

THE BURLINGTON AND MISSOURI RIVER RAILROAD
BRINGS THE MENNONITES TO NEBRASKA, 1873-1878

by

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PREFACE

During the decade of 1873 to 1883 a substantial number of Mennonites then living in Russia and Prussia emigrated to North America. Their migration provides the historian with the unique opportunity of investigating in depth the influence of the western land grant railroads upon American immigration.

This study is focused upon the attempts of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company of Nebraska, primarily through its land commissioner Albert E. Touzalin, to settle the Mennonite immigrants on its lands. In order that the Burlington's colonization efforts may be viewed in their proper perspective, considerable attention has also been given to the development of the western land grant railroads, their general colonization policies, and the previous history of the Mennonite immigrants.

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Chapter I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAND GRANT RAILROADS

Land for the Landless

By the 1840's American land reformers were decrying the widespread misery, poverty, and unemployment which they saw as the consequence of unrestrained capitalism and land monopolies. They confidently predicted that a homestead policy providing free land for all who could use it would remedy the evils of the burgeoning American industrial society.¹ George Henry Evans, English born editor of the Working Man's Advocate and other labor and general newspapers, was particularly outspoken in his belief that every individual had a right to a share of the soil. Evans contrasted the industrial laborer with the agrarian worker in language designed to promote agriculture in the abundant western lands:

One toiling incessantly for a slender subsistence, and not secure of even that. The other toiling hard, to be sure, but surrounded by waving fields, blossoming orchards, and all the health and innocence of a rural life . . . compare that man, indeed, with the recipient of a daily pittance, in return for his daily toil. Unable to call anything of value his own; without hope, without assurance that even his present wretched subsistence will be continued to him. Surely, even in the first year of his settlement, the condition of the farmer will be found vastly superior to that of the mere hired workman and each succeeding year will add greatly to the difference of their respective conditions.²

¹Fred A. Shannon, "The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus," American Historical Review, XLI (July, 1936), 640.

²George Henry Evans, "To the People of the United States," Working Man's Advocate, July 6, 1844, John R. Commons, ed., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society (10 vols., Cleveland, 1910-1911), VII, 304.

When Congress passed the Homestead Act in 1862 the desires of Evans and his fellow agrarian reformers for free homesteads for settlers had been realized. But Congress had not provided for the transportation of poor people to the lands or for guidance and assistance for those without previous farming experience. No system was instituted whereby settlers could secure financial credit for the investments necessary for food, lodging, implements, and seed. Settlers were also frequently tempted to homestead in arid regions where 160 acres of land was insufficient to provide a livelihood.³

An additional roadblock in the way of the hopeful homesteaders resulted when Congress continued after 1862 its policy of granting public lands to railroads to encourage their construction. When initially projected the railroad routes were rarely definite; consequently more than double the amount of the actual land grant was usually withdrawn from entry and remained unavailable to public settlement until the railroad in question secured all the lands to which it was entitled.⁴ Thus, according to one appraisal, at one time or another up to three-tenths of the total land area of the United States, and a much larger fraction of the West, remained unused while prospective homesteaders ranged beyond those boundaries, frequently from thirty to sixty miles away from the projected railroad route.⁵ And, since the railroads

³Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier (New York, 1945), 53-57.

⁴Paul Wallace Gates, "The Homestead Law in an Incongruous Land System," American Historical Review, XLI (July, 1936), 657.

⁵Shannon, Farmer's Last Frontier, 66.

built through undeveloped regions, they generally selected routes which would insure their possession of the largest amount of what they considered to be the best agricultural lands.⁶

Evans' poor and oppressed industrial laborer, then, faced the alternatives of purchasing land directly from the railroads--at prices which ranged between \$1.25 and \$20 per acre;⁷ of purchasing the alternate government lands which first had to be offered at auction where they generally sold for more than the \$2.50 minimum fee per acre;⁸ of purchasing lands which foresighted speculators had quickly secured and were now offering at prices which insured handsome profits; of purchasing land from the various states whose policies were not as generous as those of the Federal government; or of venturing far afield for the less desirable lands which could be homesteaded.⁹ These hindrances to the effective operation of the government's free land policy notwithstanding, approximately 96,000,000 acres of the public domain were taken up under the provisions of the Homestead Act and subsequent government land acts--the Timber Culture Act, the Desert Land Act and the Timber and Stone Act,¹⁰

⁶Gates, "Homestead Law in Incongruous Land System," 657.

⁷William S. Greever, "A Comparison of Railroad Land-Grant Policies," Agricultural History, XXV (April, 1951), 88.

⁸Roy Marvin Robbins, Our Landed Heritage: The Public Domain, 1776-1936 (Princeton, 1942), 255-256.

⁹Gates, "Homestead Law in Incongruous Land System," 662.

¹⁰Shannon, Farmer's Last Frontier, 64.

Government Aid to Railroads

While the availability of free land was of great significance in the settlement of the western states and territories, the settlement process was greatly accelerated by the railroads. Not only did the railroads provide transportation, but they paved the way for the development of new business and industry. Their promotional attempts to interest settlers in the vast land grants they had received from the Federal government greatly stimulated immigration. Indeed, the settling of the trans-Mississippi West was in large measure a railroad accomplishment.¹¹

In the eastern United States the railroads had followed the population, building tracks from town to town. Support and traffic came from their immediate localities and normally the railroads were paying enterprises. In the expensive western sectors of America, however, the nature of railroad development was radically different. There the railroads preceded the population and a minimum of local support was available. There was practically no population to travel on the railroads, there were few supplies to be shipped, and, other than for cattle and hides, there was little produce to be shipped to market. With relatively nothing to stop for the railroads proceeded directly across the plains and through the mountains, generally charting as straight a course as the topography permitted. In so far as they were dependent on the plains for revenue, the early western

¹¹Robert Edgar Riegel, America Moves West (3rd ed.; New York, 1956), 548.

railroads were destined to be losing financial ventures.¹²

Railroad construction required substantial amounts of capital and the western railroads visualized four possible methods of financing their construction. First, they could invite personal subscriptions--but the West had little capital. Second, the railroads could utilize the credit of a town, county or city. A town, for example, would issue bonds to be exchanged for railroad stocks or bonds and the railroads later became proficient at pitting two or more towns against each other in bidding for the prosperity that a railroad would bring. A third possibility was state financing, to be implemented in the same manner as town, county, or city financing. Finally, the railroads could seek the direct aid of the Federal government, which had established a precedent by previously aiding in the construction of roads and canals.¹³ Westerners believed that the entire country would be benefitted by the increased western population and trade which would result from the western railroads, and advocated grants of government land to aid construction. The theory behind the railroad land grants was that a small portion of the vast public domain would be used to give greater value to the much larger whole by helping to provide the necessary communication and transportation facilities.¹⁴

¹²Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (Boston, 1931), 274-275.

¹³Riegel, America Moves West, 456-457.

¹⁴Robert S. Henry, "The Railroad Land Grant Legend in American History Texts," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXII (September, 1945), 181.

The Congress was initially reluctant to grant such lands, but finally on September 20, 1850, the first railroad land grant act of real importance was passed. According to its provisions, the state of Illinois was given six sections of land alternating on each side of the road for each mile of track it laid. If legal settlers were found to be living on sections of the grant belonging to the state, Illinois was authorized to select alternate sections within fifteen miles of the track. In 1851 the Illinois legislature incorporated the Illinois Central Railroad Company and ceded to it the lands it had just received from the government.¹⁵ The three and three-quarter million acres of land granted to the Illinois Central, the Mobile and Ohio, and the Mobile and Chicago Railroads on September 20, 1850, proved profitable to them and other railroads pointed to the 1850 grant as a precedent, for obviously what had been given to one state was fair game for another. By 1862, when Congress was making its largest land grants to railroads, it frequently granted the land directly to the railroad corporations, although in some instances the state continued to be used as an intermediary.¹⁶

The Transcontinental Railroads

The great western boom came on the heels of the first transcontinental railroad which Congress authorized in 1862 following many years of debate and delay. Asa Whitney, a New York merchant, was one

¹⁵ Thomas Donaldson, The Public Domain (Washington, 1884), 261-264.

¹⁶ Lewis Henry Haney, A Congressional History of Railways in the United States, 1850-1887 (Madison, 1910), 13-19.

of the chief advocates of the transcontinental project. After 1844 when a commercial treaty with China had been concluded, Whitney visited practically every state in the union in the interests of a transcontinental railroad which could secure the Asiatic trade.¹⁷ Whitney also wrote letters to Congressmen, sent memorials to Congress, and addressed the people. Eventually the entire country became interested in his idea, although there was little unanimity regarding the route the railroad should take. In addition to facilitating trade with the Orient, supporters of the transcontinental railroads argued that the cross-country routes would enable the United States to establish and maintain a naval fleet to dominate the Pacific,¹⁸ that they would strengthen the army and make it easier to deal effectively with the Indians, that the mails could be delivered with increased economy and efficiency, and that the newly-acquired Pacific territories would be more securely bound to the eastern states.¹⁹

At first the nation's lawmakers were unable to agree on the route the transcontinental railroad should take, whether north, south, or somewhere in between. Stephen A. Douglas, Illinois Senator deeply interested in the railroad development of the West, wanted a transcontinental route which would pass through Illinois and Iowa, thereby making Chicago the eastern terminus. His paramount interest was to

¹⁷Robert Edgar Riegel, The Story of the Western Railroads (New York, 1926), 11.

¹⁸Robert S. Cotterill, "Early Agitation for a Pacific Railroad, 1845-1850," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, V (March, 1919), 397-401.

