

Our Mennonite Heritage & Early Family History

By Arrel D Toews

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A 2024
Toews

A Sunday Afternoon by [Henry Pauls](#)

I have assembled this document mostly for myself and my immediate and extended family - but also hope others might be interested. I thought it the best way to learn what I should already have known about my cultural and religious heritage and about my early ancestors.

This is a prelude to [Ancestors of David A and Rosa M Voth Toews](#), which details the specific ancestors of our family - also on [this website](#). Special thanks to my brother [Myron](#) for invaluable genealogical data, photos, and brotherly advice - this document would not be possible without his gracious help and advice. In fact, you should consider this a joint effort on both of our parts - after all, these are Myron's ancestors as well! We encourage you to explore [weblinks](#), which are [underlined in purple](#).

Disclaimer: This is **NOT** an academic research document - I have included few formal reference citations in the text but rather have shamelessly used numerous sources, both in printed form and online (written material/photos/maps/diagrams), many without proper attributions. That said, I have included a listing of books relative to my heritage, as well as some interesting weblinks at the end, for any interested readers. I will always appreciate suggestions for improvements and needed corrections. I make no claims for accuracy but promise I have done my best!

Abbreviated Table of Contents

Mennonite Heritage & Very Early Ancestors	2
Life in S Russia - The Molotschna Colony	12
Arrival and Early Life in the US	21
Resources on Mennonite History and Heritage Available from Arrel	25

Very Early Ancestors

As best we can tell, our families are historically the descendants of [Teutonic tribes](#) of what now comprise [Switzerland, Germany and Holland](#). These peoples were evangelized in the [Early Middle Ages \(7th & 8th Centuries\)](#) by Roman Catholic missionaries, and they continued in the [Roman Catholic faith](#) until the [Protestant Reformation](#) of the [mid-16th Century](#).



[Martin Luther](#) (1529 portrait by [Lucas Cranach, the Elder](#) at L), the acknowledged founder of the Reformation, initiated a major schism from the Roman Catholic Church when in [1517](#) he posted his [Ninety-five Theses](#) on the [Wittenberg All Saints Church door](#). The [Mennonite faith](#) of our ancestors originated in Switzerland in [1525](#) at a small gathering in [Zurich](#), another small schism or rebellion related to the Protestant Reformation.

Strictly literal in their interpretation of the Scriptures, they developed a doctrine that called upon the faithful to [live apart from a world steeped in sin](#). Thus, they renounced involvement in political affairs and [refused all forms of military service](#). Their advocacy of voluntary adult baptism ([Anabaptism](#); Gr rebaptizer), nonviolence, and congregational autonomy made them victims of cruel persecution by both Catholic and Protestant authorities alike until the faith was practically wiped out in Switzerland. By 1530, however, the movement had migrated down the Rhine to [Holland](#), where it struck deep roots in spite of violent persecution (see [Martyrs Mirror](#) for details and graphic etchings). Here, between 1536 and 1554, the errant [Friesland Dutch Catholic priest](#), [Menno Simons](#) (1496-1561), formalized this doctrine and gave it his name. He emphasized evangelism and the [inseparable nature of "word" and "deed."](#) Menno Simons was born in [Witmarsum, Friesland Province, Holland](#); in 1975, Kathy and I visited Witmarsum and his ["Menno Monument"](#) (erected 1879) in the countryside near there.

Two images of [Menno Simons](#):

L: Jacobus Burghart, 1683

R: Kornelis De Wit, 1743

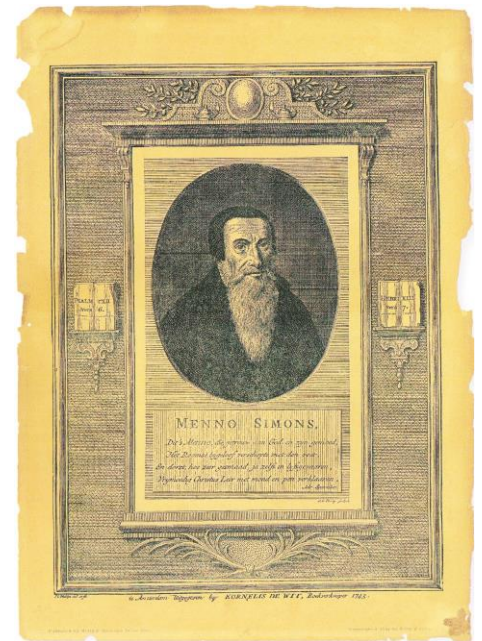
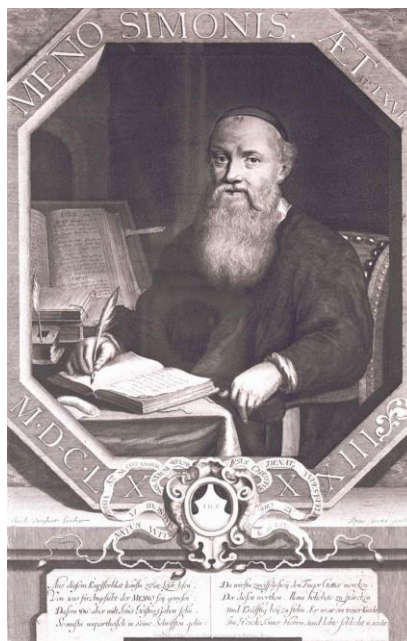
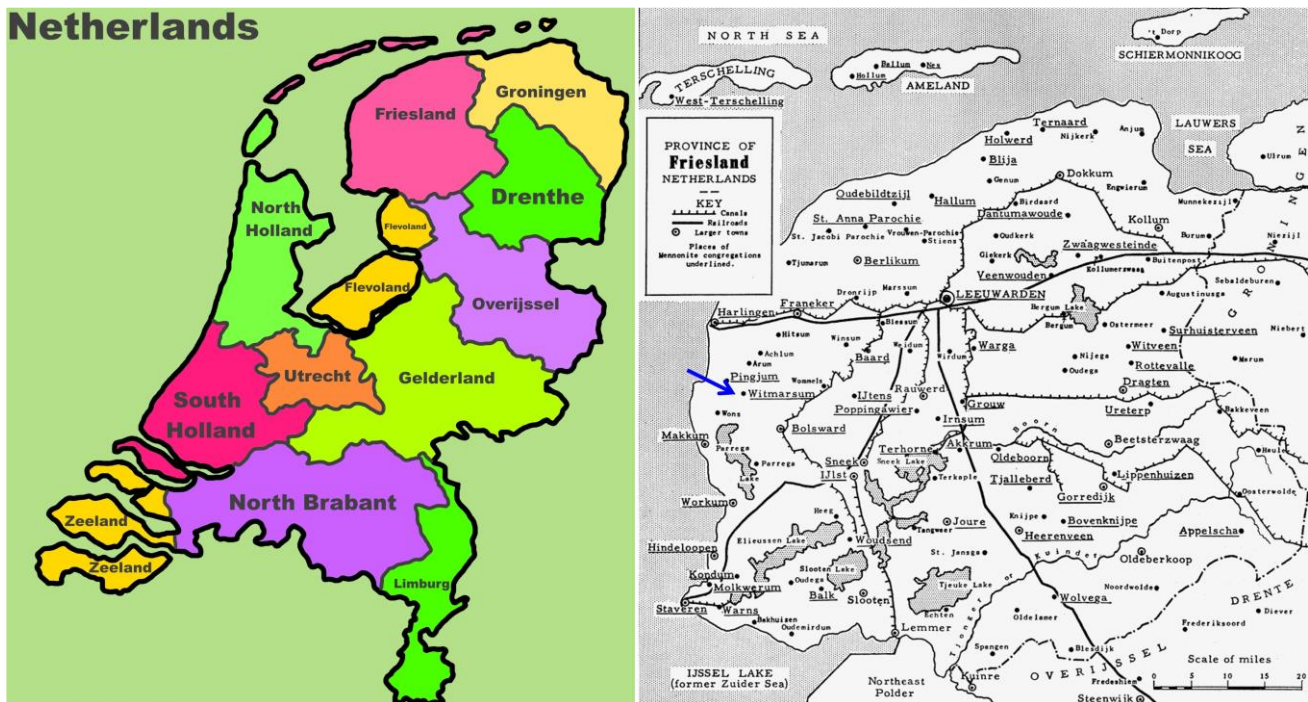


Photo at R shows Kathy at the Menno Simons monument near Witmarsum in 1975 when we visited. It is located in a small grove of trees on a farm.

A map of the provinces of Holland (Netherlands) is shown below. The second map shows Friesland Province with Witmarsum indicated by a blue arrow. The Zuider Zee surrounds much of this province.

Most Mennonite farmers were concentrated in the provinces of Friesland, Groningen and North Holland. Much of these provinces were below sea-level, protected from the sea and divided into "polders" by dikes. Of course, windmills were vital to agriculture in these areas. Many of the Mennonite farmers were promoters both of new and innovative agricultural methods and of cattle-raising and dairying. They did not live together in villages as they would in their future homelands, but rather had their farmsteads (*boerderijen*) on their individual lands.



In an effort to escape further martyrdom and bloodshed, some Dutch Mennonites took refuge in the marshy wastes of the Vistula-Nogat Delta of Polish (W) Prussia near Danzig around 1550. These pious Dutch peasants drained the marshes and turned them into productive farms and prosperous villages. In the process, they gradually abandoned their Dutch language and embraced the Low German (Plattdeutsch) dialect common to the region. Because they spoke a German dialect, they were often incorrectly identified as being of German origin/heritage, instead of their true Dutch/Swiss origins and cultural heritage.

The initial, most difficult, drainage work utilized their large "Dutch-style" windmills and took 3-4 generations; the first fruits of these efforts were meadows and pastures with lush grasses. Thus, many Prussian Mennonites became dairy farmers and by careful breeding, they were able to develop a high-quality milk-producing cow that became known widely as the "Milk Boat." Other crops (wheat, rapeseed, sugar beets) soon followed. The photo shows a Mennonite barn (combined barn/ stable/storehouse/granary) near [Barenhof](#), W Prussia. [GAMEO](#) has more detailed information on Mennonite farming practices in W Prussia, worth a click.



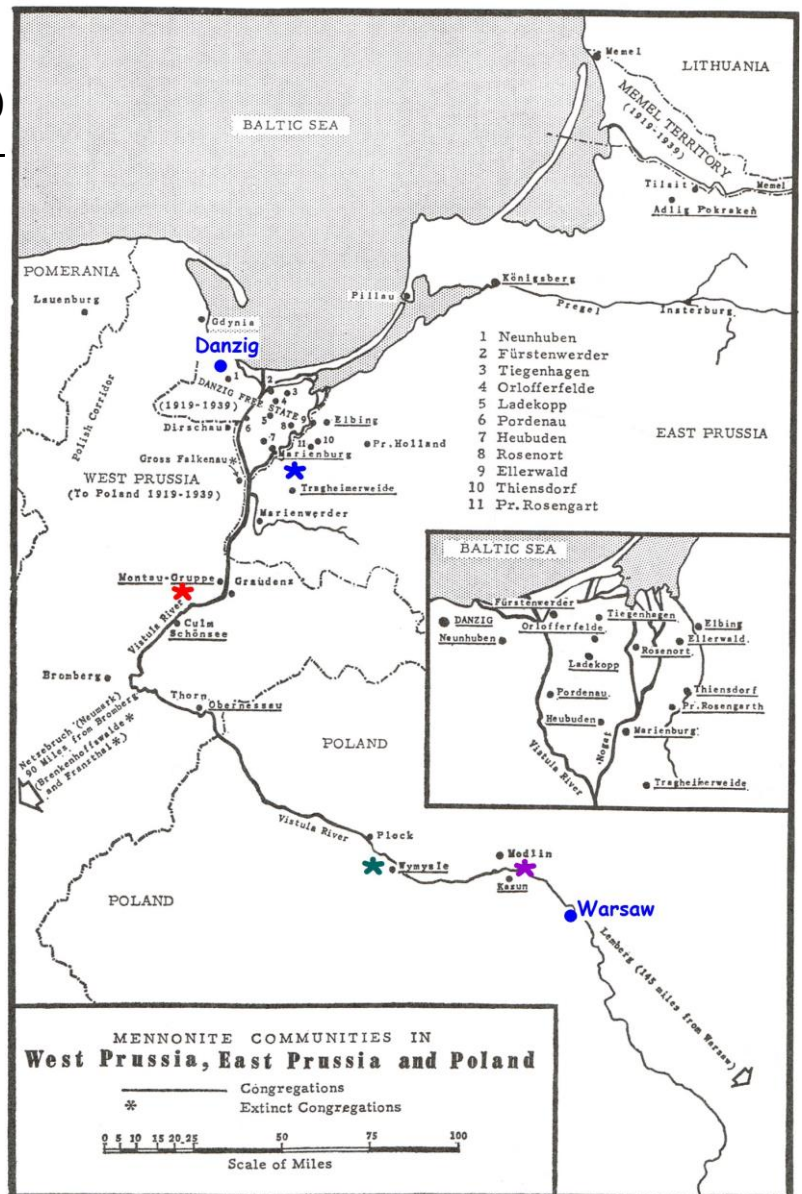
A map (Bekker, 1973) of [Mennonite colonies](#) in West/East Prussia and Poland is shown below. Nearly all were in the [Vistula/Nogat River Deltas and Vistula Lowlands](#) further south. Our ancestors remained in this region for [over 200 years - until the late 1700s/early 1800s](#).

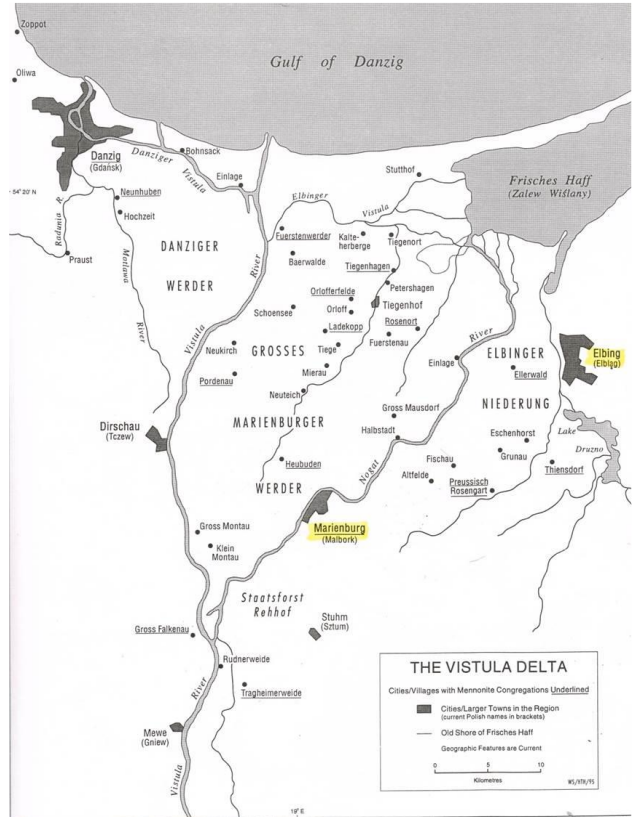
We have solid genealogical data of ancestors living in Prussia (see map at R) back to the [early 1600s](#), up to 9th Great-Grandparents in some cases, but almost nothing before that. A Hans Ratzlaff, born 1604, arrived from Netherlands, and a Schellenberger arrived in Dorposch, W (Polish) Prussia in 1634 - a [Moravian Brethren](#) fleeing Anabaptist persecution in Moravia/Bohemia (current Czech Republic).

Note [Danzig \(Gdansk\)](#) on the [Baltic Sea](#) and [Warsaw](#) to the S on the map.

