward off raiding forces with the help of the German Army. While generally regarded as a failure of spiritual commitment by many within the community (currently and at the time), the forces initially achieved some military success in defending Mennonite colonies and families while the communities tried to escape and/or relocate. Ultimately the self-defence militia was overwhelmed once Makhno's anarchists aligned themselves with the Red Army early in 1919. While the resistance certainly helped defend Mennonite communities against initial attacks, it may also have served to inflame some of the atrocities that followed. After this period, many Mennonites were dispossessed and ultimately their remaining properties and possessions were nationalized (collectivization) by the Soviet authorities.^{[29][30]}

Famine [edit]

Main article: Holodomor

Mennonites of Molotschna sent a commission to North America in the summer of 1920 to alert American Mennonites of the dire conditions of war-torn Ukraine. Their plight succeeded in uniting various branches of Mennonites to form Mennonite Central Committee in an effort to coordinate aid.

The new organization planned to provide aid to Ukraine via existing Mennonite relief work in Istanbul. The Istanbul group, mainly Goshen College graduates, produced three volunteers, who at great risk entered Ukraine during the ongoing Russian Civil War. They arrived in the Mennonite village of Halbstadt in the Molotschna settlement just as General Wrangel of the White Army was retreating. Two of the volunteers withdrew with the Wrangel army, while Clayton Kratz, who remained in Halbstadt as it was overrun by the Red Army, was never heard from again.

A year passed before official permission was received from the Soviet government to do relief work among the villages of Ukraine (see Russian famine of 1921). Kitchens provided 25,000 people a day with rations over a period of three years beginning in 1922, with a peak of 40,000 servings during August of that year. Fifty Fordson tractor and plow combinations were sent to Mennonite villages to replace horses that had been stolen and confiscated during the war. The cost of this relief effort was \$1.2 million.^[31]

Second wave of emigration [edit]

As conditions improved, Mennonites turned their attention from survival to emigration. Though the New Economic Policy appeared to be less radical than previous Soviet reforms, thousands of Mennonites saw no future under the communists. After years of negotiation with foreign governments and Moscow, arrangements were made for emigration to Canada, Paraguay and Argentina. Because Canada had not recognized the Soviet government, Moscow would not deal with them directly. Emigrants bound for Canada were processed through Riga. Those who could not pass the medical exam—usually because of trachoma—were allowed to stay in Germany and Southampton in England until they were healthy. By 1930, twenty-one thousand Mennonites had arrived in Canada, most on credit provided by the Canadian Pacific Railway.^[32]

A group of Mennonites from western Siberia who subsequently settled along the Amur in unrealized hopes of better living conditions, escaped over the frozen river to Harbin, China. A few hundred were allowed entry into California and Washington. The majority remained as refugees until the Nansen International Office for Refugees of the League of Nations intervened and arranged resettlement in Paraguay and Brazil in 1932.^[33]

Those that remained in their home villages were subject to exile to Siberia and other remote regions east of the Urals. From 1929 to 1940, one in eight men were removed, usually under the pretext of political accusations, to labor camps from which few ever returned or were heard from again.^[34]

Collectivization [edit]

With the onset of economic and agricultural reforms, large estates and the communal land of the Mennonite colonies were confiscated. The next step was to reduce the model farms by 60% and then another 50% percent—an insufficient size to support a family. The confiscated land was given to peasants from outside the Mennonite communities, often communist party members. These new villagers soon controlled the local government, further confiscating land and rights from the Mennonite majority by labeling landowners and leaders kulaks and sending them into exile. The government taxed the remaining landowners so heavily that they could not possibly produce enough to meet the obligation and their land was confiscated as payment. As collectivization proceeded, there was some hope that Mennonites could run their own collective farms, but with the introduction of Stalin's first five-year plan there was no hope that such a scheme would be allowed.

Starting in 1918 religious freedoms were restricted. Churches and congregations had to be registered with the government. Ministers were disenfranchised and lost their rights as citizens. Ministers could not be teachers, which was the livelihood of many Mennonite pastors. They and their family members could not join cooperatives or craft guilds. Because of these restrictions, ministers had a strong incentive to emigrate, and few were willing to replace them. Congregations could no longer do charitable work of any kind, which destroyed the well developed social institutions with the Mennonite colonies. Villages lost control of their schools; all religious content was prohibited. Sunday was abolished as a holiday.

During World War I the Russians had permitted Mennonites to serve in non-combat capacities in the military. This practice was not continued.^[35]

Following the Russian withdrawal from World War I, the Russian Civil War ensued, with an ultimate Red victory. The Russian Mennonites, many of whom were also known as being part of the one million or so Volga Germans living in their own established communities, were approached by the Soviet authorities and issued new standards and expectations. Education was to be controlled according to these new directives by the State, and families were eventually to be separated, with children sent to various live-in schools, while parents were to be assigned according to State needs.

These directives were described by a Volga German teacher, Henry Wieler, who attended these State meetings and related the events in his detailed Journal, *Tagabook*, which today is partially translated but available in the published book, *The Quiet in the Land*,^[36] by Henry Wieler.