¹⁹Haney, Congressional History of Railways, 150.

build the transcontinental railroad westward from Chicago and to organize the territory through which it would have to pass.²⁰ Accordingly, Senator Douglas skillfully promoted the act to organize the territory of Nebraska so that the Illinois-Iowa transcontinental route might ultimately be realized. When finally passed in 1854, the act created the two territories of Kansas and Nebraska, the compromise having been required to secure the approval of the southern legislators.²¹

The secession of the southern states from the Union removed the major Congressional opponents to the route Douglas favored, and in July, 1862, Congress chartered and provided assistance for the Union Pacific Company which was to build the eastern end of the first transcontinental railroad. Congress also provided assistance for the Central Pacific Company to build from west to east.²² Striking westward from Omaha, Nebraska, the Union Pacific was granted twenty square miles of land, alternating in ten sections on each side of the track, for each mile of track they would construct.²³ To facilitate construction, the Federal government loaned the company \$16,000 for each mile of track it built in the plains country, \$32,000 for each mile in the foothills,

²⁰Frank Heywood Hodder, "The Railroad Background of the Kansas-Nebraska Act," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XII (June, 1925), 4-6, 21.

²¹Frank Heywood Hodder, "Genesis of the Kansas-Nebraska Act," Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for 1912 (Madison, 1913), 81-84.

²²U. S., Statutes at Large, XII (1862), 489-498.

²³U. S., Statutes at Large, XIII (1864), 358.

and \$48,000 for each mile in the mountains.²⁴ With the termination of the Civil War construction began in earnest and although impeded by supply difficulties and Indian attacks, on May 10, 1869, the crews of the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific met at Promontory Point, a little northwest of Ogden, Utah, which Congress had designated as the meeting point. The final spike driven was made of gold which symbolized the closer unity the transcontinental railroad gave to America.²⁵

The administration of the railroad land grants was intrusted to the General Land Office. As soon as a railroad filed its approximate route the General Land Office withdrew all the land within the indemnity limits from public sale to prevent speculators from securing the best lands and to prevent settlers from occupying lands which might be found to belong to the railroad when the actual route was finally surveyed and completed.²⁶ Prospective homesteaders and settlers became quite annoyed with this practice which closed much of the best western lands to settlement for periods of thirty years or more.²⁷ Many eager settlers felt that any unoccupied lands should be available and despite all restrictions individual settlers often did take up the unoccupied but

²⁴U. S., Statutes at Large, XII (1862), 492, 495.

²⁵Riegel, America Moves West, 473, 476.

²⁶John B. Rae, "Commissioner Sparks and the Railroad Land Grants," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXV (September, 1938), 213.

²⁷David Maldwyn Ellis, "The Forfeiture of Railroad Land Grants, 1867-1894," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIII (June, 1946), 32.

reserved lands.²⁸

Public opposition to the railroad land grants mounted rapidly and 1871 marked the termination of the Congressional land grants. Every political party platform in 1872 condemned the system of land grants to aid railroad construction and demanded that the public domain be retained for actual settlers.²⁹ During the twenty-one years when grants were made nearly twice as much land, of far better quality, was given to the various railroad companies than was taken up under the provisions of the Homestead Act, the Timber Culture Act, the Desert Land Act, and the Timber and Stone Act combined. The 286,000 square miles actually donated was an area larger than the state of Texas--or nearly a tenth the size of the United States, and estimates concerning the actual value of the land ranged between half a billion and two and one half billion dollars.³⁰

The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad

The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company of Nebraska was one of the approximately seventy railroads which benefitted by the Congressional land grants.³¹ On May 15, 1856, President Franklin Pierce signed an act granting land to the state of Iowa which was then given to the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad for a route through Iowa,

²⁸Riegel, America Moves West, 458.

²⁹Robbins, Our Landed Heritage, 276-277.

³⁰Shannon, Farmer's Last Frontier, 64-65.

³¹Greever, "Comparison of Railroad Land-Grant Policies," 83.

the western terminus of which remained rather vague. In 1864 Congress amended the original act, and liberalized the land grant provisions. Though construction was barely underway in Iowa, several of the Burlington officials looked ahead to the day when the line would be completed to the Missouri River and would then continue westward across Nebraska.³² On July 2, 1864, Congress provided for such an extension of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad through the territory of Nebraska, granted lands to aid the extension and also specified that somewhere prior to the one hundredth meridian the Burlington should connect with the main trunk of the Union Pacific Railroad. For each mile of track eventually laid the railroad was granted twenty sections of land--ten alternating sections on each side of the track.³³ No lateral limits were established and the company assumed it could go anywhere in Nebraska opposite its track to secure its granted lands. In keeping with the terms of the granting act the company accepted the grant and filed a map of location within one year, although the effort was hampered by Indian troubles at the western end of the projected route.³⁴

The Union Pacific was building westward through Nebraska and was required to select its land grants within lateral limits of twenty miles. If the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company of Iowa would make its selections within similar limits the two grants would overlap

³²Richard C. Overton, Burlington West, A Colonization History of the Burlington Railroad (Cambridge, 1941), 81, 170.

³³U. S., Statutes at Large, XIII (1864), 364.

³⁴Overton, Burlington West, 171, 214.

to a considerable degree. The Union Pacific grant was older and thereby had preference, and the Burlington officials realized that they could receive their full quota of lands only by establishing their right to select twenty sections of land anywhere opposite their line for each mile of track constructed. Vigorous lobbying action in Washington resulted in Secretary of the Interior James Harlan's withdrawing from sale ten alternate sections of land on each side of the Burlington and Missouri's projected route, whether or not they were within twenty miles of the track. Thus, 2,382,208 acres of land were reserved for the company--the equivalent of twenty sections per mile for the estimated 186.11 miles from Plattsmouth to Fort Kearney, Nebraska, where it was assumed the juncture with the Union Pacific would take place.³⁵

John Murray Forbes, eastern financier and railroad magnate, was the manager and chief owner of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company of Iowa. Because the railroad had not yet completed its track westward through Iowa to the Missouri River, and because it was dangerous to risk money in western railroad expansion while the Civil War continued, Forbes refused to begin any construction in Nebraska. Charles E. Perkins, Vice-President of the Burlington and Missouri in Iowa and Forbes' nephew by marriage, continually urged the company to take advantage of the land grant of 1864 by beginning construction of its railroad in Nebraska. Forbes remained hesitant, however, feeling that the Union Pacific held the most profitable and practical route

³⁵Overton, Burlington West, 215-216.

through Nebraska and doubting that Nebraska could support two railroads. But Perkins enthusiasm prevailed.³⁶ He convinced the directors to provide the finances and the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska was formed under a Nebraska state charter dated May 12, 1869.³⁷ Though technically independent, close relations with the Burlington and Missouri of Iowa and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad were assured by interlocking directorates.³⁸ On April 10, 1869, a joint resolution had passed both houses of Congress and was signed by President Grant. It authorized the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company of Iowa to transfer its Nebraska land grant to the new company.³⁹ Two reasons lay behind the decision to organize, finance, and construct the Burlington Railroad in Nebraska. First, only by laying track could the company receive full title to its land grant of nearly two and one-half million acres and, second, the directors were eager to participate in the transcontinental business moving in both directions between Kearney Junction in the west and either Omaha, the Union Pacific's eastern terminus, or Plattsmouth, the Burlington and Missouri's eastern terminus.⁴⁰

³⁶Thomas M. Davis, "Building the Burlington Through Nebraska--A Summary View," Nebraska History, XXX (December, 1949), 318-320.

³⁷William Wright Baldwin, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company: Documentary History (3 vols., Chicago, 1928-1929), III, 1.

³⁸Richard C. Overton, Milepost 100, The Story of the Development of the Burlington Lines, 1849-1949 (Chicago, 1949), 20.

³⁹Davis, "Building the Burlington Through Nebraska," 320.

⁴⁰Richard C. Overton, "Why Did the C. B. & Q. Build to Denver?" Nebraska History, XXXX (September, 1959), 180.

Even though provisions had not yet been made for connecting with the Union Pacific,⁴¹ the enthusiastic Burlington and Missouri officials broke ground for their route in Nebraska at a gala ceremony at Platts-mouth on July 4, 1869,⁴² and by September 18, 1872, the entire main line of 194 miles was completed westward to Kearney Junction.⁴³

The officials of the newly formed railroad company in Nebraska soon encountered serious difficulties. Harlan had been succeeded as Secretary of the Interior by Orville H. Browning who, on March 1, 1867, restored to public market all the lands Harlan had previously withdrawn, except those sections within twenty miles of the projected route.⁴⁴ Browning's action came in response to arguments such as those of acting Nebraska Governor Algernon S. Paddock that the withdrawal of lands was a "very great hardship to the enterprising settlers" because it excluded them from large portions of the public domain, thereby also hindering Nebraska's development.⁴⁵ The Burlington officials realized that the company stood to lose more than half of the 2,400,000 acres they hoped to receive when the track was finally completed, but the matter remained unsettled, even after the company had begun construction

⁴¹Davis, "Building the Burlington Through Nebraska," 320.

⁴²Overton, Burlington West, 229.

⁴³Overton, "Why Did the C. B. & Q. Build to Denver?" 179.

⁴⁴Overton, Burlington West, 269-270.

⁴⁵Quoted in Addison E. Sheldon, Land Systems and Land Policies in Nebraska (Lincoln, 1936), 90.

and desired to begin selling its land. In Washington, a Burlington and Missouri River Railroad agent continued to press the company's claim that the original act had set no lateral limits within which the twenty sections of land had to be selected. When Congressman James F. Wilson of Iowa, who had written the 1864 act, indicated that the Burlington's claim coincided with the intent of the Congress, the new Secretary of the Interior, Columbus Delano, ordered that all the odd numbered sections of land in certain Nebraska districts north and south of the Burlington's tracks be withdrawn from pre-emption and homestead entry and from private sales.⁴⁶ This important decision more than doubled the scope of the Burlington's Nebraska colonization activities, for when it had finally patented all its Nebraska lands by the end of 1872, 1,160,198.81 acres were within twenty miles of the track and 1,210,234.35 acres were beyond that limit.⁴⁷ Added to the 50,104 acres the company had received from the state of Nebraska in 1870,⁴⁸ and to the 19,004.48 acres it received from a small railroad company it absorbed, the grand total of Burlington lands in Nebraska by the end of 1872 was over 2,400,000 acres--approximately one-twentieth of Nebraska's total acreage.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Overton, Burlington West, 330-331.