- * [Stuhm](#)
- * [Schwetz](#)
([Deutsch-Konopath](#))
- * [Olszyn](#)
- * [Duetsch-Kazun](#)

See also similar map on p 8.





Maps show [Vistula Delta/Danzig W Prussia](#) region.



When their lands came under the control of [Prussian King Friedrich II \(Friedrich The Great\)](#) in 1772, he reaffirmed earlier promises of non-discrimination, but the Mennonites were now also asked to pay fees to support a military school, and restrictions were initiated on the purchase of new lands (albeit loosely). These new impositions, restrictions, and worsening relations with envying Prussian neighbors gradually became so burdensome that, following the death of Friedrich II in 1786, they began to seek a different homeland.

Contemporary developments in Russia seemed to provide a solution to the worries of the Prussian Mennonites. [Empress Ekaterina II \(Catherine the Great\)](#) published her [Catherine](#)



[Manifesto](#) on 22 July 1763, inviting foreign colonists to settle on land recently taken from the [Ottoman Empire \(Turks\)](#). The front page of this manifesto is shown at right (note the double-headed Romanov eagle). By means of an additional special document signed by her emissary [George von Trappe](#), she later specifically invited the Mennonites in [West Prussia](#) to immigrate to ["New \(S\) Russia,"](#) promising them [complete](#)



[freedom "for all time,"](#) and 65 desiatinas (ca. 165 acres) of land for each family.

On 7 August 1786, the document was read aloud at a public meeting at Danzig. In the autumn of the same year, [Jakob Höppner](#) and [Johann Bartsch](#) went to St. Petersburg, Russia as delegates of the Prussian Mennonites. They were ceremoniously and favorably received by the Empress, and Catherine remained friendly to the Mennonites throughout her life.



Under the guidance and direction of [Prince Grigori Potemkin](#) (a decided favorite among Catherine's many lovers), who was eager to [populate steppe lands captured from the Turks](#) during the [Russo-Turkish War](#) (1768-74), the first Mennonites settled in the Czarist Empire in 1788, beginning the migration of hundreds of families from the Vistula Delta over the years 1787 through the early-mid 1800s. The first colony was [Chortitza](#) (1789) along the lower [Dnieper River](#) near the current town of [Zaporozhe](#) (then [Alexandrovsk](#)), while later immigrants formed the [Molotschna Colony](#) (1804; see below).

Perhaps of greater significance to the nascent [Molotschna Colony](#) was the [Privilegium of 1800](#), issued by [Tsar Paul I](#) (Catherine the Great's son) following 2 years of negotiations



with Mennonites uneasy following Catherine's death. It specifically guaranteed [freedom of religion and exclusion from military service for Mennonites and their descendants](#), as well as tax exemptions and other rights, including [rights to brew beer, vinegar and brandy](#) and the prohibition of outsider's saloons and breweries on colony lands! Paul's [Privilegium](#) prompted a second large wave of Mennonite immigration to Russia in the early 1800s, mostly to the [Molotschna settlements](#). This document, printed in gold letters on parchment with the monarchical seal attached, was carefully preserved by the Russian Mennonites until the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution; what became of it after that is unknown.

Both the [Molotschna and Chortitza](#) regions are part of current [Ukraine](#) (at least for the time being!). The former [Molotschna Colony](#) was SSE of Zaporozhe and about 60 miles N of the Sea of Azov and Melitopol ([above the Crimean Peninsula](#)). After almost 200 years of settled life, most all of my ancestors [migrated from Prussia to the Molotschna Colony](#) in [S Russia](#) in the [early 1800s](#) - generally at the level of [Great-Great-Great-Grandparents](#). For example, [Johann Cornelius Toews](#), born ca 1791 in [Tiegenhagen, Gross Werder, Prussia](#), is listed on an [1803 Molotschna](#) immigration list. Similarly, [Jacob Buller](#), born 25 Nov 1760 in [Deutsch Konopath, Schwetz, Prussia](#), arrived in the [Molotschna](#) in 1820.

To my knowledge, all of my ancestors [immigrated to America from the Molotschna Colony](#) in the [late 1870s/early 1880s](#).

From [Danzig to Russia \(Hildebrand, 2000\)](#), subtitled "The First Emigration of Mennonites from the Danzig Region to Southern Russia," contains details of events leading to the formation of the Khortitsa and Molotschna colonies in S Russia, including the travels and travails of Deputies [Jakob Höeppner](#) and [Johann Bartsch](#), actual migrations, and initial settlements, as well as maps and some photos. I do not own a copy, but Dave Klaassen does!

Map below shows migration routes from the Vistula region to S Russia, with the Molotschna route shown by the (lower) dotted line. Danzig (*) and Molotschna (*) are noted.

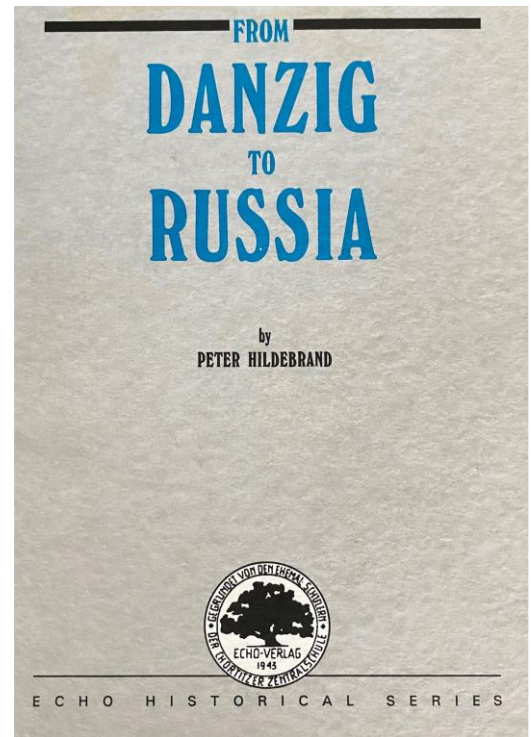
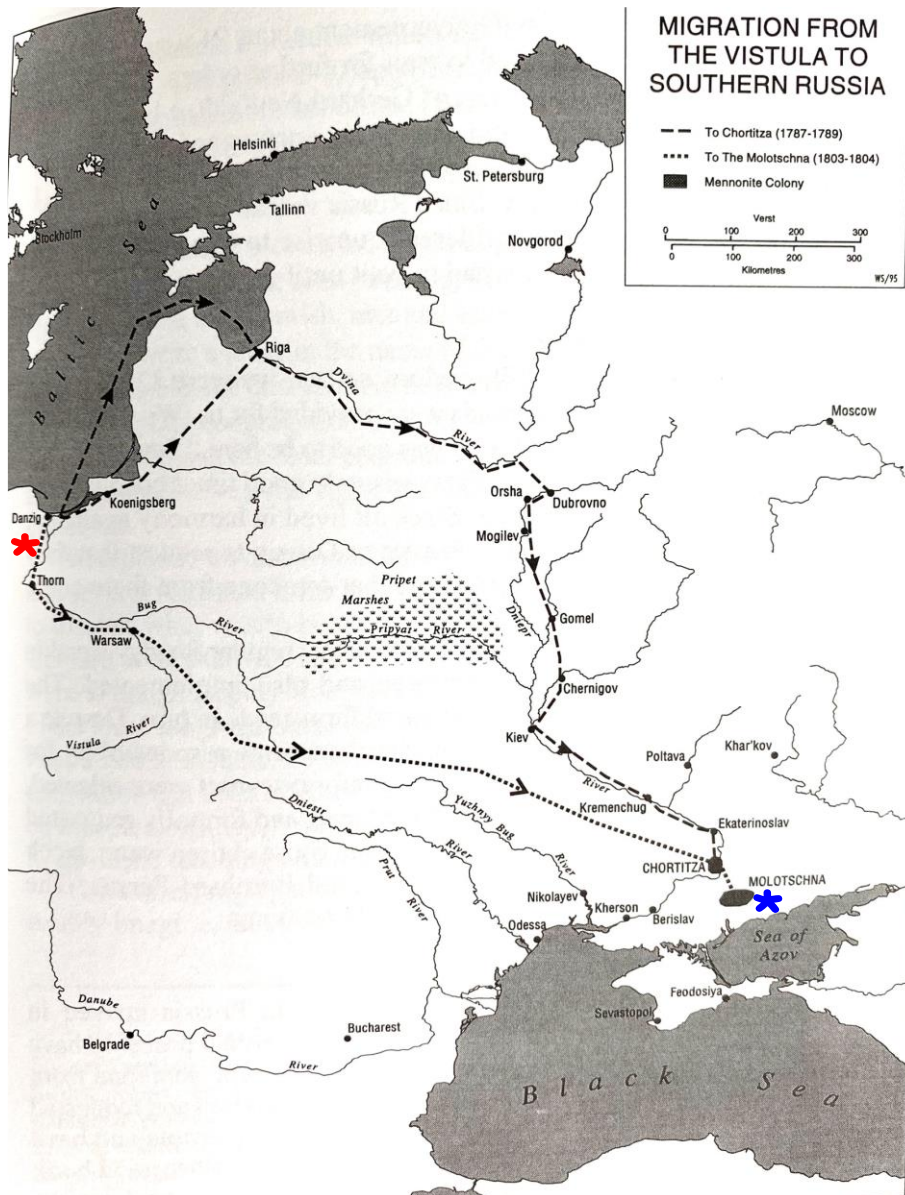


Photo at L shows a later Mennonite farmstead on the Isle of Khortitsa - the architectural style shows considerable continuity with that used earlier in the Netherlands and Prussia.

The maps on this page show the location of the Prussian "Old Flemish Mennonite Society of Groningen, Netherlands (future Alexanderwohl Colony, with that new name acquired in 1821 upon entry to S Russia). G-Grandparents Heinrich and Sarah Buller Buller were members of the Alexanderwohl Colony. Land in lower map was W Prussia at that time, not Poland. Expanded top inset shows the location of this Przechowko (Wintersdorf) Settlement. The general route of the 1820-21 900-mile wagon train migration to S Russia is shown in the lower map.



Perhaps a [brief primer on the history and heritage](#) of the region we know now as [Ukraine](#) is in order at this point - many [ancient cultures](#) and "polities" have left their marks over [many centuries](#), and it is useful to know a bit of the history and culture of this very complex geopolitical and geographic area. The [name Ukraina](#) (Ru: u- "at" + krai "edge") literally means "outskirts" or "borderlands," and was first used in the [12th Century CE](#) to define the Polish eastern frontier of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with the territory of Kievan Rus'. The name has been used in a variety of ways since the 12th Century, referring to numerous lands on the border between Poland and Kievan Rus' or its successor states. It is very aptly named!

Among the earliest cultures were the [Scythian tribes](#), a nomadic people originally of Iranian stock. Known from as early as the 9th Century BCE, they migrated westward from Central Asia to southern Russia and Ukraine in the 8th and 7th Centuries BCE. The Scythians founded a rich, powerful empire centered on what is now Crimea. The empire survived for several centuries before succumbing to the Sarmatians during the period from the 4th Century BCE to the 2nd Century CE. Remnants of the Scythians are still visible today as stone "Baba" monoliths, some of them near the Khortitsa Oak we visited on Khortitsa Island in 2008. Photos by the author



Also among the earliest cultures were Greek colonies - during our 2008 Mennonite Heritage Cruise, we visited the [Chersonesus](#) (Gr: peninsula) [Taurica](#) - the excavated ruins of an ancient (5th Century BCE) Greek settlement that is quite well preserved. Sometimes nicknamed the "Ukrainian Pompeii," there are many walls, columns, amphitheatres, and countless amphorae, mosaics, and other artifacts to view. It is near the port city of [Sevastopol](#) in [Crimea](#).

The [Khazars](#) were a semi-nomadic Turkic people that in the late 6th Century CE established a major commercial empire covering the southeastern section of modern European Russia, southern Ukraine, Crimea, and Kazakhstan. The Khazar's state declined as the Kievan Rus' became more prominent in the 10th Century CE, assimilating them in the process.

The Ukrainian capital of [Kiev](#) officially celebrates its founding year as [482 CE](#), but the city may date back at least 2,000 years. Archaeology dates the site of the oldest known settlement in the area to 25,000 years BCE. Kiev was the center of a powerful medieval state, the [Kievan Rus'](#), which connected Eastern [Slavic](#) lands with the [Varangian](#) (Viking) north & [Byzantine](#) south, beginning around [900 CE](#) under [Prince Oleg](#). [Prince Vladimir the](#)

[Great](#) (980-1015) introduced Christianity with his own baptism near [Chersonesus](#) (see above) and by decree, extended it to all inhabitants of Kiev and beyond. The Kievan Rus' reached its greatest extent under [Yaroslav the Wise](#) (1019-1054). Pretty much in the center of this former ancient Greek city is the Neo-Byzantine Russian Orthodox [St. Vladimir's Cathedral](#), commemorating the site of the baptism of Grand Prince Vladimir I of Kiev in 988 - his conversion to Orthodox Christianity (instead of Roman Catholicism) set Russia apart from Western Europe and set the direction of Russian development, intellectual and otherwise, that continues to this day. The Kievan Rus existed as a pluralistic polity for a number of centuries - it might be considered the origin of "[Russians](#)."



Photos above show [Chersonesus Taurica](#) ruins and [St Vladimir's Cathedral](#), near Sevastopol, Crimea, Ukraine. We visited during our 2008 Mennonite Heritage Cruise.

In the 17th century, the [Cossacks](#) (Turkic: kazak; "adventurer" or "free man"), a semi-nomadic, semi-militarized Slavic warrior community based on the territory of modern-day Ukraine, established an autonomous political entity, which was under the cultural influence of Western Europe, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. They were particularly noted for holding [democratic traditions](#). They inhabited sparsely populated areas in the [Dnieper](#), Don, Terek, and Ural River basins, and played an important role in the historical and cultural development of both Ukraine and Russia. One of the centers for the Cossacks was the [Isle of Khortitsa](#) in the Dnieper River near [Zaporozhe](#) ([Zaporozhian Host](#)), later colonized by Mennonite immigrants in the early 19th Century after the Cossacks were expelled by forces of Catherine the Great in 1775. The Cossack way of life persisted into the twentieth century, although it was seriously disrupted by the Russian Revolution and both WW I and II.

R: "Cossack with a head of a Tatar" (1786 print)



[Crimean Tatars](#) were a Turkic ethnic group that were indigenous to Crimea. Once the largest ethnic population in Crimea, they were decimated by forced deportation to Uzbekistan by Stalin's armed forces late during WW II (1944) - only a tiny percent have been able to return.