World War II to the Stalin era [edit]

In 1937 and 1938 the NKVD carried out ethnically motivated purges of German descendants and German language speakers, including Mennonites.^[37] As Stalin fomented cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church in World War II, Mennonites and Protestants were seen as more dangerous.^[37] During the Holodomor in Ukraine, there was active persecution of German-speaking people as a potential threat to the state, and a ban on organized religion. The hostilities of World War I had increased tensions with ethnic Ukrainians, and Mennonites with family members living

abroad were targeted during the Great Purge. Having suffered persecution by the Stalinist regime, many Mennonites came to identify with Adolf Hitler, who opposed Stalin, and subscribed to conspiracy theories blaming the Jews for Communist crimes. As pacifists within an increasingly military regime under Stalin and then (after invasion of Ukraine and parts of Russia by Hitler) the Nazis, and as "Volga Germans" whose abuse Hitler had used as pretense to invade, Mennonites were subject to special pressure to join military units. Mennonites played a central role in exploiting slave labor at Stutthof concentration camp, and some, recruited into SS units, served as guards at concentration camps or perpetrated massacres.^[38]

Other Mennonites were conscripted by force into German units as support and shock troops and some participated in exterminating or deporting families. Most history of this period is anecdotal and based on family memoirs^[39] and letters from the Gulags.^[35] Peter Letkemann of University of Winnipeg characterizes the casualties and abuses of this period as "victims of terror and repression in the Soviet Union during the 40-year period from 1917-1956."^[40] This would overlap somewhat with the "Siberian Germans" deported to that region who have lost touch entirely with the Mennonite mainstream worldwide.^[41]

North America [edit]

After 1870 about 18,000 Russian Mennonites, fearing conscription into military service and state influence on their education systems, emigrated to the Plains States of the US and the Western Provinces of Canada. The more liberal went in general to the US where the majority over a period of several decades assimilated more or less into the mainstream society.

Russian Mennonites settled much of South Central Kansas, which owes its reputation as a wheat-producing state in large measure to its early Mennonite settlers. Winter wheat was introduced to Kansas in 1873. The following year the Mennonites, who had experience with dry land farming in Russia, quickly took advantage of its characteristics, resulting in rapid expansion of the milling industry in the state.^[42] It is planted in the fall and harvested in June and July of the following summer, and is therefore ideally suited to cold winters and the hot, dry Kansas summers. Kansas remains a top producer of wheat in America to this day.^[43]

The more conservative Old Colony, Bergthal Mennonites and Kleine Gemeinde went to Canada which promised privileges equal to those previously held in Russia (no conscription into military service and German language private schools) and a large tract of land divided into two "Reserves". The Mennonites settled mostly in Manitoba in areas east and west of the Red River, called East Reserve and West Reserve.^[44]

They brought with them many of their institutions and practices, especially their traditional settling pattern which meant that they settled in vast exclusively Mennonite areas where they formed villages with German names such as Blumenort, Steinbach and Grünthal.^[45]

The more conservative faction of the Manitoba Mennonites decided to leave Canada after the World War I and moved to Mexico mostly in the years 1922-1927 and to Paraguay in 1927. The main reason for that was compulsory attendance of public schools and anti-German sentiments because of the war. Some latercomer went to Mexico in 1948.^{[46][47]} After the more conservative fraction had left for Mexico, most the remaining Mennonites quickly assimilated into the mainstream society.

Descendants of Manitoba Mennonites today form the majority of Conservative Mennonites in Latin America, counting more than 200,000. Because many of these Mennonites from Canada still hold Canadian passports, there was and still is a steady flow back to Canada fed by the high birth rates of conservative Mennonites. These emigrants strengthen the Russian Mennonite element in the Canadian Mennonite churches.^[48]

With the Russian Mennonites came separate denominations previously unseen in North America, such as the Mennonite Brethren.^[49]

A second wave of Russian Mennonites came out of Russia after the bloody strife following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and a third wave in the aftermath of World War I. These people, having lost everything they had known, found their way to settlements in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia and Ontario and in many regions of the United States.^[citation needed] Some joined with previous Mennonite groups, while others formed their own.[[]



Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church near Goessel, Kansas

Book List

1. Brothers In Deed to Brothers in Need - Clarence Hiebert Ship Manifests
2. For Everything There Is a Season - Paul Toews with Kevin Enns Rempel
3. Molotschna Historical Atlas – Helmut T Huebert
Maps of Villages and Colonies
4. Smith's Story of the Mennonites – C Henry Smith
5. Mennonite Food & Folkways from South Russia (Ukraine) – Norma Jost Voth
Cookbook with stories
6. Kuban Settlement - C P Toews (Paul), Heinrich Friesen, Arnold Dick
7. Building on the Past – Rudy P Friesen Pictures/stories from all villages in Russia and Ukraine
8. Leave No Threshing Stone Unturned – Glen Ediger
9. The Molotschna Settlement – Heinich Goerz
10. Melting Pot of Mennonite Cookery – by a committee to commemorate the 100 year
Anniversary of (all) Mennonites in the US 1874-1974
11. The Russian Mennonite Story – Paul Toews with Aileen Friesen
12. The Mennonite Brotherhood In Russia – P M Friesen *The best and most comprehensive
History of the Mennonites*

There are websites dedicated to Mennonites from Russia or Germany. Many charge a fee. The one most used and referred to is "grandmaonline.org". If the person you are researching is in "grandma", they are documented and assigned a number. It is not free.

All records from Europe are in German, Ukrainian, or Russian and sometimes Low German.

There are 3 Libraries of Mennonite History dedicated to saving artifacts, and stories of Mennonites: Fresno, California, Hillsboro, Kansas, and Manitoba, Canada. Some of their info is online.

The American Historical Society of Germans From Russia is another resource. There is a website - www.ahsgr.org