⁴⁷Ibid., 332.

⁴⁸Ray H. Mattison, "The Burlington Tax Controversy in Nebraska Over the Federal Land Grants," Nebraska History, XXVIII (April-June, 1947), 111.

⁴⁹Overton, Burlington West, 332.

With the assurance that the company would receive its full quota of land one of the reasons for building the railroad in Nebraska had been realized. But even greater difficulties surrounded their concomitant plan to participate in the transcontinental business of the Union Pacific. Thomas Kimball, Vice-President of the Union Pacific, feared that the presence of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska would interfere with the rich traffic the Union Pacific then enjoyed as a monopoly, and he informed the Burlington and Missouri officials that he would not allow their road to connect with the Union Pacific at Kearney. This was contradictory to the Federal statutes of 1864, but Kimball apparently hoped by his tactics to limit the Burlington and Missouri in its construction, to force it into bankruptcy if its management persisted in laying track, and then to purchase it for the Union Pacific.⁵⁰

Though the connection was eventually made, Jay Gould, owner of much Union Pacific stock and in a position to dictate its policies, continued to refuse to interchange business with the Burlington and Missouri at Kearney Junction on a pro rata basis. The Union Pacific demanded as much to ship goods from Ogden, Utah, to Kearney, as it did to transport the same load from Ogden to Omaha, its own eastern terminus, which effectively eliminated the Burlington and Missouri from participating in the transcontinental business. Since the Union Pacific continued adamant in its policy, Burlington officials began to think in terms of extending their own railroad to Denver, Colorado,

⁵⁰ Davis, "Building the Burlington Through Nebraska," 325-326.

thereby developing their own transcontinental business. The route they envisioned was 125 miles shorter from Chicago to Denver than on the Union Pacific route, as well as 100 miles shorter than on the Kansas Pacific and nearly 200 miles shorter than on the Santa Fe.⁵¹ At a "peace conference" in New York in October, 1880, officials of the Burlington and Missouri agreed not to build to Denver if the Union Pacific would agree not to extend its roads in southern Nebraska. When the agreement was broken the Burlington went ahead with its plans and on May 29, 1882, the road was open for through business between Chicago and Denver.⁵² The parent corporation, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, formally absorbed the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company of Nebraska on January 1, 1880.⁵³

⁵¹Overton, "Why Did the C. B. & Q. Build to Denver?" 184-185, 195.

⁵²Ibid., 200-205.

⁵³Wright, Documentary History, III, 2.

Chapter II

THE RAILROADS PROMOTE IMMIGRATION

Railroad Promotional Activities

A period of depression followed the financial crisis of 1873 in the United States and for the next several years there was relatively little railroad construction.¹ Though actual construction was slowed, the railroads accentuated their promotional efforts. The panic alerted the discontented to the millions of acres of land available for settlement in the West. Westerners also were desirous of increasing their number--better roads, schools, and local government would all be fostered by a greater population sharing the tax burden. Frequently the railroads were joined in encouraging immigration to the West by state, county, and town immigration officers and boards, and all the promotional activities resulted in an enormous increase in migration to the West, both from within the United States and from foreign countries.²

Conspicuous in the encouragement of immigration were the land grant railroads which had at their disposal large amounts of land. Some railroads held portions of their grants for future speculative profits, but the majority sought to sell as soon as possible for the sales furnished the funds necessary to complete and maintain the roads. The settlement of progressive farmers on the land adjacent to the

¹Riegel, America Moves West, 553.

²Hallie Farmer, "The Economic Background of Frontier Populism," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, X (March, 1924), 406-409.

railroads would also build up traffic on the road which would yield continuing profits. The railroads, hoping to receive as much revenue as possible from the sale of their lands, were somewhat handicapped by the existence of government homestead land, but the railroads could always point out that their land had better transportation facilities and it usually was also of equal or better quality. The railroads had seen to that matter when they initially surveyed and laid out their routes.³ The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska, in one of its promotional pamphlets, stated the railroad attitude toward the government land:

You can judge for yourself whether it is not better to purchase land at four or five dollars per acre, on ten years credit, and six per cent. interest, that is good land and near a railroad, and will quickly advance to twenty-five dollars per acre, rather than go upon the far western or southern plains and homestead land upon which you are never certain of half a crop, and which will never advance in value.⁴

The price the railroads charged for their lands was generally determined following a careful inspection of the land. The type of soil, the adequacy of the water supply, the amount of timber on the land and the proximity to a railroad station all had a bearing on the eventual price of the land. Prices also varied depending on the general prosperity of the area and the period of time. The railroads were especially eager to make cash sales and offered reductions as high as

³Riegel, Story of the Western Railroads, 280.

⁴An anonymous Burlington and Missouri River Railroad pamphlet promoting its lands in southern Iowa and southeastern Nebraska, 1878, 24. The pamphlet is located in the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

twenty per cent to stimulate them. Most often, however, credit had to be extended. Usually the railroad would require ten to twenty per cent down with the balance spread over four to ten years in annual installments. Most railroads had two or three different purchase plans available to their customers at any particular time.⁵ In variety of purchase plans the Burlington Railroad in Nebraska was the leader, offering twenty-six different plans in 1877 and twenty-three the following year. A purchaser could arrange to pay for his land over any period ranging from six months to eleven years on widely differing yearly installments.⁶ Only where timber lands were involved was the Burlington hesitant to extend generous credit, fearing that settlers would be tempted to quickly strip off the timber and then depart, leaving the value of the land greatly reduced.⁷ The Burlington sold its entire Nebraska land grant at the average price of \$5.24 per acre, its Iowa grant brought \$11.67 per acre. In both states the Burlington received slightly more than enough from the sale of its grants to cover the cost of original construction from Burlington, Iowa, to Kearney Junction, exclusive of equipment or the Plattsmouth Bridge.⁸ The Santa Fe Railroad was meanwhile realizing an average return of \$5.02 for its acreage between the years of 1871 and 1879.⁹

⁵Greever, "Comparison of Railroad Land-Grant Policies," 88.

⁶Overton, Burlington West, 429.

⁷Ibid., 294.

⁸Overton, Millenpost 100, 49.

⁹Gates, "Homestead Law in Incongruous Land System," 664.

In Nebraska, the Burlington Railroad was dependent upon the products and needs of the territory it served to a greater extent than was the Union Pacific because it had no share in the trans-continental business during the 1870's. The necessity of promoting and establishing stable and productive agricultural communities was thus forcefully evident to the company.¹⁰ Charles Russell Lowell, nephew of the poet and diplomat James Russell Lowell, served as assistant treasurer of the Burlington and Missouri Railroad in Iowa and also had charge of developing the land department. In December, 1859, he outlined the policy which was to continue as the company's stated policy in Nebraska as well as Iowa. "Keep it constantly before the farmers," he urged, "that we are a railroad company & not a land company--that settlers are more important to us than a high price for our land."¹¹

In the main, the western railroads utilized similar methods of attracting settlers for their lands. Most of them were eager to bring settlers to the west, even if they did not purchase lands from the railroad, for the more inhabitants the more traffic and the greater the financial returns. Many settlers desired to see the land prior to making a purchase, and the practice was encouraged by several railroads which sold land exploration tickets, the price of which would be credited to any purchase a prospective settler might make on the company's land. The railroads all staged elaborate advertising cam-

¹⁰Overton, Burlington West, 285.

¹¹Quoted in Overton, Burlington West, 150.

paigns, both in the United States and in Europe, utilizing newspapers, magazines, handbills, and pamphlets. While most of the advertisements merely extolled the respective railroad's lands, they occasionally gave sound advice as well, warning heads of families to reflect carefully before committing their dependents to the difficulties of a pioneering life.¹² Ministers were preferred as agents to distribute circulars and posters and to appeal personally to prospective immigrants in their native countries.¹³ To attract settlers some railroads placed samples of crops grown in their area on exhibition. In the fall of 1874 the Burlington and Missouri inserted short notes in Nebraska newspapers requesting that farmers send samples of the crop of 1874 to the Burlington Land Department for which they would be reimbursed. The samples would be sent throughout the East to illustrate the resources of the section of Nebraska where the Burlington held its lands.¹⁴ The Illinois Central Railroad promoted annual fairs in order to boost its lands, offered reduced travel rates to visitors, and set aside two and one-half miles of railroad cars on its side tracks for sleeping accommodations.¹⁵ The Illinois Central also endeavored to in-

¹²Greever, "Comparison of Railroad Land-Grant Policies," 87-90.

¹³Shannon, Farmer's Last Frontier, 43.

¹⁴The Beatrice Express, (Beatrice, Nebraska), August 13, 1874; The Fairbury Gazette, (Fairbury, Nebraska), August 29, 1874. In response to the request, the September 5, 1874, Fairbury Gazette reported on the "character around Hutchison" who had boxed up a bushel of grasshoppers and sent them to A. E. Touzalin, the land commissioner, with an explanatory note: "Here's the products of your d---d country---a hundred bushels to the acre."