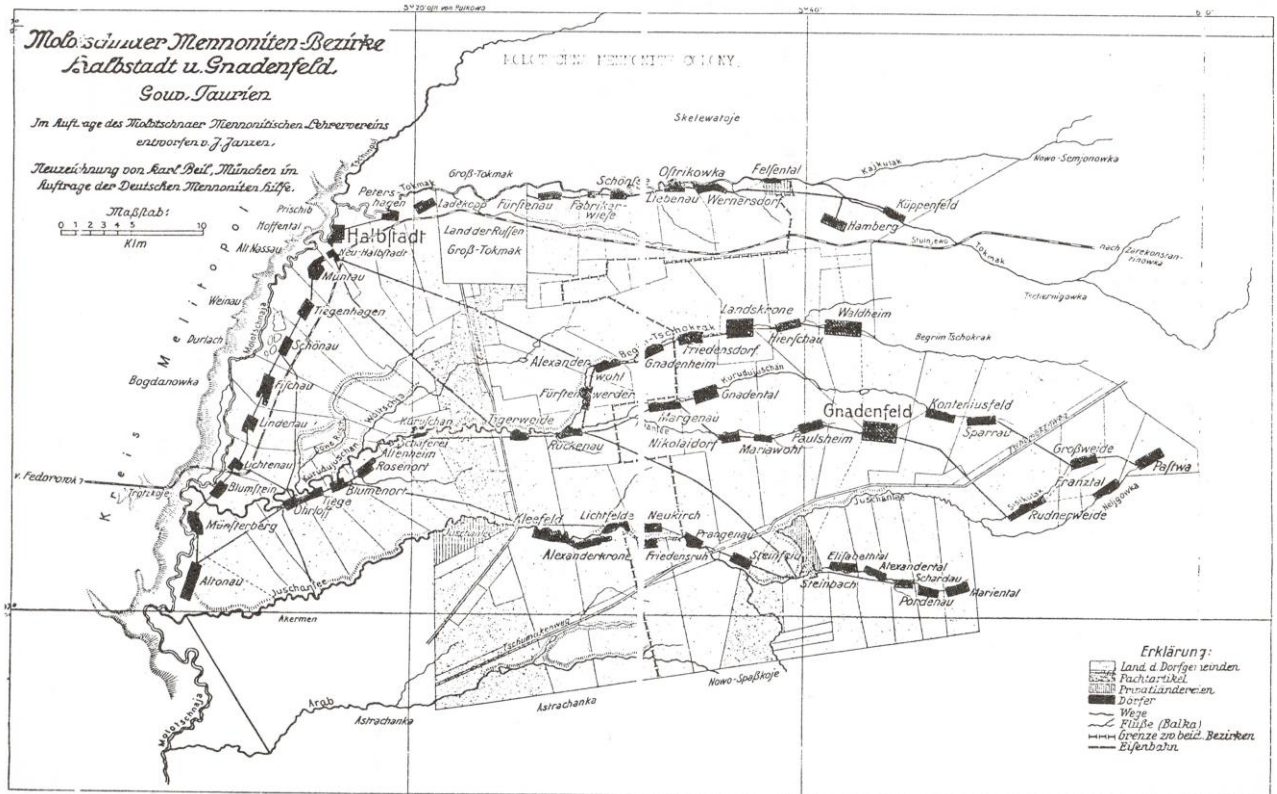
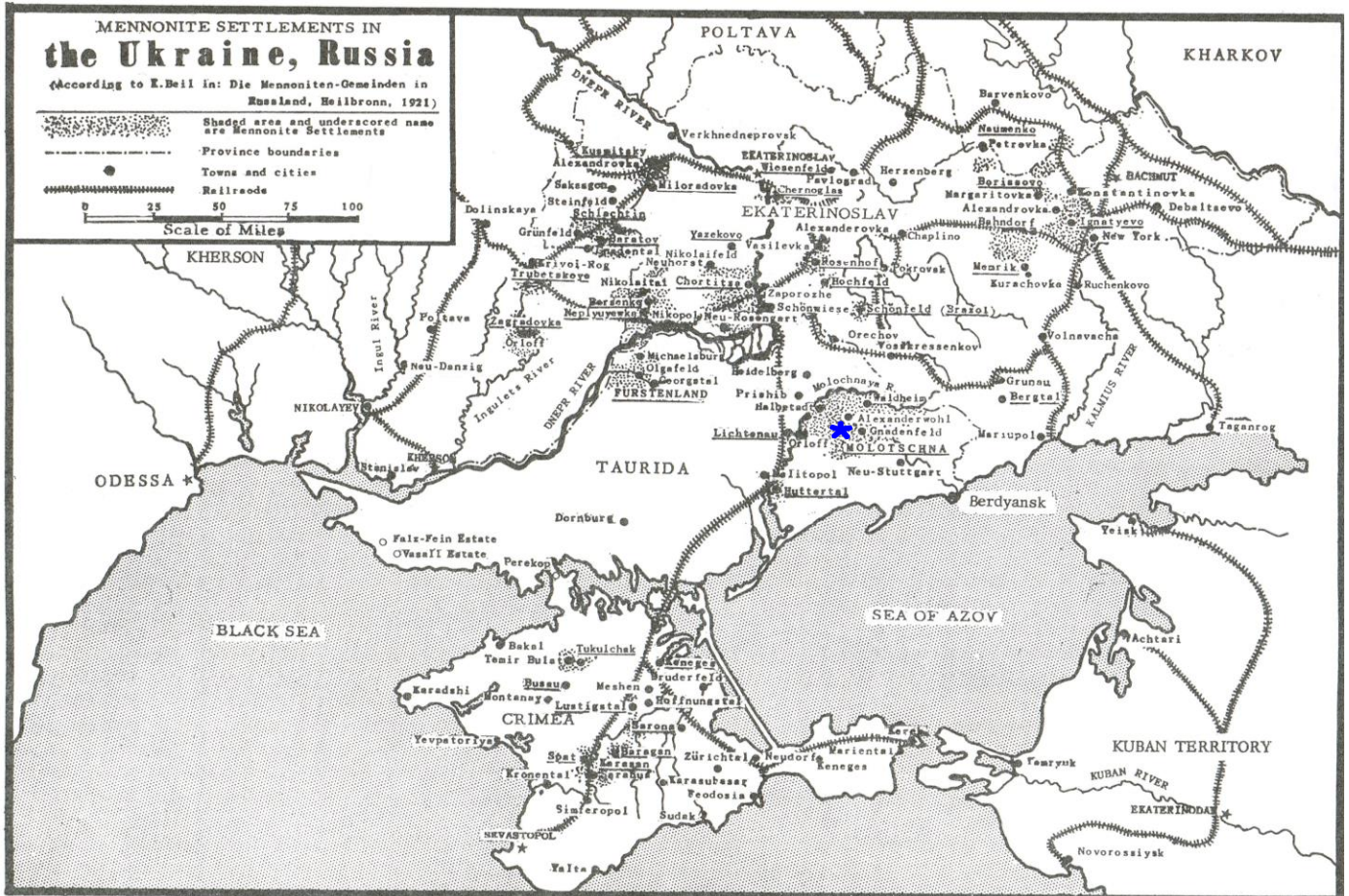
What we now know as Ukraine became part of the [expanding Russian Empire](#) in the late 1600s and 1700s in a series of conquests, largely from the [Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth](#) and [Crimean Khanate/Ottoman Empire](#). After the [Russian Revolution](#) in 1917-1921, there were the short-lived "Ukrainian People's Republic" and "Ukrainian State" before it was partitioned into the [Ukrainian SSR](#) as part of the formation of the USSR in 1922. It was temporarily annexed by Nazi Germany as "*Reichskommissariat Ukraine*" between 1941-1944 during WW II and became the independent country of Ukraine in 1990-91 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The fate of Ukraine is once again uncertain (2023).

The [Mennonite Central Committee \(MCC\)](#) was formed in 1920 to provide humanitarian aid (including Fordson tractors!) to starving Mennonites in the Molotschna and Khortitsa Colonies of war-torn Ukraine. The [Holodomor](#) (Terror-Famine or Great Famine) in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 killed millions of Ukrainians. "*Holodomor*" emphasizes the famine's man-made character and intentional aspects such as rejection of outside aid, confiscation of all household foodstuffs, and restriction of population movement. The Holodomor was part of the wider Soviet famine of 1932-1933 that affected the major grain-producing areas of the country. Not many Mennonites remained in the Ukrainian SSR following WW I, and those remaining few were almost entirely decimated by deportation to Siberia and the Holodomor, parts of Stalin's Purges.

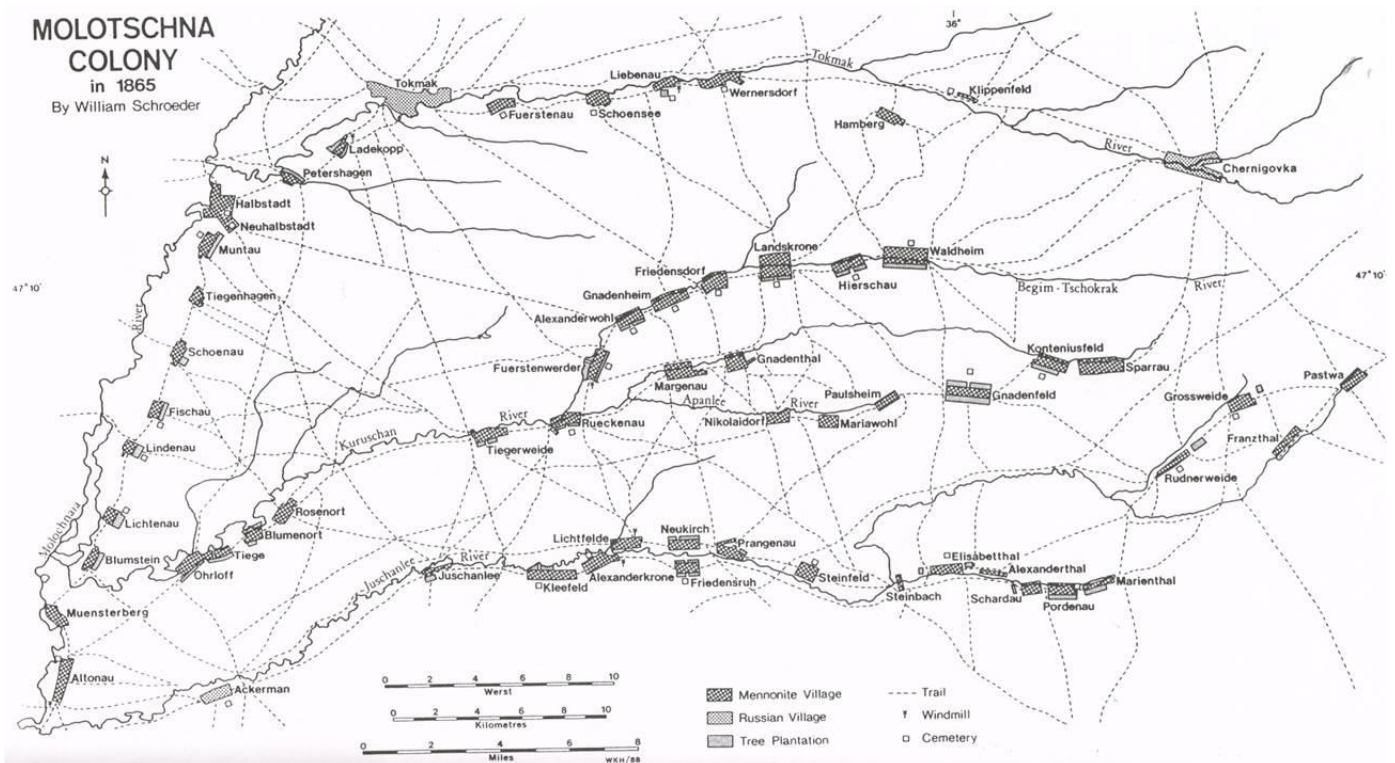
Of course the "Turks" ([Ottomans](#)) and "Russians" have at various times controlled what is now Ukraine, with almost incessant warring. Our people, in fact, emigrated to "[New South Russia](#)" following the seizure of this former Ottoman Empire territory by [Catherine the Great's](#) forces during the [Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74](#). Ukraine, with its well-situated natural warm-water ports of [Odessa](#) and [Kherson](#), at the mouth of the Dnieper River, both on the [Black Sea](#), and its rich oil fields and fertile grain-producing regions, was an early strategic target for [Germany](#) during both [WW I](#) and [WW II](#), and so also a prime target for recovery by Russian forces. It also saw great turmoil, carnage, and destruction during the [Russian Revolution/Civil War](#) (1917-1923). The same was/is true for [Sevastopol](#), another prime Black Sea port in [S Crimea](#) - as we all know, Crimea was seized by Russia in 2014. The current war (2022-4) Russia is waging against Ukraine is only the latest tragedy/travesty for these long-suffering people.

Life in S Russia - The Molotschna Colony

Maps shown below are from Bekker, 1973. All our ancestors emigrated to the **Molotschna Colonies** (*) - just N of the Sea of Azov (see top map). The lower (German-script) map shows the Molotschna Colonies - English version (Schroeder/Heubert, 1996) on next page.



Another map of the **Molotschna Colony** in 1865 is shown below. Most of the villages were along or near small rivers, and only 1-2 miles separated the individual villages in many places. Additional farmlands, including common pastures, were located above and below the villages.

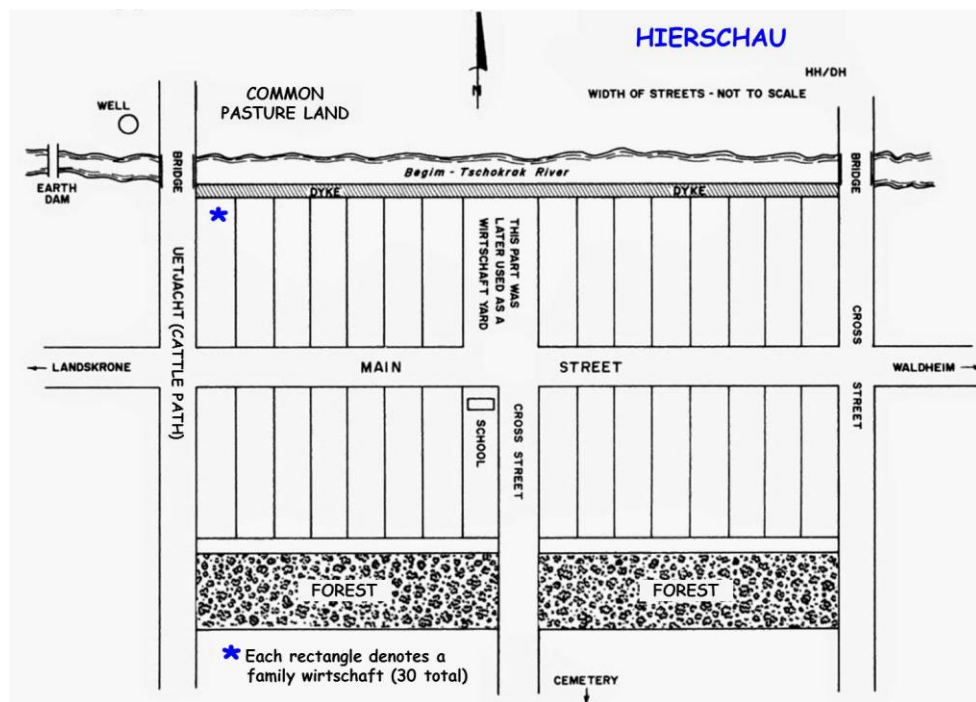


Not much is known about our specific ancestors' daily lives in specific villages, so a general historical overview and synopsis of typical village layout and life is given below. Although much of our cultural heritage seems to derive from our ancestor's time in the Molotschna Colony, they actually lived there only 50-75 years (early 1800s to 1870-80s) before immigrating to the US. An excellent detailed description of village life, social and religious customs, and agricultural practices can be found in "[Hierschau - An Example of Mennonite Life](#)" by HT Huebert. [Hierschau](#) was the home village of [Great-Grandparents Isaac and Elisabeth Toews](#) and the birthplace of [Arrel's Grandpa Gerhard \(George\) P Toews](#).