¹⁵Paul Wallace Gates, "The Promotion of Agriculture by the Illinois Central Railroad," Agricultural History, V (April, 1931), 58-60.

roduce other crops to alleviate the one crop economy of either corn or wheat. By the use of circulars describing the results of experimental farms the company encouraged the introduction of cotton and fruits and also gave prizes for improved agricultural machinery.¹⁶

The Northern Pacific Railroad published maps and documents describing its lands, printed them in several languages, and distributed them via company agents throughout the United States and Europe. An 1872 Northern Pacific pamphlet promoting the Montana Territory stated that "the only illness which touched the residents of Montana was the distress of overeating, resulting from excessive indulgence of appetites heartened by the invigorating atmosphere."¹⁷ The Northern Pacific also organized a Bureau of Immigration with a central office in London and branch offices in Germany, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries, and vigilantly endeavored to keep high pressure agents representing other railroads away from its European immigrants when they arrived in New York¹⁸ --a necessary precaution as agents representing most western railroads descended on every ship that landed in New York, actively seeking settlers for their lands.¹⁹

Burlington Advertising

On April 1, 1870, the Burlington and Missouri's land department

¹⁶Gates, "Promotion of Agriculture by Illinois Central," 64, 73.

¹⁷Quoted in Edward Douglas Branch, Westward, The Romance of the American Frontier (New York, 1930), 552.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Shannon, Farmer's Last Frontier, 43.

began operations in Nebraska and Iowa, under the leadership of George S. Harris, who had earned an enviable reputation as a land-grant commissioner while in the employ of the Hannibal and St. Joseph's Railroad in northern Missouri.²⁰ Harris chose Lincoln as the headquarters for the Nebraska land department. He hired a renowned professor, James D. Butler, whose services he almost lost when the University of Nebraska expressed an interest in appointing him chancellor in 1870.²¹ Butler's task was to publicize the Burlington lands in Nebraska and Iowa through letters, circulars, newspapers, and lectures. He was to prepare pamphlets which would give potential purchasers information concerning the land; the cost of building materials, seeds, and trees; the availability of stock animals, timber, and fuel; the prevalence of any particular diseases; and to answer any additional questions which prospective settlers were likely to ask. These pamphlets were printed in foreign languages and distributed abroad.²² In an 1873 pamphlet Butler noted that although up to that time the Burlington lands in Nebraska had sold for an average price of \$8.42 per acre they were still cheaper and more advantageous than other Nebraska lands because of their close proximity to the railroad, their proximity to neighboring farms under cultivation by homesteaders, and the liberal credit offered by the Burlington. In addition, Butler proudly called attention to the fact that the Burlington and Missouri "was the first

²⁰Overton, Burlington West, 314, 290.

²¹Ibid., 319.

²²Ibid., 299-300.

to build reception houses, affording, in Burlington and Lincoln, shelter, lodging-room, and appliances for cooking to all strangers without charge.²³ The immigrant homes were used by prospective land purchasers for lodging while they looked for suitable tracts of land. Food was provided at cost. The home in Lincoln was 100 feet by 24 feet with a kitchen, dining room, running water, and sleeping quarters for ten families. By June 10, 1872, after approximately one year of operation, 636 persons had already been housed in the Lincoln immigrant house.²⁴ The Burlington also built immigrant homes especially for some of the colonies of foreign immigrants it induced to settle on its Nebraska lands. Immigrant homes were established for Polish immigrants in Howard and Sherman Counties²⁵ and for Mennonite immigrants in York County.²⁶ Advertisements for Burlington and Missouri lands were carried in foreign-language newspapers and in 1870 full page advertisements appeared in British newspapers. Colorful posters were placed at ticket offices, railroad stations and docks throughout the world.²⁷ Edward Edginton was employed by the Burlington to publicize their lands in England, and he spoke to all emigrants on board departing ships, ran

²³James D. Butler, Nebraska, Its Characteristics and Prospects, 1873, Burlington promotional pamphlet located in the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

²⁴Overton, Burlington West, 336-337.

²⁵Merce J. Owens, "John Barzynski, Land Agent," Nebraska History, XXXVI (June, 1955), 85-86.

²⁶John B. Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," The York Republican, (York, Nebraska), August 12, 1937.

²⁷Overton, Burlington West, 319-320.

advertisements in papers, gave lectures, and passed out pamphlets.²⁸ In 1878 Burlington advertising suggested that "this Railroad Company offers better lands at lower prices, longer terms of credit, and lower rates of interest than any company in the United States."²⁹ C. J. Ernst, one of the Burlington's Nebraska land agents, estimated that the Burlington had spent nearly one million dollars for advertising the country and similar expenses.³⁰ The Burlington's interest in its settlers did not end with the sale of its lands. In the early 1870's the Burlington donated \$5,000 to its Nebraska frontier farmers, hauled some supplies for them free of charge and reduced the general freight rates on grain and coal to near cost. When it became evident that the farmers would have to be supplied with seed grain if they were to reap a harvest in 1875 the Burlington agreed to ship free of charge any donated grain from any point on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to any point on the Burlington and Missouri in Nebraska.³¹

The competition for progressive settlers between the various western land grant railroads was very keen. For example, almost every railroad sent secret agents to Russia to induce persons of the Mennonite, Lutheran, and German Reformed faiths to come to America. The Bur-

²⁸Overton, Burlington West, 361.

²⁹An anonymous Burlington promotional pamphlet for southern Iowa and southeastern Nebraska, 28.

³⁰C. J. Ernst, "The Railroad As a Creator of Wealth in the Development of a Community or District," Nebraska History, VII (January-March, 1924), 21.

³¹Anonymous, "The B. & M. to the Rescue," The Daily State Journal, (Lincoln, Nebraska), February 14, 1875.

lington agent, Ernst, met the incoming immigrants from Russia several times in New York and once "swiped a whole trainload from the two Kansas roads, each of which had a special train awaiting their arrival at Atchison, but I stole the whole bunch, except less than a dozen unmarried young men, and carried them all by special train, free, to Lincoln, Nebraska."³²

State and Nation Also Promote Immigration

Railroads were not alone in promoting foreign emigration to the United States. In 1864 the United States passed its only law which directly encouraged immigration, and it remained in force for four years.³³ After considering various bills which would place the government squarely behind the promotion of immigration the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on July 3, 1868, issued a report favoring United States promotion of immigration. The Committee indicated that,

We want people to fill up these States and Territories; we want the land cultivated, that plenty and wealth may abound; . . . having in view the growth, prosperity, greatness, and power of our own land, as also the general good of mankind, let us throw open wide the doors of this republic, and invite the oppressed, the earnest and honest people of all the nations, to come. . . let them come and unite their fortunes with ours in making this republic the freest and most powerful empire of the world.³⁴

³²Ernst, "Railroad As a Creator of Wealth," 20.

³³George M. Stephenson, A History of American Immigration, 1820-1924 (Boston, 1926), 135-137.

³⁴U. S., House of Representatives, 40 Cong., 2 Sess., Committee on Foreign Affairs, Encouragement of Emigration, House Report No. 76, (Washington, 1868), 1-4.

Although the bill the House Committee favored was not passed, the report was characteristic of the general American interest in promoting immigration. In 1871 the Federal government published a "Special Report on Immigration" which contained information on land prices, staple products, and average wages. Several thousand copies of the report were distributed throughout Europe.³⁵

In 1870 the governors of various states met at Indianapolis to consider means by which immigration to the United States could be promoted. Before adjourning they requested that the Congress establish a national bureau of immigration.³⁶ It was not until 1882 that the United States Congress passed any legislation which regulated immigration and the regulation it then imposed was relatively mild. A head tax of fifty cents was levied on all foreigners entering the United States, and convicts, lunatics, idiots, and persons liable to become public charges were excluded.³⁷

Various states joined the railroad companies and the Federal government in actively promoting foreign emigration. In 1852 Wisconsin appointed a commissioner of immigration who circulated pamphlets in Europe which described settlement opportunities in Wisconsin. The effectiveness of Wisconsin's efforts was demonstrated by the immigration statistics of 1853 which revealed that while total immigration to the United States had declined from the previous year, immigration to Wis-

³⁵Stephenson, History of American Immigration, 140, 141.

³⁶Ibid., 140.

³⁷Ibid., 142-143.

consin had increased by fifteen per cent--the increase coming from the very countries upon which pamphleteering had been concentrated.³⁸ Other western states, such as Minnesota and Iowa, quickly established Boards of Immigration, Minnesota appropriating ten thousand dollars per year for its Board's use.³⁹ Kansas organized an Immigration Bureau in 1864 which released pamphlets promoting the state. Hampered by lack of legislative support, it was abolished in 1897.⁴⁰

Not to be outdone, Nebraska established a Board of Immigration in 1870, and provided it with \$15,000 and the authority to appoint four immigration agents for duty either in the United States or abroad.⁴¹ The Board began with a burst of enthusiasm, publishing numerous pamphlets describing the fertility of the soil and other Nebraska advantages. While the writers of an 1871 release "endeavored truthfully to represent the case," they could not refrain from the conclusion that,

Nebraska, as a whole, is about to be wisely chosen by the Nations of Mankind as the last grand gathering place for the Tribes of Humanity, fitted as she is, in substance and in fact, geologically and topographically, to be the center in the circle of States--the central star in the constellation of Republics--the Star of Beauty in the crown of Empire.⁴²

³⁸ Branch, Westward, 551.

³⁹ Ibid., 555-556.

⁴⁰ Cornelius J. Dyck, "Kansas Promotional Activities with Particular Reference to Mennonites," (unpublished M. A. thesis, The Municipal University of Wichita, 1955), 102-107.

⁴¹ James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln, 1955), 172.

⁴² C. F. Walther and I. N. Taylor, The Resources and Advantages of the State of Nebraska (Published by the State Board of Immigration, likely in 1871), 25-26. The pamphlet is located in the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Burlington and Missouri Railroad was the only railroad taking advantage of the opportunity of advertising its lands in the pages of the English, German, and Scandinavian promotional pamphlets the Board issued in the spring of 1870.⁴³ In 1874 the Beatrice Express suggested that while the State Board of Immigration and the Burlington and Missouri Railroad were both seeking to bring settlers into the state, the Burlington was "accomplishing infinitely more than the Immigration Board, without cost to the State."⁴⁴ Support for the Board waned rapidly in the wake of such statements minimizing the importance of the Board's accomplishments and it was abolished in 1877.⁴⁵ Also assisting in the campaign to promote Nebraska was the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture. It sent exhibits of fruit and grains grown on Nebraska farms to expositions throughout the East, the railroads providing free transportation. The Board of Agriculture, as well as the railroads, vociferously countered the widespread rumor that much of Nebraska was unsuited for agricultural purposes because of insufficient rainfall. Wide distribution was given to Dr. Samuel Aughey's learned opinion that the state's rainfall, already adequate, was increasing yearly. Dr. Aughey was Professor of Natural Sciences at the University of Nebraska and had conducted experiments which convinced him that as more and more land was brought under cultivation more and more rain would fall.⁴⁶

⁴³Overton, Burlington West, 321.

⁴⁴Anonymous, "The Mennonites," The Beatrice Express, September 10, 1874.

⁴⁵Olson, History of Nebraska, 172.

⁴⁶Ibid., 172-174.

Nebraska's Growth

The 1860 census revealed that Nebraska's population was 28,841.⁴⁷ The area of regularly cultivated land was approximately one-half million acres,⁴⁸ or an average of less than eighteen acres for each resident. By 1870 the population had risen to 123,033; 30,748 of which were foreign born. The real population growth, however, came in the next two decades, when the Burlington and Missouri, the Union Pacific, and the other state agencies were concentrating on bringing settlers to Nebraska. In 1880 the census indicated that there were 97,414 foreign born persons in Nebraska, by 1890 there were 202,542. The total population of the state jumped from 452,402 in 1880 to 1,058,910 in 1890.⁴⁹ The population growth occurred in spite of the fact that the 1870's encompassed the panic of 1873, the disastrous grasshopper invasions, severe drought years, low farm prices and high costs of consumer goods, high interest rates, burdensome taxes, and the frontier problems of prairie fires, blizzards, windstorms, and even Indian raids in some parts of the state.⁵⁰ Indeed, in the early 1870's a generally prevailing opinion in states east of Nebraska was that nothing would grow beyond ten miles west of the Missouri River, and for that reason land sales by the Burlington were quite slow until 1874. Then, just

⁴⁷ U. S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part I, (Washington, 1895), 399.

⁴⁸ Branch, Westward, 477.

⁴⁹ U. S., Report on Eleventh Census, 399.

⁵⁰ J. R. Johnson, "Nebraska in the Seventies," Nebraska History, XXXVII (June, 1956), 100.

as the farmers were beginning to prove that the lands west of the Missouri were of high fertility, the grasshoppers invaded.⁵¹

Despite the difficulties, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska was quite successfully competing for the foreign emigrants whom the Federal government, most western states, and especially the western railroads possessing government land grants were encouraging to come to the United States.

⁵¹Ernst, "Railroad As a Creator of Wealth," 19-20.

Chapter III

THE MENNONITE MIGRATION

The Mennonite Faith

At precisely the time that the western land grant railroads were seeking progressive farmers for their lands, a large group of Mennonites began to consider migrating from Russia to some country where the governmental authorities would not interfere with their religious beliefs and practices. The Mennonite Church originated in the Anabaptist wing of the Reformation period, in 1525 in Zurich, Switzerland.¹ Viewing the church as a fellowship of believers, the Anabaptists looked upon baptism as symbolic of a conscious, wholehearted commitment to a new way of life in Jesus Christ and therefore rejected infant baptism. The Anabaptists established a believers' church based upon a literal interpretation of the Bible and adhered to the principle that love was the fundamental basis of all social relations.² Their pacifistic beliefs and emphasis on evangelism caused them to suffer severely at the hands of the established state churches and political authorities, thousands being killed for their faith. It became a capital crime in Europe to embrace the Anabaptist faith and a criminal offense to give food and shelter to Anabaptists.³ The persecution became so violent that it destroyed the evangelistic fervor of the church and the Mennonites became essentially a quiet people who sought primarily sep-

¹C. Henry Smith, The Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1920), 15.

²John D. Unruh, In the Name of Christ (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1952), 1-2.

³Ibid., 2-3.

aration from the world and freedom to practice their religion.

The Russian Background

The Mennonites living in Russia had come by way of northeastern Prussia and Holland. Mennonite refugees from Holland had migrated to Prussia in the sixteenth century upon the invitation of ecclesiastical and lay noblemen who desired industrious farmers to develop their swampy estates.⁴ By 1750 the Dutch language had been completely abandoned and the Mennonites were slowly being assimilated into the surrounding Prussian civilization.⁵ The growing European spirit of militarism in the latter part of the eighteenth century was a harbinger of trouble for the peace loving Mennonites and slowly the Prussian government began to restrict their special religious privileges and economic growth.⁶ On December 17, 1801, Frederick William III issued a supplement to his earlier edict of July 30, 1789, which prevented the Mennonites from further increasing the number or size of their landed estates. Greatly disturbed by this development, the Mennonites petitioned the government to rescind its order, but to no avail.⁷

Meanwhile the Russian government was actively seeking settlers for

⁴G. Henry Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1927), 11.

⁵Cornelius Krahn, "From the Steppes to the Prairies," Cornelius Krahn, ed., From the Steppes to the Prairies (Newton, Kansas, 1949), 2.

⁶David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia, A Study of Their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1933), 52-55.

⁷David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," II, Mennonite Quarterly Review, IX (July, 1935), 118.

its extensive lands along the Volga, Dniester, Dnieper, and Don Rivers. The first efforts brought in primarily poor farmers and in the hope of securing better settlers Empress Catherine II issued a manifesto in 1763 inviting foreigners to immigrate to Russia and promising all immigrants extensive rights and privileges. In addition to land, Russia guaranteed perpetual exemption from military and civil service, free religious practice, the right of local self-government, and numerous economic privileges.⁸ In 1786 the Russian government invited the Mennonites to take advantage of those guarantees and between 1789 and 1797 approximately 350 of the poorer Mennonite families from the Danzig area emigrated to southern Russia. There they founded a number of colonies on the lower Dnieper River which came to be known as the Chortitza settlement.⁹

The Russian government was aware of the discontent of the Prussian Mennonites following Frederick William's edict of 1801 and again invited the Mennonites to migrate to Russia. Russia procured land for such a settlement near the Molochnaia River, relocating the few settlers who had been occupying some of the land. Groups of Mennonite families began to emigrate in 1803. When the Prussian government realized that it was about to lose many of its settlers it endeavored to forestall their leaving by delaying passports, but with little success. By 1806 385 families had founded eighteen colonies on the Molochnaia River,

⁸David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia (1787-1870)," I, Mennonite Quarterly Review, IX (April, 1935), 74-75.

⁹Ibid., 88.

which came to be known as the Molotschna settlement. The lands along the Molochnaia were more fertile than those the earlier emigrants had settled at Chortitza and coupled with the greater wealth of the later emigrants the Molotschna settlement was more prosperous from the first. By 1840 it consisted of 45 colonies with a population of 11,381.¹⁰ The Mennonites settled in communal type villages and not on individual homesteads mainly because early attacks by their half-civilized Tartar neighbors and bands of horse thieves forced them together.¹¹

The Mennonites prospered in Russia. For a time silk production was one of the main sources of income, after which cattle raising and wheat production assumed greater importance. The Ukraine became known as the "granary of Russia" due to the great quantities of wheat produced by Mennonites and other farmers. Three-fourths of the Mennonite families farmed about two hundred acres each and lived in the traditional villages of from thirty to fifty homesteads. Some individuals came to own large estates, one covered 54,000 acres.¹² Mennonite activity in the manufacture of agricultural machinery progressed so rapidly that by 1908 Mennonite factories accounted for ten per cent of the total Russian domestic output.¹³

The Mennonites, in Russia as in the other European countries where

¹⁰Rempel, "Mennonite Migration to New Russia," II, 118-125.

¹¹E. K. Francis, "Mennonite Institutions in Early Manitoba: A Study of Their Origins," Agricultural History, XXII (July, 1948), 152.

¹²Krahn, "From Steppes to Prairies," 4-6.

¹³Rempel, "Mennonite Colonies in New Russia," 281.

they had sojourned, formed a nearly separate state within the borders of the Russian empire. They preserved their national characteristics and resisted most Russian influences. There was no intermarriage with native Russians.¹⁴ The Mennonites continued to speak the German language and relatively few learned Russian. The census of 1897 found that less than one per cent of all Mennonites living in Russia used Russian as their native tongue.¹⁵ The Mennonites had their own educational system and in their closed religious communities supervised every member according to their own regulations. Accordingly, when in 1870 the new Russianization policies became known the Mennonite colonists were fearful that their special privileges would be eradicated.¹⁶ Tsar Alexander II's program of Russianization was far-reaching. Not only were all previous military exemptions abolished in 1871, but also in store for the Mennonite settlers was complete government control of the school systems in the colonies. The Russian language, instead of the German, would now be the medium of instruction in the schools, and the colonies would be subject to direct governmental control in local affairs from St. Petersburg.¹⁷

The Mennonites sent a delegation to the government in St. Peters-

¹⁴Smith, Coming of Russian Mennonites, 43.

¹⁵Walter Kuhn, "Cultural Achievements of the Chortitza Mennonites," Mennonite Life, III (July, 1948), 38.

¹⁶Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada in 1873-1880," I, Mennonite Quarterly Review, VI (October, 1932), 207.

¹⁷Smith, Coming of Russian Mennonites, 44.

burg in the spring of 1871 to ask for a renewal of their exemption from military service, but found little receptivity to their requests. The President of the Imperial Council was dissatisfied that though the Mennonites had been living in Russia for generations, most still did not know the Russian language. The President of the Special Military Commission suggested the possibility of non-combatant service in lieu of regular military service but the delegates refused to consider this. In January, 1872, another delegation went to the Crimea with hopes of seeing the Tsar at his winter quarters, but were unable to do so.¹⁸ Clearly, there would be no return to the earlier privileges and many Mennonites began to realize that another migration would be necessary if they did not wish to compromise their beliefs.