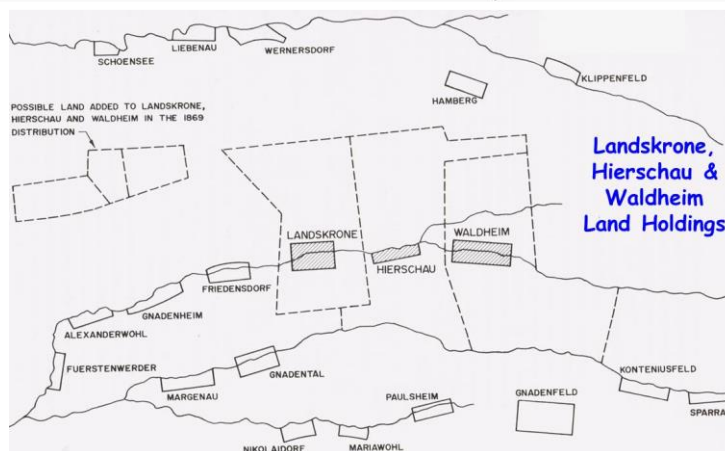
In 1803, 1,020 Mennonites left Prussia in horse-drawn covered wagons, herding their livestock and beginning an arduous voyage of five to seven weeks (>1,000 miles) to Chortitza, then on to the [Molotschna](#) region in the [spring of 1804](#). Life for the new pioneers was very difficult in the early years, with much suffering and death, but they persevered, bolstered by their fierce faith in God and a strong work ethic, and soon had established a series of thriving villages with productive farms, orchards, forests, and related businesses (flour gristmills mostly powered by Holland-style windmills, brick/tile yards, breweries and distilleries, and eventually even implement/tractor factories and the like).

To no one's surprise, these colonists soon again distinguished themselves as farmers. Agriculture, along with the general prosperity of the colonies, took a giant leap forward thanks to [Johann Cornies](#) (1789-1848), a brilliant farmer and agricultural statesman whose reputation and influence eventually extended to the far reaches of the Russian empire. He was the founder and head of the [Ohrloff Agricultural Society](#), which eventually became too authoritarian for some colonists. No matter what, he rigidly standardized agricultural practices and the design of villages, including architectural aspects of various buildings such as "[Cornies hip roofs.](#)" [Hierschau](#) was his [model village](#); the name means "[Look here.](#)" He also encouraged diversification into sheep (particularly [Merinos](#)) and cattle breeding, and the growing of new crops such as flax, potatoes, and various fruits - including mulberries, which led to a flourishing silk industry. Other innovations included four-field farming, with rotation of crops leaving one portion in summer-fallow at all times, and use of stable manure as fertilizer. Further, he advocated for construction of earthen dams on the small rivers the colonies lined to produce ponds/lakes that assured year-round water supplies for livestock and allowed irrigation of low-lying hay meadows.

The Mennonites basically replicated the village pattern they had found appealing in their previous home in Polish-Prussia, dividing themselves into [villages of 15-30 families](#). Each village had a central street lined with [family homesteads \(wirtschafsts\)](#); in the village center was a school and sometimes a church (see map, R).

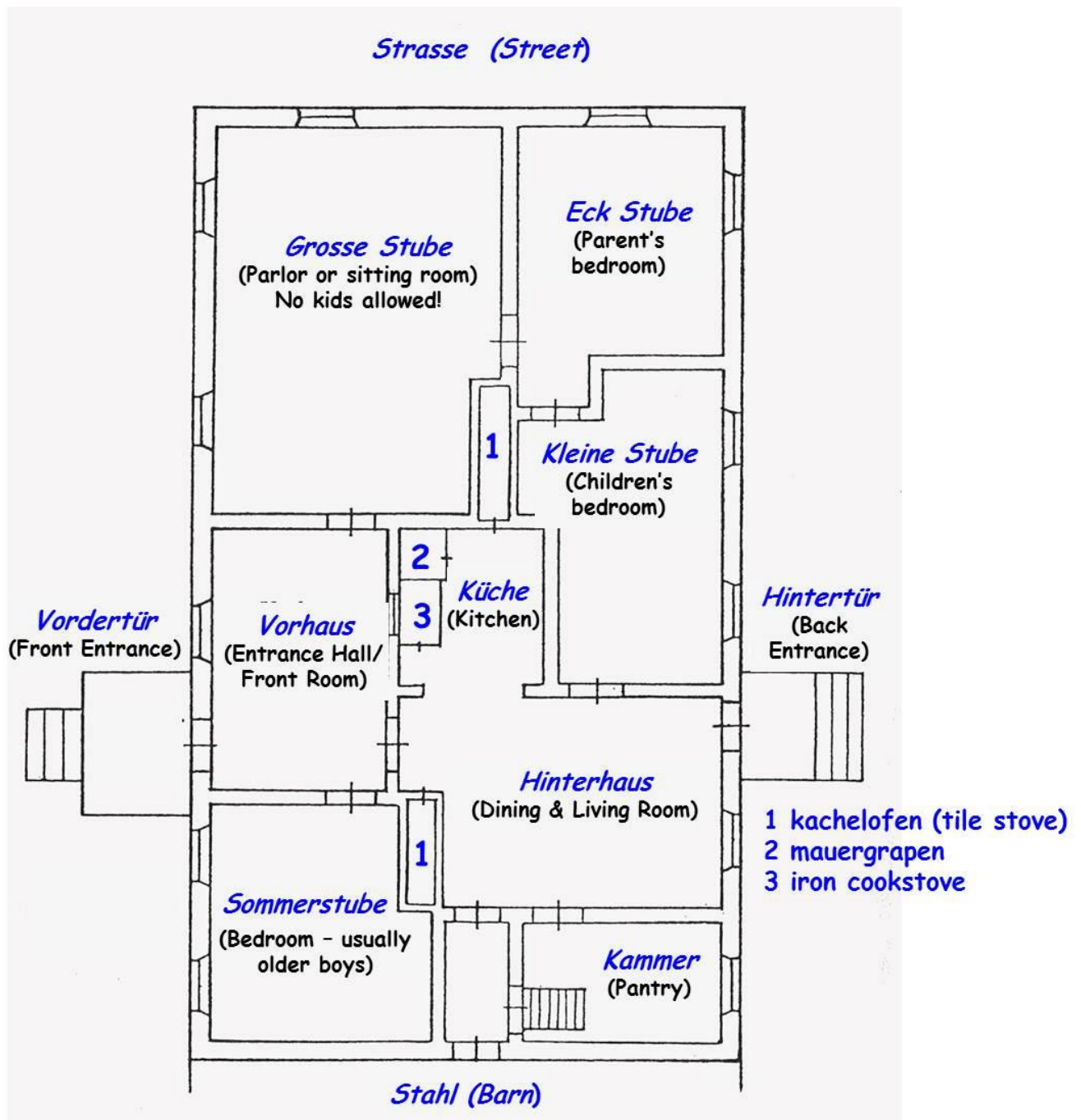


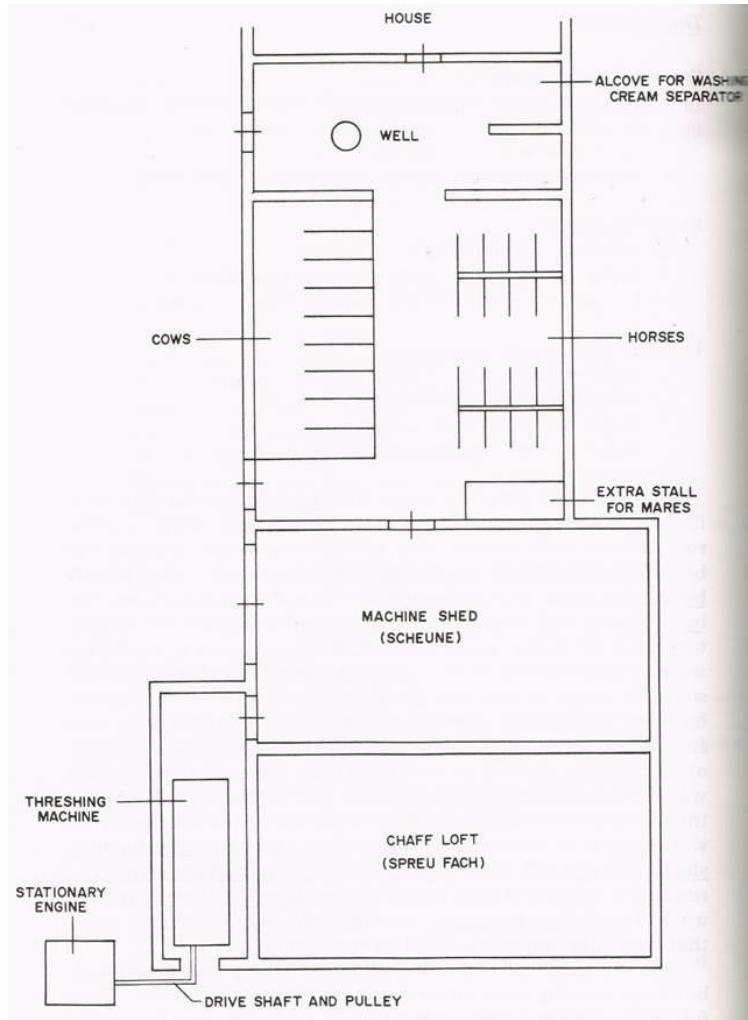
Additional farm and pastureland surrounded each colony (see map at R), but available acreage was finite and this eventually became problematic as the population increased.



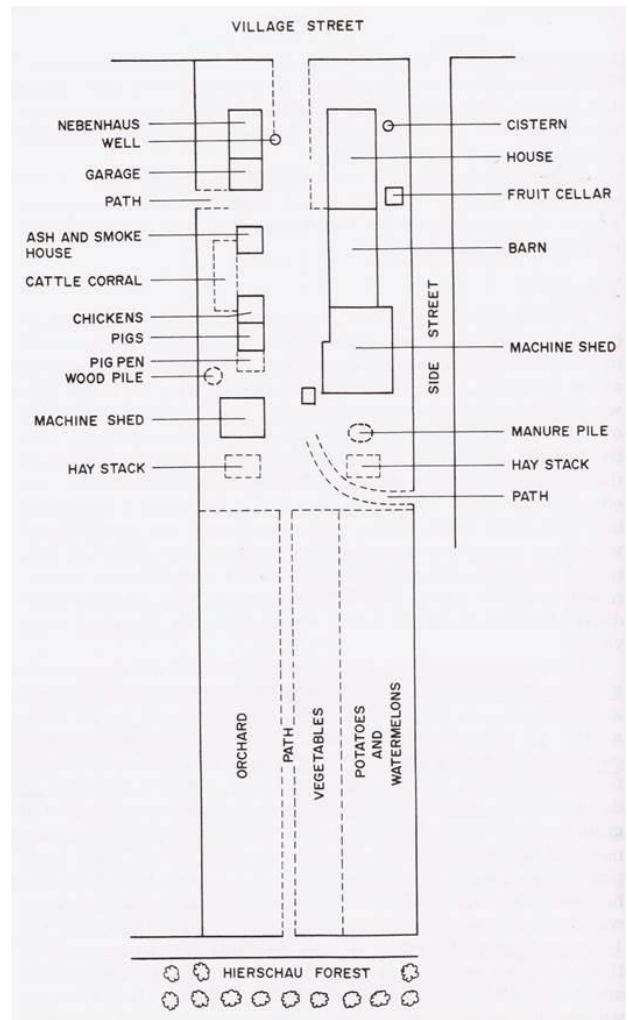
As in Prussia, the house and barn/machine shed were all connected, sometimes linearly as shown in the figure below, but often perpendicular, with the long axis of the house facing the street and the barn extending down into the wirtschafft yard. These designs allowed taking care of winter farm chores without venturing out into the bitter cold. Land was parceled out in pieces so that everyone shared equally in the quality of the soil.

"Typical" house, barn/machine shed, and wirtschafft plans are shown below. Many of the rooms of the house had multiple uses - for example, the *Eck Stube* was also a sitting/sewing "day room" in addition to serving as the parent's bedroom at night, and married children sometimes lived in the *Sommerstube*. The upper *kachelofen* (1; tile stove) had a door opening/hearth in the *Grosse Stube* that allowed access for baking use.



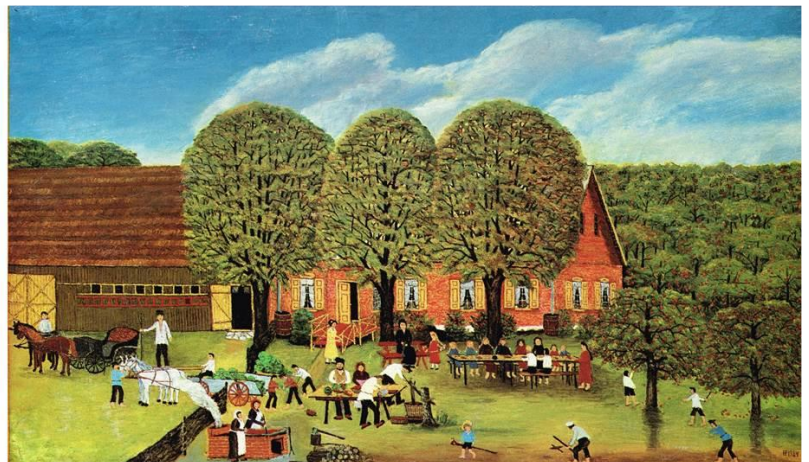
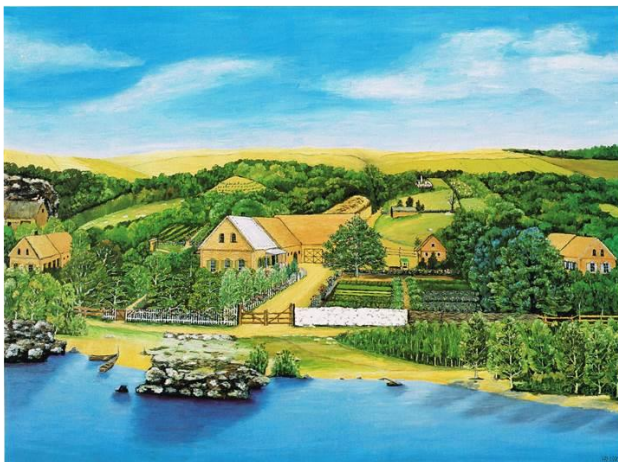