Looking Toward America

Cornelius Jansen, Prussian Consul at Berdiansk, a grain port on the Black Sea, early advocated that the Mennonites migrate to the United States.¹⁹ Because he believed that emigration was an eventual certainty, Jansen undertook to secure as much information about the United States as was possible by initiating correspondence with Mennonites already in America. Beginning in 1871 he corresponded with John F. Funk, editor of the American Mennonite paper, the Herald of Truth, seeking information concerning available land in America, religious freedom,

¹⁸ Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," I, 203-209.

¹⁹ Gustav E. Reimer and Gustav R. Gaeddert, Exiled by the Czar (Newton, Kansas, 1956), 41.

and military service.²⁰ As prospects for reaching an agreement with the Russian government dwindled, Jansen made available the information he had been collecting about conditions in America, first through correspondence and finally by printing a booklet of selected letters from America and distributing copies among the Mennonites of Russia and Prussia.²¹

During the summer of 1872 four young men from the Molotschna colony toured the United States. The young men, from fairly wealthy homes, came on their own volition to become acquainted with America--its people, institutions, and religion. Though not an authorized delegation, if their report would prove favorable, an official delegation would likely be sent. The young men visited John F. Funk in Elkhart, Indiana, and from there went westward to visit Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, and other states.²² While in America one of the young men, Bernhard Warkentin, received the stunning news that his fiancée had died and he decided not to return to Russia with his colleagues.²³

²⁰ Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," I, 210. Peter Jansen, in a June 11, 1895, letter to John F. Funk, indicated that Cornelius Jansen's correspondence with Funk during 1871 and 1872 was "really the first step taken toward the Mennonite Immigrations to the United States." The letter is quoted in Ernst Correll, ed., "Sources on the Mennonite Immigration from Russia in the 1870's," Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV (October, 1950), 352.

²¹ Reimer and Gaeddert, Exiled by the Czar, 51-52. Copies of the booklet, Sammlung von Notizen über Amerika, are located in the Bethel College Historical Library.

²² John F. Funk, "The Mennonites in Russia. A Visit from there," Herald of Truth, (Elkhart, Indiana), August, 1872.

²³ Christian Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, The Christian Krehbiel Story (Newton, Kansas, 1961), 72.

Warkentin remained in Summerfield, Illinois, with Christian Krehbiel, who had come to the United States from Bavaria with his parents in 1851 because of the military conscription laws there,²⁴ Warkentin kept in correspondence with his friend David Goerz in Russia, to whom he reported the findings of his extensive travels in the western states. His letters were duplicated and circulated in the Mennonite villages and were read at mass meetings where they were enthusiastically received and helped to pave the way for the coming migration,²⁵

Warkentin's presence in Summerfield and the fact that a delegation of Russian Mennonites was expected in 1873 to explore American lands soon became known to the western railroads. Assuming that Warkentin was an advance agent, railroad agents contacted Warkentin, telling him of their available lands and offering free transportation for inspection tours.²⁶ A representative of a Texas railroad took Warkentin and other Mennonites from Summerfield on a journey through Texas, but although Warkentin's party found the soil inviting they thought that the Russian Mennonites would not appreciate the hot climate. A representative of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad offered free transportation to a group of Mennonites from Summerfield which they accepted in the summer of 1873. The representative, Goodenow, showed them lands on which

²⁴Olin A. Krehbiel, "Christian Krehbiel," The Mennonite Encyclopedia (4 vols., Newton, Kansas, 1955-1959), III, 236.

²⁵Krahn, "From Steppes to Prairies," 7; Cornelius Krahn, ed., "Some Letters of Bernhard Warkentin Pertaining to the Migration of 1873-1875," Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXIV (July, 1950), 250.

²⁶Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, 73.

pioneers had already erected buildings and made other improvements. Those lands had now been granted to the railroad which planned to evict the settlers. Even though the prices quoted were "invitingly low," the Mennonites were hesitant to purchase lands from which other settlers would first need to be evicted, especially after a group of the settlers gathered menacingly before the hotel at which Goodenow and the Mennonites were staying in Parsons, Kansas, threatening the Mennonites with violence if they purchased the settlers' lands and attempted to occupy them.²⁷

While the four young men from the Molotschna colony were touring the United States, a Canadian Immigration agent, W. Hespeler, arrived in Russia to attempt to convince the Mennonites to make Canada their new home. Although the Mennonites had previously contacted the British Consul at Berdiansk requesting information regarding conditions in Canada, Hespeler learned of the possible Mennonite emigration while seeking settlers in southern Germany. Hespeler was warmly received in the Russian Mennonite villages and his report was well received by the Canadian Minister of Agriculture. In fact, the Minister proposed that the Canadian government send ships directly to the Black Sea to transport the Mennonites to Canada. Such enthusiasm led the British authorities to caution Hespeler and the Canadian officials for they did not want the Russian government to get the idea that other countries were actively soliciting the Mennonites and encouraging them to leave

²⁷ Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, 73-75.

Russia.²⁸

On March 7, 1872, the Mennonites also petitioned the American Consul at Odessa, Russia, indicating that there were approximately 100 Mennonite colonies in Russia with a total population of about 150,000 persons.²⁹ The petition eventually was received by the United States Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish, who noted the statement that E. Schuyler, the United States Minister at St. Petersburg, had appended to the document, "I do not find in Europe any better emigrants than these Mennonites and should the whole colony go to the United States, they would rapidly develop into good and useful citizens."³⁰

The Committee of Twelve

By the spring of 1873 enthusiasm for emigration to North America resulted in the most interested colonies sending official delegates to investigate concrete possibilities. The detailed instructions given the delegates were essentially similar to the requests the Mennonites had made in the petitions sent to the British and American governments-- full religious freedom together with freedom from military service, suitable lands at moderate prices and if possible some financial assistance for the trip from Russia to America. One additional stipulation not previously requested was included--the delegates were to seek

²⁸ Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," I, 210-221.

²⁹ The figure of 150,000 is undoubtedly somewhat of an exaggeration. Rempel, following considerable study in documents of the period, concluded that there were approximately 40,000 Mennonites in New Russia in 1868. Rempel, "Mennonite Colonies in New Russia," 212.

³⁰ Quoted in Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," I, 224-225.

the right to live in closed settlements with the privilege of autonomous local administration and the use of their native German language. Closed homogeneous communities, the Russian Mennonites felt, would enable them to maintain their religious and national integrity.³¹

The 1873 delegation was composed of twelve men from the various Mennonite communities in Russia and Prussia who traveled in three groups through the eastern United States, meeting by agreement at Fargo, Dakota Territory, on June 9, 1873.³² Here they were met by Hespeler who, in behalf of the Canadian government, invited the entire group to investigate settlement possibilities in Manitoba. The Canadian government, due largely to Hespeler's efforts, was well prepared for the Mennonite delegation and offered the delegates written assurance of their requests.³³ J. N. Lowe, Secretary of the Canadian Department of Agriculture, signed the final document of July 23, 1873, in which Canada promised the Mennonites "entire exemption from military service." The government had reserved eight townships for the Mennonites where

³¹ Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," II, Mennonite Quarterly Review, VII (January, 1933), 6.

³² Smith, Coming of Russian Mennonites, 51-52. In view of Warkentin's experience with American railroad agents, and since his letters to David Goerz had provided much of the impetus for the official delegation, it was somewhat surprising that Warkentin was not appointed to accompany the delegation in America. Warkentin was certain that Cornelius Jansen had prevented his appointment when Warkentin's father had endeavored to make it, Jansen having felt that Warkentin's letters were not to be trusted and that he was too young for such responsibility. Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, March 28, 1873, Bernhard Warkentin Collection, located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.

³³ Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," II, 7-8.

any family head or person twenty-one years old could homestead 160 acres and could purchase the remaining acres in the section at one dollar per acre. The maximum acreage any one settler could accumulate was 640 acres. If they settled in Canada, the Mennonites were assured of their desired closed communities, for the eight townships were reserved exclusively for them and if their settlement would extend beyond the specifically reserved townships additional ones would be reserved. If the Mennonites did not approve of the location of the original townships, they could exchange them for any other unoccupied townships. The government promised the Mennonites the full exercise of their religious principles without any restrictions whatever, and extended the same privilege to the education of Mennonite children. The Canadian government even agreed to furnish passenger warrants from Hamburg to Fort Garry (now known as Winnipeg) for \$30 per adult person, for \$15 per person under eight years of age and for infants under one year of age there would be no charge. The rates were guaranteed for three years.³⁴ The Canadian government even paid the expenses the Mennonite delegates had incurred in traveling from Berdiansk, Russia, to Manitoba and back--a total of \$670.³⁵ The provisions which Hespeler and the Canadian government held out to the Mennonite delegates were far more generous than anything they were to receive in the United States and were especially appealing to the delegates representing the

³⁴U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 14, 1874), 3054-3055.

³⁵Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," II, 9.

poorer Mennonite villages in Russia.³⁶ Of the 18,000 Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to North America during the decade of 1873 to 1883, approximately 8,000 settled in Manitoba,³⁷ the high percentage testifying to the effectiveness of Hespeler's work and to the high quality of the Manitoba lands.³⁸ Peter Jansen, son of Cornelius Jansen, felt that the "chief reason" so many Mennonites chose Manitoba instead of the United States was because "they believed a non-archial government more according to Scripture than a Republican."³⁹

After they had viewed the Canadian lands, the delegates journeyed southward where they resumed their investigation of the lands available in the western states of America. John F. Funk accompanied the delegates and later printed in the Herald of Truth a resume of their tour. By the middle of July the delegates reached Nebraska, guests of the Union Pacific Railroad Company. Of the lands shown them by Union Pacific agents, Funk noted that "the land lays nice, the crops were excellent, the soil is fertile, and land can be purchased at reasonable prices and on very easy terms. The milder climate of this region offers advantages to settlers which are not to be enjoyed in more norther [sic] localities."⁴⁰

³⁶Smith, Coming of Russian Mennonites, 60-61.

³⁷Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," II, 33.

³⁸Ernst Correll, "Mennonite Immigration into Manitoba, Sources and Documents, 1872, 1873," I, Mennonite Quarterly Review, XI (July, 1937), 200.

³⁹Peter Jansen, Memoirs of Peter Jansen (Beatrice, Nebraska, 1921), 84.

⁴⁰John F. Funk, "Notes by the Way," Herald of Truth, X, November, 1873.

On July 18 officials of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company met the Mennonite delegation at Kearney Junction. Funk later wrote that the Burlington lands were "in some places more rolling indeed than desirable, yet we found good soil, producing good corn, wheat, oats, vegetables, etc." Commenting on additional features of the land, Funk noted that the "grass on the elevations however, was light. We found considerable buffalo grass. There are but few streams. Wells are bored from 30 to 100 feet deep and cost 60 cents a foot with bucket, windlass, etc. included."⁴¹ The delegates visited with a farmer who had homesteaded in the area and whose well kept sod house impressed them. The farmer's well was 77 feet deep and had been completed in one day. Professor Butler joined the Mennonite delegation at Kearney Junction and supplied much additional information regarding the area. Funk concluded that,

this country is well adapted for settlements. It certainly gives to the settler a wider range of crops and fruits, a longer summer, and a milder winter than more northern latitudes, and is certainly also better adapted to stock raising. There is no doubt that there are very excellent localities for settlements to be found in this state."⁴²

Paul Tschetter, a young minister of the Russian Hutterite brethren who practiced the community of goods, was another of the twelve Mennonite delegates and he kept a diary of his American experiences. Like Funk he found that Nebraska "is excellently fitted for wheat, oats and corn," but he also saw several drawbacks. The grass was not very plentiful,

⁴¹ John F. Funk, "Notes by the Way," Herald of Truth, X, December, 1873.

⁴² Ibid.

the land was hilly and streams were scarce. The ease with which water could be secured was one of the delegates' major considerations. Tschetter noted that to get water one had to dig "one hundred thirteen feet in the ground," and that "only one small insignificant stream," had been seen in their Nebraska travels. Moreover, the region was "entirely treeless" and lumber for building purposes would need to be shipped from Minnesota, at relatively high rates.⁴³ The entire delegation apparently shared Tschetter's view of Nebraska, for Bernhard Warkentin was surprised that the entire deputation "has been carried away so totally by the influence of the Canadian government and the Northern Pacific Railway Co., and received such a prejudice against the southern states that they did not even consider them worth seeing." Warkentin noted that elder Jacob Buller was leaning toward the Dakota Territory and that the Reverend Wilhelm Ewert favored Kansas, and that none favored Nebraska.⁴⁴

The delegates met in New York and departed for Russia on August 20, 1873, all quite enthusiastic over the possibilities of settlement in North America, but each tending to favor different localities. Their return voyage was marred by one of the most violent and destructive storms in maritime history, during which 250 boats were reported lost.⁴⁵ The vessel on which the Mennonite delegates had taken passage was hit

⁴³J. M. Hofer, trans. and ed., "The Diary of Paul Tschetter, 1873," II, Mennonite Quarterly Review, V (July, 1931), 211-212.

⁴⁴Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, August 13, 1873, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

⁴⁵John J. Gering, After Fifty Years (Marion, South Dakota, 1924), 21.

by a gigantic wave which washed one lifeboat overboard, tore a gaping hole in the deck of the ship, and resulted in injury to fourteen men. The storm was finally weathered and the delegates returned to tell their brethren of the new lands they had seen.⁴⁶

Government Dealings

Prior to their departure several of the delegates, Paul Tschetter amongst them, endeavored to secure guarantees that they would be able to establish closed settlements in the United States. Jay Cooke, a trustee of the Northern Pacific Railroad, arranged an audience with President Ulysses S. Grant. The delegates requested that they and all their brethren be exempted from military service for the succeeding fifty years and that they be allowed to administer their own schools according to their own rules, which meant that instruction would be in the German language. All that Hamilton Fish, in behalf of the United States government, could assure the delegates, however, was that the United States had no desire to be involved in any wars during the next fifty years.⁴⁷

The United States government did give some consideration to the desire of the potential immigrants to settle in closed homogeneous communities. In his 1873 report, Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano outlined for the Congress the Mennonites' desire to come to the

⁴⁶J. J. Friesen, "Our Fathers' Journey to America, in 1874," The Henderson Review, (Henderson, Nebraska), August 10, 1937.

⁴⁷Ernst Correll, "President Grant and the Mennonite Immigration from Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review, IX (July, 1935), 146-149.

United States and "occupy a portion of our public lands in a compact body, with no strangers to their religious faith within the exterior bounds of their possessions."⁴⁸ Delano accordingly requested the authority to withdraw from sale or entry such lands as the Mennonites might desire to occupy. In the event they would choose to purchase railroad lands, Delano requested the authority to withdraw the alternate sections of land belonging to the Federal government so that the closed settlement idea could be realized.⁴⁹ President Grant mentioned Delano's request in his December 1, 1873, message to Congress. Expressing interest in the desire of the Russian Mennonites to migrate to America, Grant suggested that "the acquisition of so large an immigration of citizens of a superior class would without doubt be of substantial benefit to the country," and invited the Congress to consider Delano's request.⁵⁰

On December 8, 1873, Congressman A. Herr Smith of Pennsylvania introduced in the House of Representatives a Mennonite petition which requested that the Mennonites be allowed to select adjoining lands, either by purchase or under the homestead laws, and to reserve them until 1881.⁵¹ On January 12, 1874, Senator Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania introduced

⁴⁸Quoted in Correll, "President Grant and the Mennonite Immigration," 150.

⁴⁹Ibid., 149-150.

⁵⁰Ulysses S. Grant, Fifth Annual Message, December 1, 1873, James D. Richardson, A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897 (10 vols., Washington, 1896-1899), VII, 235.

⁵¹U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (December 8, 1873), 100.

a similar petition in the Senate. In the petition the Mennonites indicated their determination "to emigrate to some country where we can enjoy civil, social, and religious liberty," and requested that if they should purchase railroad lands in the western states and territories they be allowed to select and reserve the alternate government lands, either by purchase or under the homestead laws so that they would be insured of having their desired closed communities. They desired to reserve such lands as they might select until 1881, which date marked the ten years within which they had to leave Russia or accept Russianization. The Mennonites also mentioned that the Canadian government had offered them many concessions, but that many of them preferred to settle in the United States "if the opportunity is given us to locate in colonies."⁵² On February 24, 1874, Representative A. Herr Smith introduced a bill to enable the Mennonites to effect their desired closed settlements on the United States public lands and it was referred to the House Committee on Public Lands.⁵³ Senator William Windom of Minnesota introduced a similar bill in the Senate on April 2, 1874, and sought to guide it through the Senate.⁵⁴

Senator Windom's bill provided that advance agents could withdraw entire tracts of land ranging up to 100,000 acres for the Mennonites, who would then have two years to settle the lands. In all, 500,000 acres

⁵²The Mennonite petition was printed in U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (January 12, 1874), 570.

⁵³U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (February 24, 1874), 1731.

⁵⁴U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 2, 1874), 2718.

could be withdrawn in such a manner. Windom explained to his Senate colleagues that the Mennonites were "farmers; industrious, intelligent, and in every respect the class of people most desired in this country,"⁵⁵ and that since the Canadian government had already offered the Mennonites greater advantages than they were asking in the United States, the bill should speedily be passed "unless we choose to drive away forty thousand of the very best farmers of Russia who are now competing with us in the markets of the world with some ten million bushels of their wheat."⁵⁶ Other Senators similarly praised the Mennonites and urged the passage of the bill. Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania explained that Mennonites had been living in his state since 1724 and were "among the best of our citizens. . . . I do not believe there is a better class of people in the world than are the German Mennonites. . . . I am sure that wherever they go they will be a blessing to the neighborhoods in which they think proper to settle."⁵⁷ Pennsylvania's other Senator, John Scott, echoed Cameron's words, stating that "for thrift, industry, economy, integrity, and good morals, they [Mennonites] are not exceeded by any other class of the population."⁵⁸ In later debate on the bill, Senator Daniel D. Pratt of Indiana contended that "there is no worthier class of people upon the face of the globe. . . . Certainly there is no more valuable

⁵⁵U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 14, 1874), 3054.

⁵⁶Ibid., 3055.

⁵⁷Ibid., 3057-3058.

⁵⁸Ibid., 3058.

class of immigrants that have come or will come to this country than these Mennonites."⁵⁹

These laudatory characterizations of the Mennonites notwithstanding, several senators voiced major reservations to the principle of allowing a foreign class of people to enter the United States planning to retain their foreign identity. Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont argued that it was "fundamentally wrong" for any sect of people to be separated from the rest of the community and to establish within the United States a settlement which would exclude other citizens.⁶⁰ Senator Orris S. Ferry of Connecticut feared that the Mennonites might take up the reserved lands, hold them indefinitely without becoming United States citizens, and thus retain their immunity to the military draft.⁶¹ Senator Allen G. Thurman of Ohio pointed out that much of the best agricultural land had been given to the railroads or was covered by homestead and pre-emption applications and that the remaining good lands must be jealously guarded. Reserving large portions of it for the Mennonites was "not the way of 'giving land to the landless.'"⁶² Senator Thomas W. Tipton of Nebraska then rose to counter some of the arguments, pointing out that the Mennonites were not "ordinary immi-

⁵⁹U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 22, 1874), 3264.