BARN & MACHINE SHED

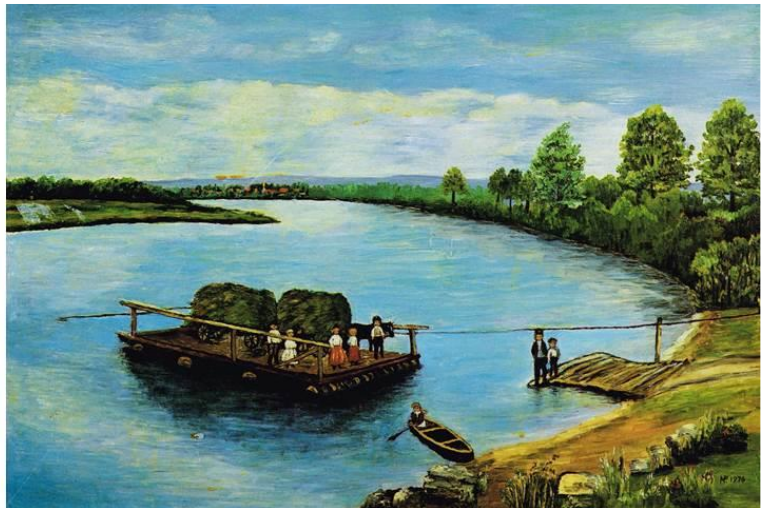
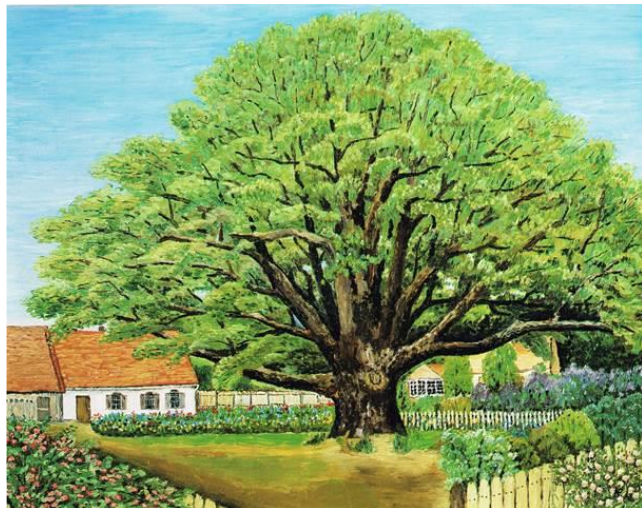
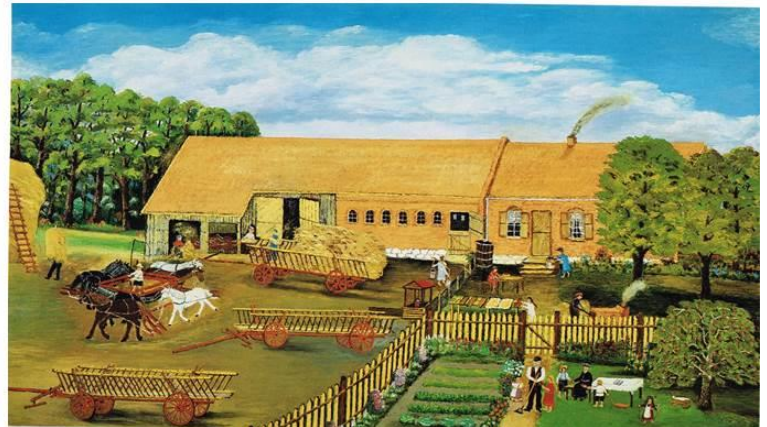
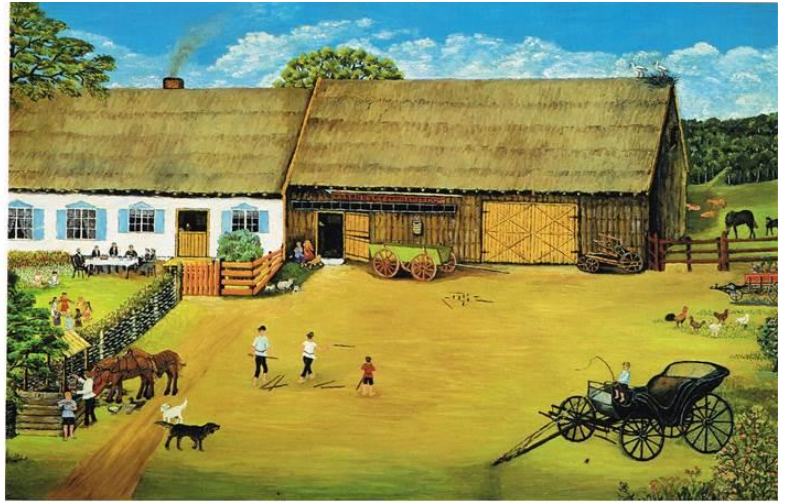


WIRTSCHAFT PLAN

Village life was relatively simple, with farm work and chores occupying everyone for six days, then Sunday with both worship in the churches as well as communal social gatherings. Although painted after our ancestors departed for America, the paintings of [Henry Pauls](#), who was born in the Chortitza Colony in 1904, are both informative of village life and quite poignant to me. Shown below, from "[A Sunday Afternoon](#)" are "[Bernhard & Helene Pauls Farmstead, Island of Chortitza](#)" (where Henry grew up) and "[Making Watermelon Syrup.](#)"



Paintings below (L/R, top to bottom) are "Sunday Morning at Chortitz Mennonite Church," "A Sunday Afternoon," "Harvesting Wheat in Russia," Threshing Time in Russia," "The 700 Year Old Oak, Chortitz," and "Ferry Crossing, Dnieper River." Note the connected homes, barns, and machine sheds in the photos. [Henry Pauls](#) lived out his last earthly days at a Mennonite retirement center in Leamington, Ontario, and he was good friends there with our good friends, [Bob and Louise Cornies](#). ["A Sunday Afternoon: Paintings of Henry Pauls"](#)



It was in S Russia that many of the Russian Mennonites' distinctive foods became part of their tradition. Of course topping the list are [swiebachs \(zwiebach\)](#), the legendary buttery double-decker buns for which Mennonites are famous (these are NOT the double-roasted crunchy buns of German fame) - they were traditionally baked on Saturdays to lessen the amount of labor on Sundays. Additionally, the popular "[summer borscht](#)" soup was made with a ham bone, onions and potatoes and flavored with herbs like sorrel. "[Regular](#)" borscht, usually beef, cabbage, and onions flavored with sour cream (and sometimes beets), [verenika](#) (fried dumplings with dry farmer's cheese) traditionally served with sour cream gravy, and [pluma moos](#) (or [cherry moos](#) - thick cold dessert soups containing plums, cherries, and other fruits and spices) are other traditional dishes. [Watermelons \(arbüis](#) in Plattdeutsch) and accompanying [roll kuchen](#) also deserve special mention here. Rather than attempt to insert many relevant photos and recipes, I will simply direct the interested reader to two excellent (and for me, personal) Mennonite cookbooks assembled by sister-in-law [Anita Toews](#) and her cousin, [Eleanor Suderman](#). They are "[From Tillie's Kitchen - A Collection of Stories and Recipes from Matilda Suderman Regehr](#)" (Anita's Mother) and "[Food, Farm & Family - A Collection of Recipes, Stories and Photographs in Memory of Rosa Marie Voth Toews](#)" (my Mom). Sorry, I could not resist inserting a few anyway! They are [Jeanette Regier's swiebachs](#), [Peabody KS Mennonite sausage](#) and [Vi Neufeld's swiebachs](#), [verenika with sour cream gravy](#), [cherry moos](#), and [watermelon with roll kuchen](#).



Another staple of both Mennonite life and "cuisine" was the **pig** - butchering pigs was traditionally a fall ritual, with several families gathering for the occasion. Men killed the pigs (there was usually a "hog-sticker" for each village who killed the pigs) and butchered, while the womenfolk rendered the lard (producing the wonderful byproduct cracklings or "greivi" in the process), cleaned the intestines that were used as casings for liverwurst and pork sausage, and smoked the hams and bacon. The pig's feet, knuckles, heart, tongue, ears, and some of the rind were used to make head cheese. Everything but the squeal! Note that this tradition continued even as I was growing up in OK in the 1950-60s - neighbors and relatives came over and helped butcher our pigs, and we made lard and cracklings (officially "Jreewe" or as we say, **Greivi**) in the **mea grope** in our summer kitchen, along with both liverwurst and pork sausage. The cracklings were precious and never lasted long - culinary gold to the Toews Brothers! By the way, I inherited **G-Grandpa Heinrich Buller's hog-sticking knife**, forged by a blacksmith from a bastard mill file, and yes, it is still plenty sharp enough to stick the carotid of a plump pig!



Back to history! Eventually, developments both in the colonies themselves, and within Russia in general, combined to make another migration attractive to some of the S Russian Mennonites, including most all of our ancestors. For one, the 100-year-old immunity from established religious orthodoxy and mandatory military service initiated by **Empress Catherine the Great (Ekaterina II)** was being threatened by **Tsar Alexander II**. Other changes instituted by Alexander II also contributed to the general unease. Russia's devastating loss of the **Crimean War** (1853-56) to Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire served as a wake-up call to Russian nationalists. As nationalism rose, so did suspicion and prejudice against minorities - not just Mennonites, but Jews, Poles, and Germans as well. Plus there was talk of mandatory military conscription. **"Russification"**



unfolded as the country sought to cleanse itself from foreign impediments, including those who did not speak their language - official correspondence was to be in Russian and efforts were made to have Russian taught in schools across the land. After so many years of being "left apart," many Mennonites began to feel their special status seeping away; one of their greatest fears - religious and cultural assimilation - loomed. In addition, there was a very serious shortage of new land available in the colonies - in fact, basically none at all because of restrictions on the purchase of new lands, yet the populations continued to grow. The **freeing of the serfs** by Tsar Alexander II put further pressure on the availability of land

and also enhanced nationalist sentiments. Additionally, many saw [America as a new economic opportunity](#) - railroads were being constructed across the middle of the country, frontier land was freely available, and the railroads and federal government were quite amenable to helping pioneers populate and develop the central United States. Perhaps those with the least to lose left, and those with the most to lose - generally the more prosperous Mennonites - chose to stay. It is certainly also true that those with the strictest interpretation of the teaching and beliefs of their religion chose to leave. The first wave of immigration began in [1873-74](#) with about a third of the Russian Mennonites (~18,000) leaving for North America. Some 10,000 of these, our ancestors included, came mostly from [Molotschna](#) and migrated to [Kansas](#), [Nebraska](#), the Dakotas, and Minnesota. Another 8,000 of the more conservative Chortitza colony went to Canada, mostly Manitoba. As with past migrations, motives were mixed - some left because they saw their cherished religious freedoms and beliefs threatened, some were attracted by new economic opportunity, some perhaps infected with general wanderlust, many likely influenced by all these and more.

[Golden Age of Mennonites in Russia](#) - After our ancestors left, the remaining Mennonites became very prosperous, issuing in what is referred to as "[The Golden Age of Mennonites in Russia](#)." As their estates and businesses, which included large implement and tractor manufacturing factories (see R for the [I J Neufeld Implement Factory](#) in Waldheim, Molotschna!), became more prosperous, their society became even more exclusive of other (envious) Russians, so they were prime examples of "[kulaks](#)" - low-hanging fruit for the Bolsheviki/Communists and anarchists during the violent [Russian Revolution](#) and [Civil War](#) (1917) and [World War I](#) (1914-18) as well.

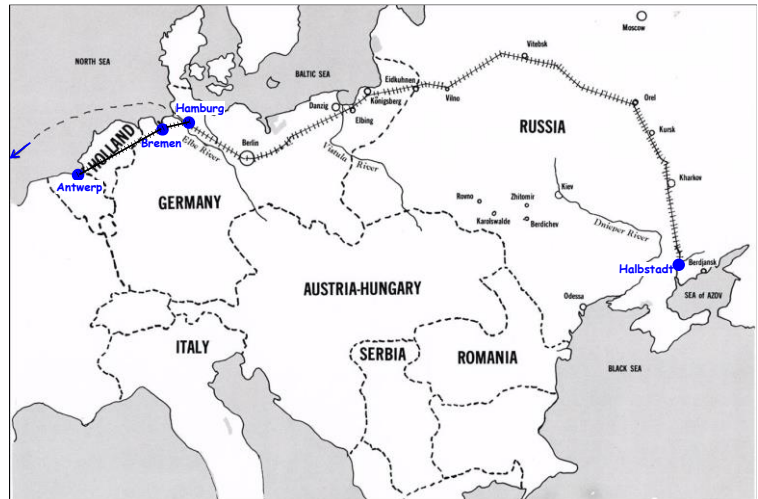


To the Bolsheviki, the prosperous Mennonites represented capitalistic success, which they despised. The remaining Mennonites could not believe how suddenly their Golden Age was smothered by persecution, plunder, and starvation - for those who stayed, the wrenching 1920s would forever define their Mennonite experience in S Russia. Ravaging bands of anarchists, many led by [Nestor Makhno](#), laid waste to many villages in both the Molotschna and Chortitza Colonies, raping and pillaging as they went. The carnage was sporadic, but brutal - hundreds of Mennonites, including infants and old persons, were murdered, some by gruesome decapitation. Most remaining Mennonites, including Anita's parents, [Henry and Matilda Suderman Regehr](#), migrated to Canada & US in the late 1910s and 1920s, but not before being subjected to great terror and violence, and considerable loss of life and property.

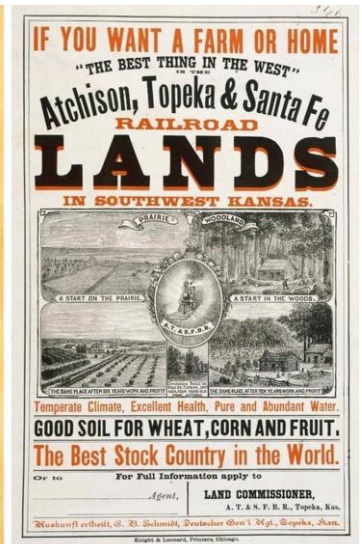
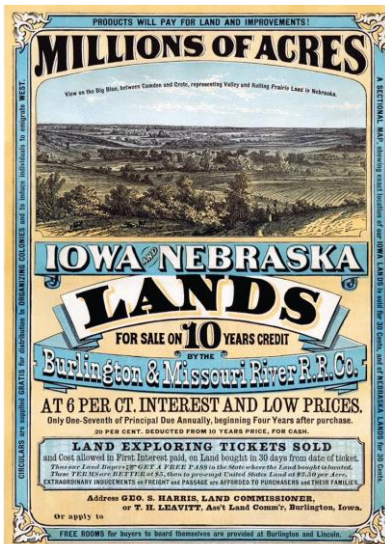
As an **aside**, not all was peaceful on the **religious front for Russian Mennonites** in the mid-19th Century either. A major acrimonious schism occurred among the Russian Mennonites in **1860**. Influenced strongly by pietistic Lutheran preachers from Germany and earlier Moravian exposures, a group of 18 dissident Mennonites rebelled against what they regarded as spiritual decay in the Mother Church and began holding communion separately. In the warmth of their newly articulated spirituality, the men addressed one another as **"brother,"** hence this small radical splinter group became known as the **Mennonite Brethren Church**. This is the denomination in which we were raised, and which defined our parent's religious heritage - of course it continues to inform our thoughts and lives to some degree even now. MBs chose to baptize by fully immersing candidates backwards in water to symbolize the death and resurrection of Christ, and yes, all three Toews Brothers were thusly baptized! - Galen in a small lake along US-81 between Enid and Kremlin and Arrel & Myron in an Enid OK church dunk-tank.

Arrival and Early Life in the US

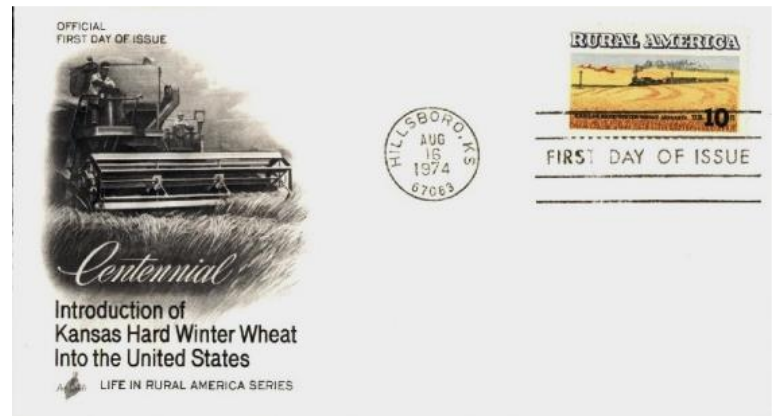
Our ancestors boarded **trains in S Russia** for travel to **W European ports**, mainly **Bremen or Hamburg, Germany or Antwerp, Belgium** (map at R); an alternate route to Hamburg from Odessa through Lviv was also utilized. They took passage on various steamships across the Atlantic Ocean and arrived in **NYC or Philadelphia**, then immediately departing, again by train, to the Great Plains of the central US - either near **Henderson, NE** (**Burlington and Missouri River RR**) or to an area NE of Newton KS (**Alexanderwohl & Gnadenau Colonies; Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe RR**).



These railroads and others were eager for industrious pioneer farmers to populate the prairies crossed by their newly laid lines; they provided generous offers to sell farmland, other financial support, and even physical structures to house the immigrants until they could build their own homes. Note **German script** at the bottom of the **ATSF flier** at R.



They took as much of their cherished possessions as possible in large wooden chests. A nice display of some of these wooden trunks can be found in the [Kauffman Museum](#) in Newton, KS, across from the Bethel College campus (as well as in our living room). Contents included jars of choice seeds, among them their precious [Turkey Hard Red winter wheat](#). This variety of wheat proved to be more winter-hardy and drought-resistant than wheat grown earlier in the KS area, and quickly became the variety of choice in Kansas and then most all of the Great Plains.



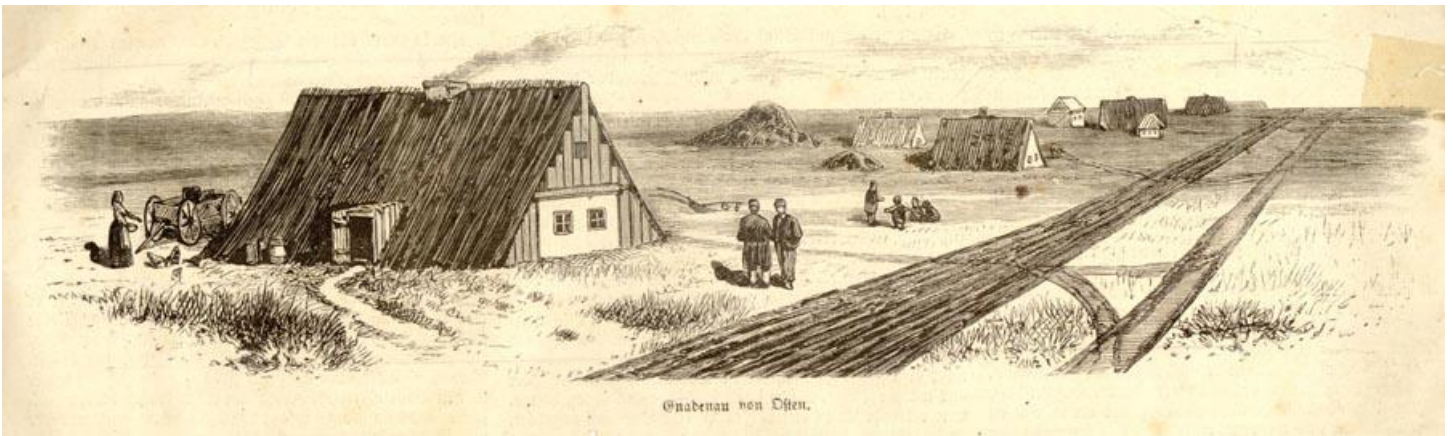
Note the first-day-of-issue in Hillsboro, KS (home of Tabor College!) of the [Rural America commemorative stamp](#) for the centennial of Kansas hard red winter wheat in 1974.



US Mennonite pioneers used either a team of oxen or horses, pulling a sod-breaking plow to break the native prairie in preparation for sowing grain. The first few years, each farmer tried to plant 5 acres of wheat and 5 of rye - sometimes corn was grown as well, especially in the Henderson, NE area. Although agricultural machinery was rapidly developing in America during the 1870-80s, early pioneers most likely broadcast their wheat seeds by hand, working the seeds into the ground with a drag harrow. At first, the [scythe](#) was used to harvest the grain and the [Mennonite threshing stone](#) to thresh the

grain. In the Kansas settlement areas of the 1870s, 40 acres of land was considered sufficient for the average farmer, but by 1900, a quarter-section (160 acres) was barely enough to make a living. By the time of the opening of the [Oklahoma Territory \(Land Run of 1889 and later Cherokee Outlet Land Run of 1893\)](#), Marion and Harvey County, KS were considered over-populated and many second-generation pioneer families, including our own, took out claims or purchased farms and moved south to [Oklahoma](#).

The [first 2 photos below](#) show immigrant houses constructed for Mennonites by the railroads - (L) re-constructed immigrant house in Henderson NE; (R) immigrant houses N of Newton, KS, from "[Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper](#)" (1875). Drawings below that and on the next page are also from Frank Leslie's articles and are of the nascent Gnadenu Colony S of Hillsboro KS. I think these give a good feel for the early villages and life of US Mennonite pioneers. The [Krimmer MB Gnadenu congregation](#) is now the [Parkview Mennonite Church, Hillsboro KS](#). Lower three, top to bottom: Gnadenu Looking East (1874), Gnadenu in 1875, Mennonites Worshipping on the Prairie



Gnadenu in 1875



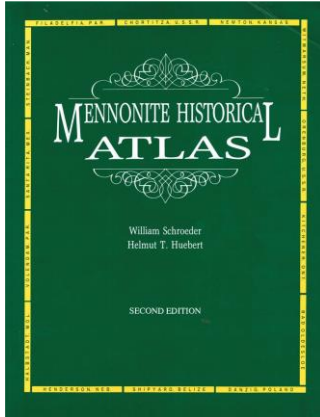
Below, again from [Frank Leslie's Newspaper](#): (L/R) **first row**: Interior of the Russian Immigrant House, Russian Mennonites - Faces and Typical Dress (also Mennonites at the Post Office & a basket); **middle row**: New York City - Arrival of Mennonite Emigrants on a Hamburg Steamer on the Hudson River, Gnadenau - Mennonites at their well; **bottom**: Temporary home of the Russian Mennonites.



The story of our ancestors continues in the next installment - ["Ancestors of David A and Rosa M Voth Toews"](#) - also on this website. It details specific ancestors and family lines of our family.

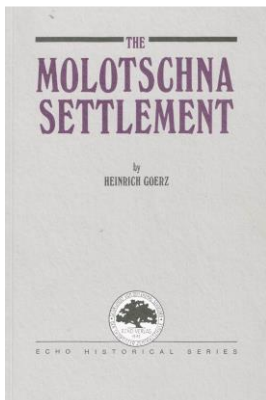
Resources on Mennonite History and Heritage Available from Arrel

Below are listed some of my books relevant to Mennonite history, culture, heritage, and our ancestors. Some of them have been valuable to me in my thinking and writings, and I will be happy to loan any of them to interested parties with the understanding that they will be well cared for and returned within a reasonable interval. They are listed (very) loosely in order of their usefulness, but all are worth reading and studying.

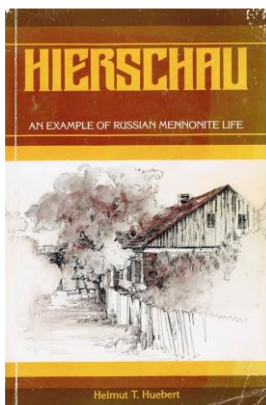


Mennonite Historical Atlas - Schroeder & Heubert (1996) - Maps of virtually every Mennonite colony in the world, including Prussian and S. Russian villages and associated migrations. Also very nice concise and factual summaries of villages, colonies, towns, and more. Quite a useful resource. Many maps included in this writing.

We took it along on our 2008 Mennonite Heritage Cruise in Ukraine and were glad we did. Very useful when we got back, as well as for my current writings.

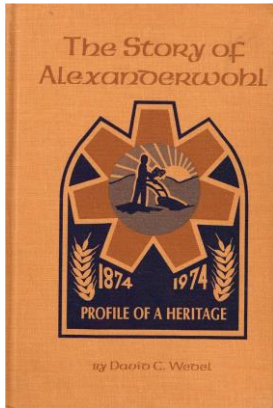


The Molotschna Settlement - Goertz - Best known source of information on the Molotschna Colonies of S Russia, from which all of our ancestors immigrated.

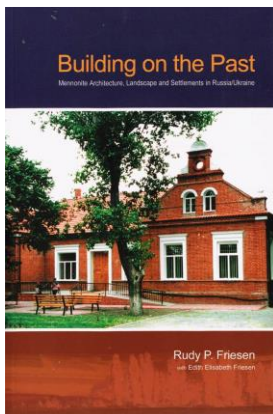


Hierschau: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life - Heubert - by one of the authors of the Mennonite Historical Atlas. Excellent and detailed book on the Molotschna village of Hierschau, designed and built under the rigid guidance of [Johann Cornies](#), head of the Ohrloff Agricultural Association, who had a major influence on the survival and prosperity of the Molotschna Settlement. Useful maps, diagrams, photos and text

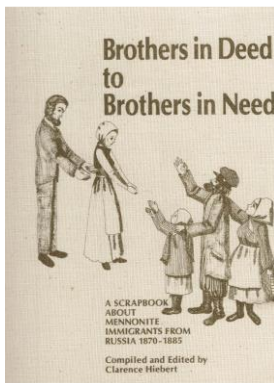
[Great-Grandpa Isaac Toews](#) and his family, including my [Grandpa George \(Gerhard\) P Toews](#), immigrated to the US from Hierschau.



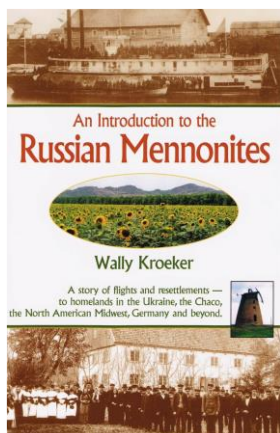
The Story of Alexanderwohl - Wedel - Written for the 1974 US Mennonite Centennial, it is mostly about the KS colony, but with good historical information about previous history from [Flanders](#) ("Flemish" region, SW "Low Countries" including Zeeland of the Netherlands and NW Belgium) through W Prussia, then through S Russia and on to the US. Quite a story, and some detailed information for anyone who seeks it. [G-Grandparents Heinrich J and Sarah Buller Buller](#) were members of this colony.



Building on the Past - Mennonite Architecture, Landscapes, and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine - Rudy Friesen - Rudy is a big-time Winnipeg architect who has been active in recording Russian Mennonite architecture and other aspects of that culture. Rudy has taken thousands of photographs of buildings over the years, many no longer extant. Excellent descriptions of structures, villages, and lots more, including histories. He was one of the excellent resource leaders on our [Mennonite Heritage Cruise in 2008](#). There is an online archive of photos not in this book that might be useful to others too - [Raduga Publications](#)



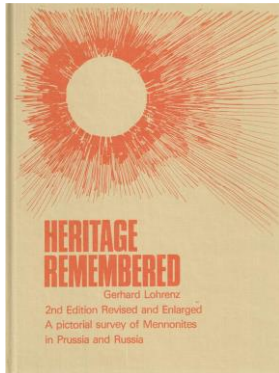
Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need: A Scrapbook about Mennonite Immigrants from Russia 1870-1885 - Clarence Hiebert - An exhaustive life's work for Clarence Hiebert, beloved Tabor College Religion professor and MB preacher, with newspaper clippings, ads, drawings and photographs, ship's manifests, and lots more regarding the Mennonite migration from S Russia to North America. Lots of useful information in here, including those ship manifests! Rev. Hiebert was the pastor of our North Enid MB Church when the Toews Brothers were growing up.



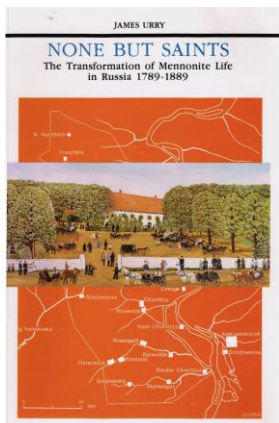
An Introduction to the Russian Mennonites: A Story of Flights and Resettlements in the Ukraine, The Chaco, the North American Midwest, Germany and Beyond - Kroeker - A relatively short and concise story of Russian Mennonites, well worth reading. Very good synopsis of it all.



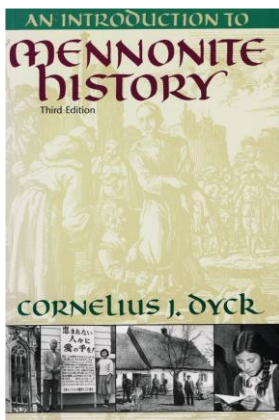
A Century of Russian Mennonite History in America - 1874 - 1974 - Compiled for the centennial of the Russian immigration from S Russia to North America, it covers the American side of things. No illustrations!



Heritage Remembered - A pictorial Survey of Mennonites in Prussia and Russia - Gerhard Lohrenz - lots and lots of pictures from both W Prussia and S Russia, plus some commentary too. At least interesting to page and graze through!



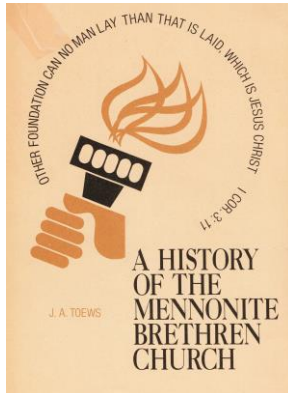
None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 - James Urry - basically the story of Mennonites in S Russia from their initial arrival in the late 18th century until after our ancestors left for the US. Recommended reading for our Mennonite Heritage Cruise "Floating Mennonite University" lectures. Only for the bold, though!



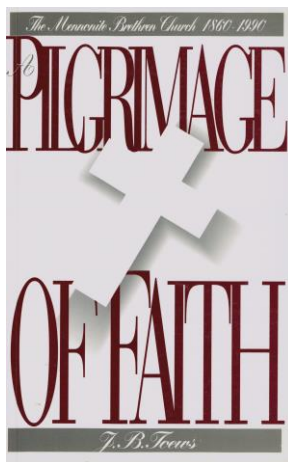
An Introduction to Mennonite History - Cornelius Dyck - exactly what it says it is. A Mennonite historian writes a Mennonite history book.



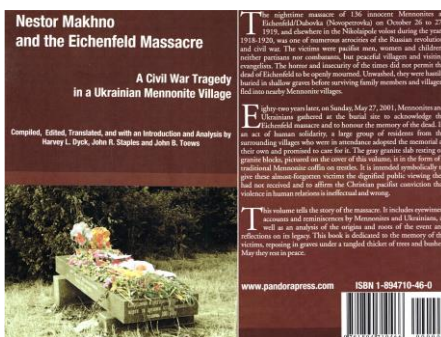
Relatively dry yet informative 1973 account of the founding events and beliefs of the MB Church, notable mostly for a **series of old maps of W Prussia and S Russia** towards the end. I was happy to make this discovery and they are included in this writing. **Jacob P Bekker**



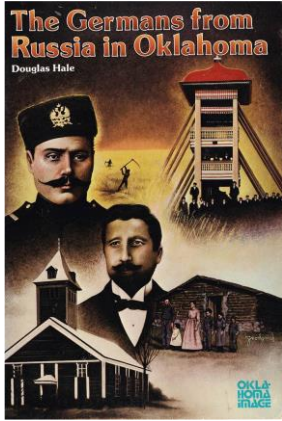
Another slow-going studios telling of the **history of the MB Church**, subtitled "Pilgrims and Pioneers." Covers both S Russia and later the Americas as well, as well as Anabaptist thought. **JA Toews** 1975



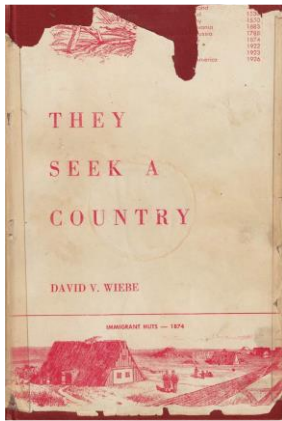
JB Toews takes a look back at the previous 130 or so years of the Mennonite Brethren Church - part of the "Perspectives on Mennonite Life and Thought" series. Who better to do this than **J.B. Toews** whose life spans well over half of those years and who has experienced much of what he writes. 1993



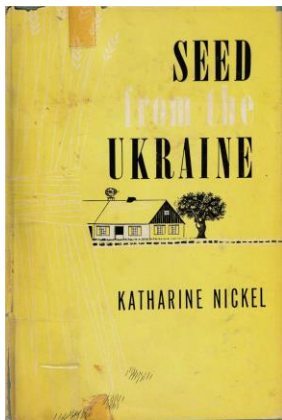
An account of the **Eichenfeld Massacre**, where 136 Mennonite colonists were killed by anarchists led by **Nestor Makhno** in **October 1919**. Includes eyewitness accounts and memories by locals, as well as helpful background context and coverage of the dedication of the commemorative monument. In 2008, while on our Mennonite Heritage Tour, we visited this memorial.



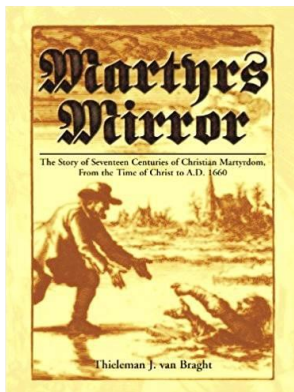
The Germans from Russia in Oklahoma - Douglas Hale - really nice concise summary of Mennonites ending up in OK, starting in Switzerland before they even knew they were Mennos, all the way through W Prussia and S Russia to the Neufelds in Balko! Only ~75 pages but chocked full of useful and interesting information.



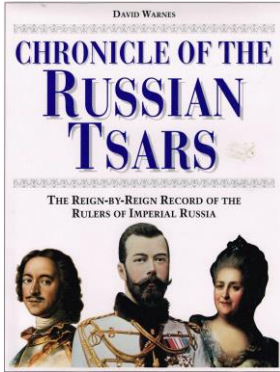
They Seek a Country - David Wiebe - another very useful book about Mennonite migrations, their pioneer settlements, customs, and culture. Some good photos, etchings, and maps. Lots about the [Gnadenau Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church](#) S of Hillsboro, the first MB church in the US. **Krim** is the German name for **Crimea**, where this sect was founded in 1869. It has **no connection whatsoever to our Mennonite Brethren denomination**.



Seed from the Ukraine - Katherine Nickel - the stuff from which legends are born! Fictionalized story of Turkey Red wheat and the Mennonite immigrants who brought it to the US and got things started - it was not easy!



Martyrs Mirror - van Braght - Massive (1158 pages!) tome on Christian martyrs from the time of Christ right up to 1660 (when it was written), with lots of early **Anabaptists** and **Mennos** included. Classic graphic accounts of more than 4,000 Christians who endured suffering, torture, and a martyr's death because of their simple faith in the gospel of Christ. Songs, letters, prayers, and confessions appear with the stories of many defenseless Christians who were able to love their enemies and return good for evil. Most importantly, it includes more than **50 finely detailed etchings** by noted **Dutch artist Jan Luyken**. Worth looking at just for that. Really impressive on a bookshelf too!



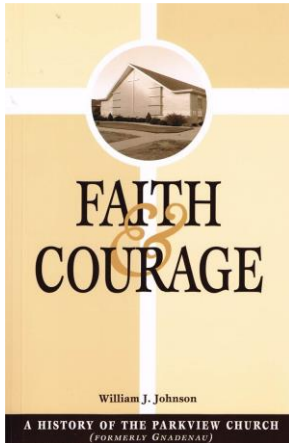
Chronicle of the Russian Tsars: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Russia - David Warnes - nice readable account of Imperial Russia's rulers with a good measure of photos, maps, timelines, and other visual material. Very interesting & relevant reading for me. While in St. Petersburg, we were fortunate to visit the [Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul](#), which contains the crypts of most all of the Romanovs - Peter the Great, Paul, Catherine the Great, Nicholas II & Alexandra & family, and more (only Peter II and Ivan VI are not here).

A Sunday Afternoon

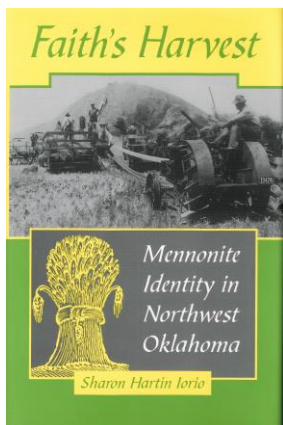
Paintings by Henry Pauls



A Sunday Afternoon - Paintings by Henry Pauls - Henry Pauls - very nice book of primitive paintings on Mennonite life in S Russia as well as on the prairies of Saskatchewan by Henry Pauls, born in the Chortitza Colony in 1904. A good sense of what life was like in the S Russia colonies, albeit after our forebears left for the US.

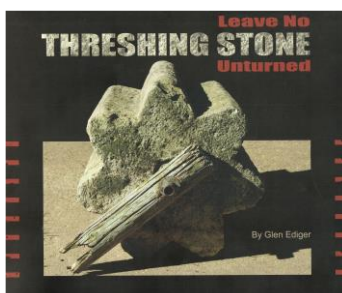


Faith & Courage - A History of the Parkview Church (Formerly Gnadenau) - William J Johnson - multi-year quest of beloved Tabor College Chemistry Professor Bill Johnson to document the history and culture of the [Krimmer MB Gnadenau Colony](#) S of Hillsboro and its current incarnation, [Parkview Mennonite Church](#). Interesting history and photos of early colony life - the name Gnadenau means [Grace Meadow](#), and a book by that title is also available from [Hillsboro Free Press](#).

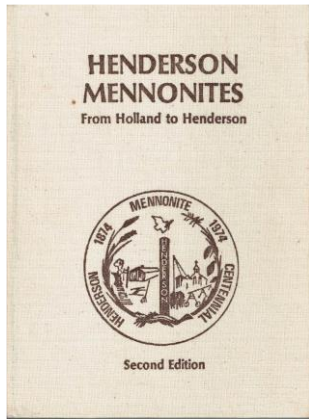


1999 book about [NW OK Mennonites](#), featuring 60 in-depth interviews. Interesting to me since I grew up a Mennonite in NW OK! Many locations and even some of those interviewed are known to me.

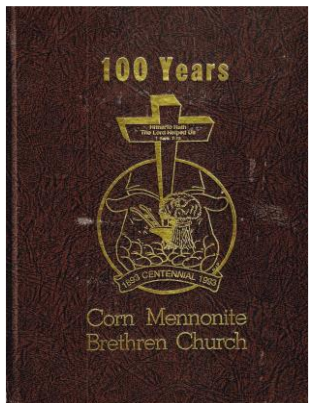
[Sharon H Iorio](#)



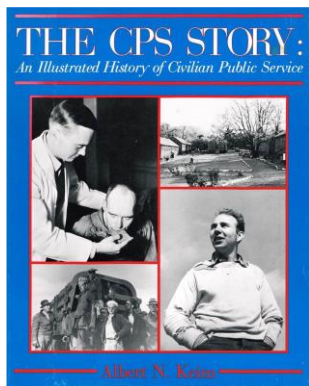
Interesting in-depth, richly illustrated treatment of the [threshing stone](#), used since ancient times to thresh wheat grain from the straw. It was used by [Mennonites in S Russia](#) and in [KS](#) as well. Enjoyable and informative book - I am happy to have discovered it at the Faith Meets Life Bookstore in Newton KS - [Glen Ediger](#) is a Bethel College graduate. 2012. Check out his ["Zwiebach & Faspas"](#) YouTube video too!



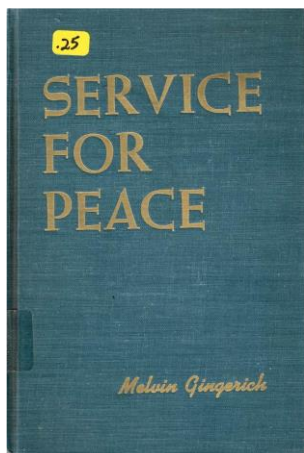
Henderson Mennonites: From Holland to Henderson - 2nd ed, 1975; 1981. Expanded and revised version of Henderson Mennonite Centennial, it has lots of decent information from Holland thru Prussia thru S Russia to Henderson NE. Some good photos too, including a mea grope!



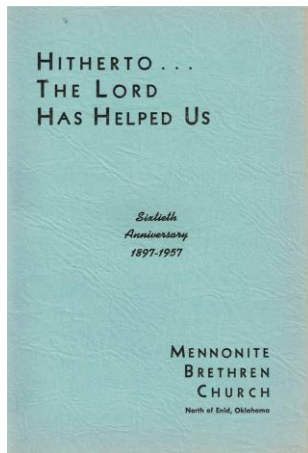
100 Years (1892-1993) - Corn Mennonite Brethren Church - Centennial publication of a major OK Mennonite community with a nice section of "before/after" photos of farming and community life at the end. Kathy's maternal Fadenrecht and Froese ancestors are from this general area. From Myron via his pastor, Morita Thurman (ancestors are Kremlin Kirkpatrick's).



The CPS Story: An Illustrated History of Civilian Public Service - **Albert Keim** - nice history of CPS, the alternative service organization for those whose consciences led them to object to military service during World War II. I am proud to count my Dad, David A. Toews, among their numbers.

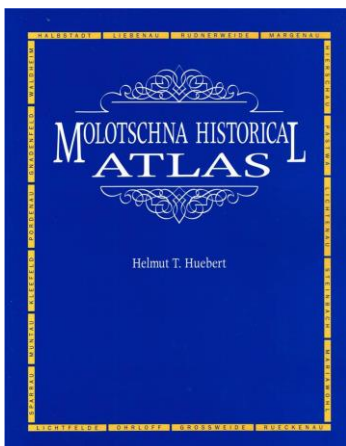


Service for Peace - **Melvin Gingerich** - Exhaustive 1949 MCC tome on CPS and involvement of Mennonites therein. Not a single illustration save for a US map inside the covers, so only for the bold. And yes, I got it for \$0.25 at the Enid MCC Sale! Originally from Fairview MB Church Library. Will take it to the farm on our next trip to OK where it will likely still go unread.

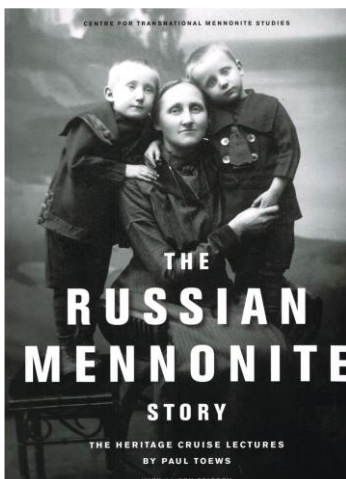


Hitherto The Lord Has Helped Us: The Story of the Mennonite Brethren Church North of Enid, Oklahoma 1897-1957 by **Jacob A Voth, Sr** (Arrel's Gpa Voth). Prepared for the 60th Anniversary Celebration of the N Enid MB Church, it has some early photos and lots of history of the church, its pastors, and the families that made up the congregation. Not used heavily in the current document, but will be very helpful for future writings on my family and our early lives. It was useful for my "**Church and Religious Life**" writing - ask for it!

Some additional books recently obtained - all are good resources with fairly high priorities. They are included here for convenience, and their position does not indicate their priorities.



Molotschna Historical Atlas by **Helmut T Huebert** (2003). Follow-up atlas to the Mennonite Historical Atlas by one of the authors, and somewhat but not completely redundant with the earlier work. Focus is on the Molotschna Colony, but most maps are from after our people migrated to the US in the 1870s. Still a good book to have on the shelf and a good resource with more specific information and many more detailed village maps of this colony than the Mennonite Historical Atlas. I got it at the Mennonite Heritage and Agricultural Museum in Goessel, KS in March 2018.

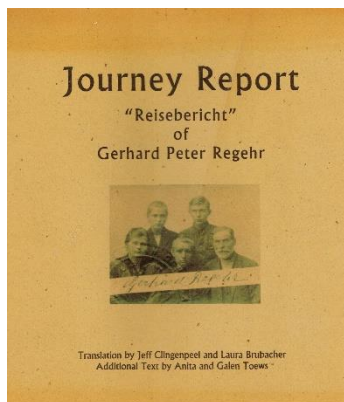


The Russian Mennonite Story - The Heritage Cruise Lectures by **Paul Toews** with **Aileen Friesen** (2018). Just published book of the lectures given by Paul Toews on the Mennonite Heritage Cruises on the Dneiper River. **Paul Toews** (1940-2015), the middle son of MB patriarch, **JB Toews**, was Professor Emeritus at Fresno Pacific University and spent a good part of his professional career in search of Mennonite historical documents and data from Russian and Ukrainian archives and in assembling "The Russian Mennonite Story!" Kathy and I, along with Anita and Galen, were fortunate to be on one of these cruises in 2008 and learn from and get to know Professor Paul Toews. [Paul Timothy Toews](#) passed from this world in 2015.

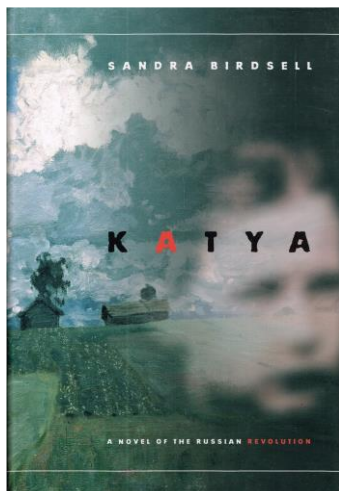
An interesting history of the [Przechowka/Alexanderwohl Colony](#) from [Prussia](#) (now Poland) through [S Russia](#) (now Ukraine) to [Goessel KS](#) can be found online in the [April, 1955 issue of Mennonite Life](#). It is good reading for anyone interested in learning more about this colony and current community. My G-grandparents Heinrich and Sarah Buller were part of the Alexanderwohl Colony in both S Russia and KS. You will need to scroll down to [page 56!](#)

[GAMEO.org](#) - The [Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online](#) is an online encyclopedia of topics relating to [Mennonites](#) and [Anabaptism](#). The mission of the project is to provide free, reliable, English-language information on Anabaptist-related topics, and it quite useful as an online source of Mennonite history through the centuries and all over the world. Easily searchable and generally quite detailed, comprehensive, and up to date.

Books on Mennonite Family Sagas and Memories



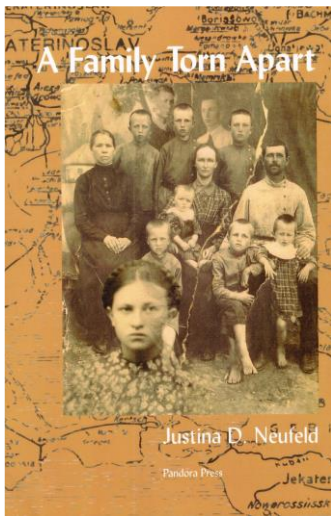
Fascinating story of [Anita Regehr Toews' grandfather Gerhard P Regehr](#), as published in the *Die Zionsbote* in 1923-24, with excellent supplemental historical and familial information by Anita and Galen Toews. Includes many historical documents (visas, immigration documents, family photos). Well worth reading for historical perspective of S Russia during WWI, Russian Revolution, times of anarchy and more. Gift from Anita & Galen in 2001.



Katya Vogt lives on the S Russian Steppes on the vast wealthy Sudermann estate. Their Mennonite religion, traditions, and prosperous lands set them apart from surrounding Russian peasants. Then the Revolution comes - German Army, Bolsheviks, Anarchists, White Army, Red Army, Communists. Katya, schooled in Mennonite pacifism and the patient forbearance of her father, is tested by a world upended. About as good as S Russian Mennonite historical fiction gets. I have a signed copy. 2001



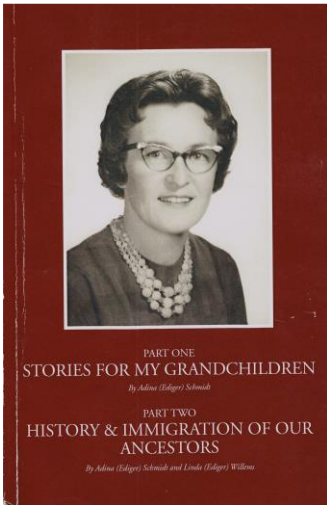
Journey Into Freedom - One Family's Real-Life Drama - Family saga of the Dyck family, Mennonites caught up in the sweep of world events during the 1930-40s, by Edith Friesen, wife of Winnipeg architect Rudy Friesen, a valuable resource person on our 2008 Mennonite Heritage Cruise. Real-life challenges from Stalinist Russia through Poland, E Prussia, Germany and finally to Canada. I have a signed copy.



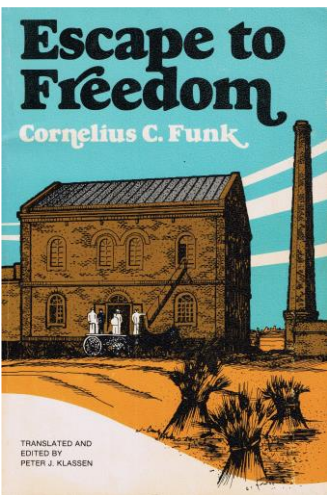
Harrowing true story of a Mennonite family's flight from Soviet Ukraine during the early years of WWII. The author currently lives in N Newton KS. 2003



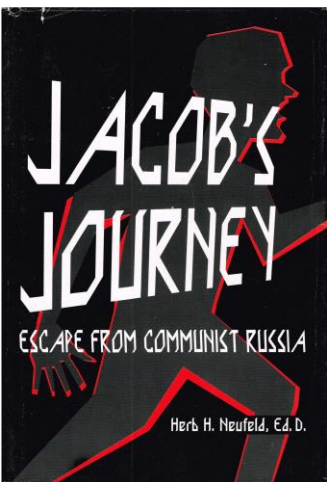
Accurate historical fiction about the Becker family, who immigrate from Polish Russia in 1874, ending up in Hitchinson, then Florence, and finally in Canton KS. Faced with rejection, starvation, and the horror of a plague, teenager Lusanna Becker struggles to preserve her family and faith. The award-winning author lives in Hesston KS. A gift from Gaylen and Loretta Neufeld. 2008



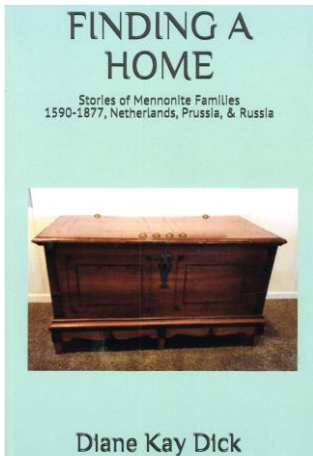
Childhood and family memories/history of Adina Ediger Schmidt, who grew up about a mile SE of our homeplace E of Kremlin. She is the sister of George and "Shiner" Ediger. Lots of stories of school and the N Enid MB Church are our stories as well, including the entire family using the same bathwater for a Saturday evening weekly bath. Kremlin High School Class of 1940! Well worth reading!



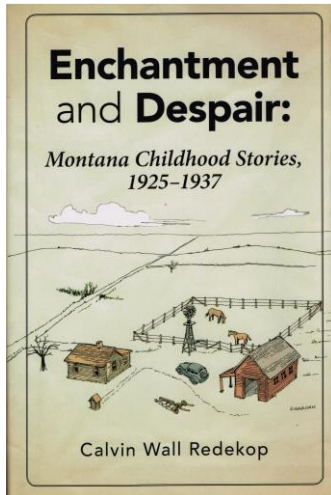
The prosperous Cornelius Funk family of S Russia meet the Bolshevik Revolution, WWI and more in the early 1900s, eventually ending up in BC, Canada.



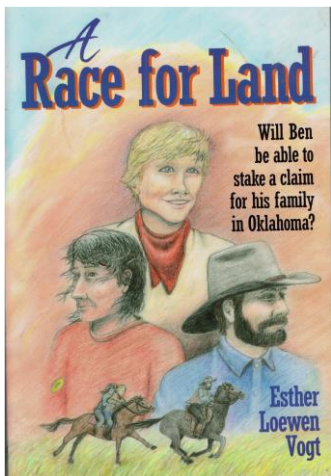
The Jacob and Helena Neufeld family, including son Herb, have a harrowing escape from Communist Russia, thru Siberia, then China, and finally to the US.



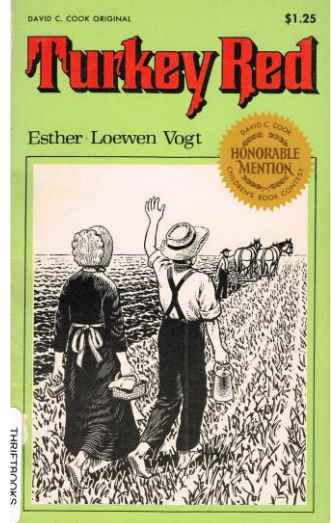
Stories and family history of the Anton and Viola Dick family, from 1590 to 1877 and beyond - Netherlands, Prussia, S Russia, Mountain Lake MN!



Poignant farm-boy stories and adventures and mis-adventures of Menno [Calvin Redekop](#), co-founder of MCC Pax and former Tabor College VP. Some stories especially meaningful to this OK farm boy - no preaching here, just good fun farm stories in desolate MT.

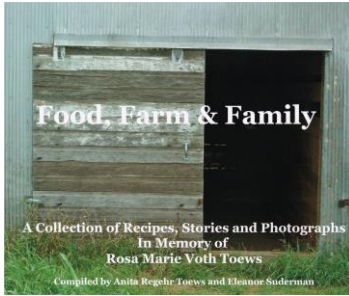


12-year-old Ben Martens and his family immigrated from S Russia to KS in 1892. Now they seek land in OK as part of the Cherokee Outlet Land Run of 1893 (this is where our farms are). Childhood historical fiction with Cherokee Indians and more. Somehow I own a signed copy! 1992



The Mennonites came from the Steppes of S Russia with little more than their faith and their Turkey Red wheat. Was that enough to conquer the strange, dangerous new frontier of America? Rattlesnakes, prairie fires, Indians, tornados. Let Ester Loewen Vogt tell you all about it in this children's book of historical fiction.

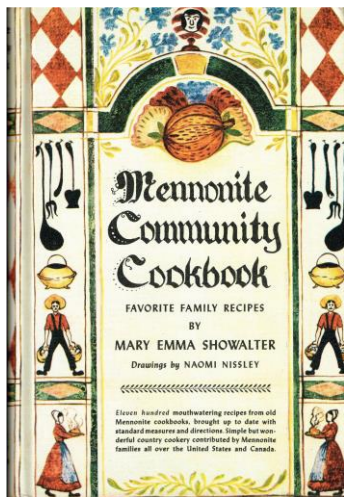
Books on Mennonite Cooking and Folklore



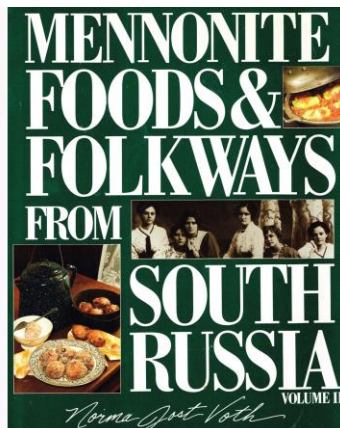
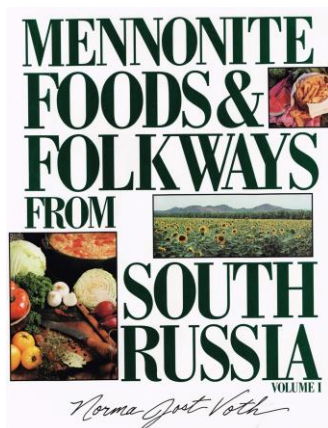
Food, Farm & Family - A Collection of Recipes, Stories and Photographs In Memory of Rosa Marie Voth Toews - Anita Regehr Toews and Eleanor Suderman - very nice book well worth owning - Anita can give details of how to "print on demand." Lots of writings and recipes and photos dear to my heart, some my very own!



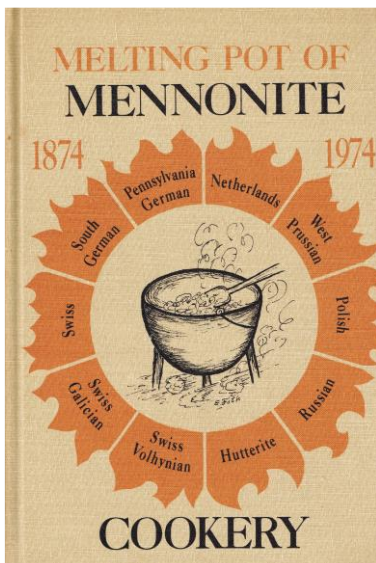
From Tillie's Kitchen - A Collection of Stories and Recipes from Matilda Suderman Regehr - Anita Regehr Toews & Eleanor Suderman - another excellent collection of Mennonite recipes, photos, and stories with emphasis on Anita's family, which immigrated to Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada in the 1920s.



Mennonite Community Cookbook - Mary Emma Showalter - 1995 edition of the classic Mennonite cookbook by iconic Mennonite cook/author Mary Emma Showalter [gift from Galen & Anita 1995]. 1100 Mennonite recipes from old Menno cookbooks are updated and modernized. My dad David A Toews was a student of hers in CPS Camp 4 near Grottoes VA during his alternative service during WW-II. He spent most of his Civilian Public Service days as a cook at CPS Camp 5 near Colorado Springs CO.

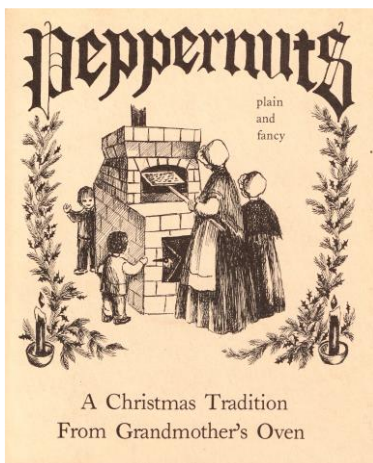


Exactly what it says it is! Volume I is mostly recipes (~400), while Volume II has some nice, interesting information of life, customs, and heritage in S Russia (currently Ukraine), where our ancestors immigrated from. **Norma Jost Voth**, descended from S Russian Mennonites, has compiled 2 interesting volumes. 1990 editions

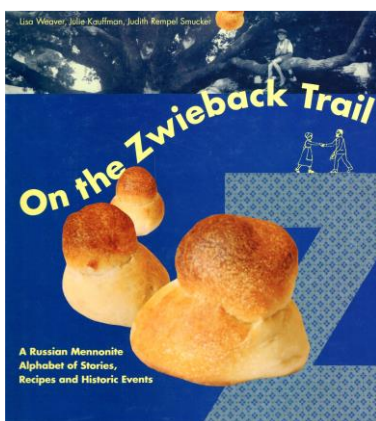


Compilation of Mennonite recipes from ethnic Mennonite groups originating around the world, on the occasion of the centennial (1974) of the arrival of the first S Russian Mennonite immigrants to the US.

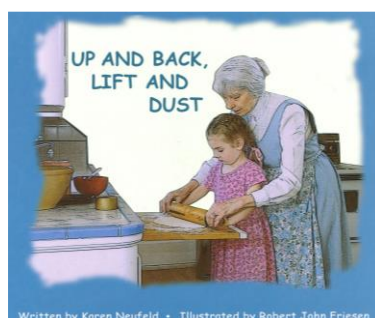
We do not utilize it, but it is an interesting resource and has many delicious recipes, along with some heritage background of the various groups.



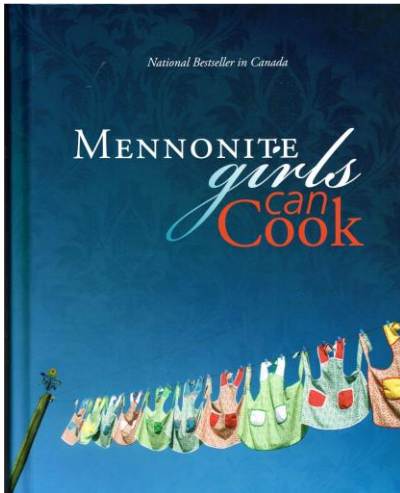
Peppernuts (pfferseuse) are traditional Mennonite holiday cookies and there are numerous variations - this is an interesting compilation of many such recipes. We prefer ours hard (vs soft) and with anise, but without raisins. But Arrel actually loves them all! They are usually available at MCC Auctions, but nothing beats the homemade versions! Kathy and I hope our daughters and grandchildren will bake and enjoy them as well!



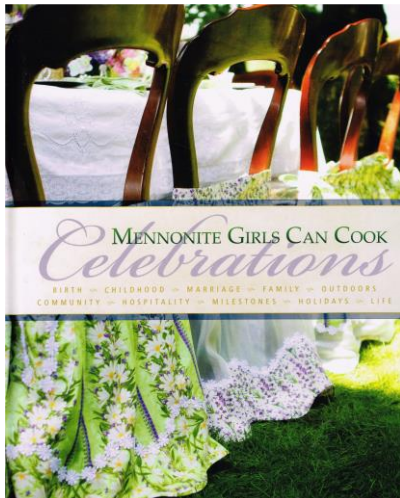
A nicely written **A-to-Z compilation of Russian Mennonite heritage, recipes, history and more.** Written as a children's book, but perfect for adults too - and **perfect for teaching your children about their Mennonite heritage.** Autographed copy with nice note from Anita, who gave it to us in 2012.



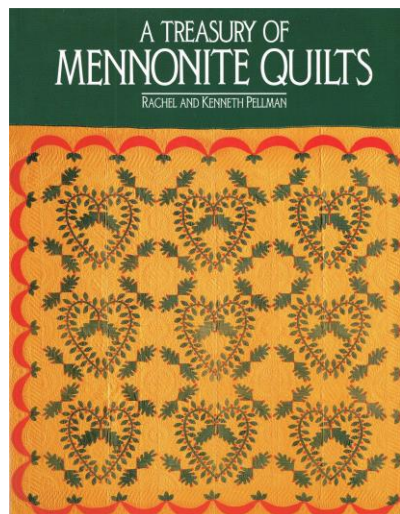
Endearing children's story about a **Mennonite grandmother teaching her granddaughter to make verenika.** By **Karen Neufeld**, wife of Arrel's Tabor College physical chemistry/physics professor Lorin Neufeld. Read it all the way to the end, and not just for the verenika recipe on the last 2 pages. 2007



Contemporary (2011) compendium of Mennonite recipes, customs and heritage by a group of **Mennonite "girls" from British Columbia**, Canada. Not exclusively Mennonite recipes, but all the classics are amply covered, and the secular recipes are good too. Kathy and I have a copy autographed by most of the authors. Visually pleasing, so worth leafing through - if you're not hungry when you start, it won't take long!



2013 follow-up to the above by the same "girls" - this one with emphasis on **special occasions and celebrations**. Again, well worth looking over.



Collection of Mennonite Quilts with nice photos but minimal background information. Good Books, 1992

I encourage readers to avail themselves of the many **embedded web-links** ([underlined in purple](#))

Arrel Toews
updated 10 January 2024
Carrboro, NC, USA

Please contact me (atoews@hotmail.com) if you have any comments, corrections, or suggested additions - I will always welcome any help and advice.