⁶⁰U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 14, 1874), 3055.

⁶¹U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 14, 1874), 3057.

⁶²U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 23, 1874), 3299-3300.

grants" since they would bring substantial wealth to America. He was certain that the Mennonites would become "patriotic, devoted, and self-sacrificing citizens."⁶³ Tipton may have been convinced that the legislation was proper but most of his colleagues were not, and the bill was never brought to a vote. And, while their petitions were being deliberated at leisure in the Congress, the migrating Mennonites began to stream into the United States. As they effected contracts with the land departments of various western railroads they gradually abandoned their plans for closed settlements,⁶⁴

The Migration Begins

Once the Russian government realized that the Mennonites were serious in their emigration plans and that their departure meant the loss of many of the best Russian farmers, they sought a reconciliation with the Mennonites. General E. I. de Todtleben, Crimean War hero, was sent to the Molotschna colony where, in full military uniform, he addressed the Mennonites at a huge assembly in one of their churches. Speaking in German, he pointed out the advantages of "fine schools, fine churches, fine houses and gardens," which the Mennonites enjoyed in Russia but which they would lose if they emigrated. In Russia, the general said, the Mennonites could hire Russian laborers at low wages to do their work, but in America they would have to "dig trees, weed

⁶³U. S., Congressional Record, 43 Cong., 1 Sess., (April 23, 1874), 3300-3301.

⁶⁴Correll, "President Grant and the Mennonite Immigration," 151.

the roots and break the prairie and do all your work yourself."⁶⁵ The majority of Mennonites living in Russia eventually accepted the non-combatant provisions Todtleben offered in behalf of the Russian government and remained in Russia.

Those who were determined to leave could not be dissuaded. Sometimes entire communities decided to migrate in a body and thus whole villages were offered for sale. Thousands of persons seeking to sell their property at virtually the same time meant that prices plummeted and many Mennonites who had been fairly well-to-do in Russia arrived in the United States with very little capital. Not infrequently farms worth from 5000 to 7000 Russian rubles were sold for 1500 to 2000 rubles.⁶⁶

Recognizing the financial difficulties of many of their Russian brethren, those Mennonites already in America offered material assistance from the very first. The Mennonite Board of Guardians was organized to facilitate aid efforts and provided the Mennonites in Russia with information and instructions, made contracts with steamship and railway companies in order to get the lowest possible rates, and stationed representatives at the ports of Hamburg, Germany, and New York to assist the immigrants and protect them from fraud.⁶⁷ Most of the Mennonite

⁶⁵Jacob A. Wiebe, "The Founding of Gnadenu," Krahn, ed., From Steppes to Prairies, 99-100.

⁶⁶Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," II, 28; John F. Funk, "From Russia," Herald of Truth, January, 1874. The Russian ruble was worth about 73¢ in American money at that time. Melvin Gingerich, "The Alexanderwohl 'Schmurbuch,'" Mennonite Life, I (January, 1946), 46.

⁶⁷Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," II, 28-29.

immigrants could not speak English, consequently they were susceptible to the fast talking land and colonization agents who met every incoming ship. Bernhard Warkentin met many of the Mennonite immigrants in New York in behalf of the Board of Guardians and the evidences of fraud he saw convinced him that it was "absolutely necessary for an impartial person from the Mennonite brotherhood" to be stationed in New York at all times to supervise all the Mennonite immigrants.⁶⁸ The Board of Guardians negotiated a contract with the Inman Steamship Line and the Erie Railroad on February 27, 1874. The Inman Line agreed to transport Mennonite immigrants from Hamburg to New York, via Hull and Liverpool, and the Erie Railroad would then transport the Mennonites from New York to either Atchison, Kansas; Omaha, Nebraska; Sioux City, Iowa; or St. Paul, Minnesota. The fare for the entire trip was pegged at \$41 from Hamburg to Omaha or St. Paul and \$42 to Atchison or Sioux City. Children from five to twelve years of age were half-fare; children between the ages of one and five were half-fare from Hamburg to New York and free the rest of the way; while infants under one were free for the entire journey. The Mennonites were guaranteed up to twenty cubic feet of free baggage on the steamships and 150 pounds of free baggage on the railway and free meals were also provided on the Inman Line. The Board of Guardians agreed to use its influence to have as many Mennonites as possible choose the Inman Line and the Erie Railway on their pilgrimage to America. It has been estimated that the American

⁶⁸ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, May 17, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

Mennonites furnished their European brethren with material assistance amounting to at least \$150,000 during the great migration.⁶⁹

The actual migration began in 1873. Just before they departed for Europe, the Mennonite committee of twelve was pleasantly surprised to meet a small group of Mennonites who had just arrived in New York from the Crimea in Russia, one of the first immigrant groups.⁷⁰ The group was under the leadership of Daniel Unruh, initially a farmer in the Molotschna colony who moved to the Crimea in the early 1860's when the land problem became acute in the Molotschna colony.⁷¹ Unruh, with his family and some friends, had decided to emigrate as soon as it became clear that his sons would no longer be free from military obligations.⁷² Unruh toured the western and middle-western states before deciding to settle in the vicinity of Yankton in what was then Dakota Territory.⁷³

The Mennonite migration presented the various railroad agents with a unique and inviting situation--thousands of potential settlers were pouring into the United States, not yet determined where they wished to settle. The remainder of this study will center on the results of the efforts of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad to settle the Mennonite immigrants on its Nebraska lands.

⁶⁹ Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," II, 29-30.

⁷⁰ Gering, After Fifty Years, 20.

⁷¹ John D. Unruh, The Daniel Unruh Story (Freeman, South Dakota, 1959), 1.

⁷² Daniel J. Unruh, grandson of Daniel Unruh, personal interview with the author in Freeman, South Dakota, March 31, 1962.

⁷³ Gering, After Fifty Years, 21.

Chapter IV

THE BURLINGTON SEEKS THE MENNONITES

The competition for the Mennonite immigrants between the Santa Fe Railroad in Kansas and the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska was especially keen and, of course, other railroads also hoped to interest the Mennonites in the lands they had to offer. The Mennonites' reputation as able and industrious farmers had already been established in the eastern United States and, as the statements by Congressmen revealed, their success in Russia was well known. The financial panic of 1873 and the grasshopper plagues of the following years had slowed the progress of western development and colonization and the prospect of securing up to 40,000 skilled prairie farmers who were afraid of neither grasshoppers nor hard times helped to explain the competition between the various railroads for the Mennonites.¹

A. E. Touzalin, Land Agent

Albert E. Touzalin, land commissioner for the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad,² found himself in a unique and unenviable situation. Touzalin had previously been quite successful in securing Mennonite settlers for the Santa Fe Railroad in Kansas, and he found that the Mennonites were inclined to settle where their relatives and neighbors from Russia had settled. Now, however, Touzalin was employed by the Burlington Railroad and charged with securing as many Mennonites as possible for the extensive Burlington lands in Nebraska.

¹Smith, Coming of Russian Mennonites, 114-115.

²The Daily State Journal, July 25, 1874.

Originally an immigrant himself, Touzalin came to the United States with his parents from England in 1850 when he was eight years of age. By 1867 he was employed by the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Iowa as general passenger and ticket agent,³ where he was highly regarded as a passenger traffic manager and an intelligent advertiser.⁴ When ill-health forced D. L. Lakin to resign his position as the first Santa Fe land commissioner in 1872, Touzalin accepted the position and immediately proceeded to organize the Santa Fe land and immigration department. A man of great administrative ability, Touzalin appointed agents in the new towns along the Santa Fe's land grant and encouraged them to promote settlement. Throughout the East he commissioned ministers, lawyers, school teachers, and newspaper editors to promote the state of Kansas and especially the lands available from the Santa Fe Railroad. All the agents were paid on a commission basis, which meant that the entire advertising program could be carried on with a minimum of expenditure. Literally tons of literature promoting the Kansas lands were distributed.⁵

When Touzalin learned that many Mennonites would likely leave Russia in search of religious freedom, he quickly saw the desirability of inducing the Mennonites to come to Kansas. In Lawrence, Kansas,

³ Anonymous, "Albert E. Touzalin," Colorado Springs Gazette, September 24, 1889, reprinted from the Nebraska State Journal.

⁴ Carl Bernhard Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work for Kansas," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1905-1906 (Topeka, 1906), IX, 487.

⁵ L. L. Waters, Steel Trails to Santa Fe (Lawrence, 1950), 220-222.

Touzalin made the acquaintance of Carl B. Schmidt, a well educated young German in the mercantile business, and, after appointing him an immigration commissioner, he planned to send Schmidt to Russia to secure Mennonite settlers.⁶ In 1873 George Herriot, a Santa Fe land agent, made repeated visits to Summerfield, Illinois, to see Bernhard Warkentin and soon convinced Warkentin to travel to Kansas at Santa Fe expense to view the Santa Fe lands. In Kansas Warkentin met Touzalin who offered prospects of very favorable colonizing terms and Warkentin agreed to attempt to persuade the expected Russian delegation of 1873 to visit Kansas during their tour of North America.⁷

Knowing that Christian Krehbiel was partial to Kansas as a location for Mennonite settlers, Touzalin cabled him inviting him to come to Topeka at the Santa Fe's expense. When Krehbiel arrived Touzalin endeavored to persuade him to join, again at Santa Fe expense, the Mennonite deputation which was then in Canada viewing the Manitoba lands. Touzalin hoped that Krehbiel would be able to persuade the Mennonite deputies to visit Kansas. Krehbiel refused Touzalin's offer, advising Touzalin instead to concentrate on selling Santa Fe lands to Peter and Jacob Funk, recently arrived in Summerfield from the Russian Crimea and planning to go west to locate lands for settlement. Krehbiel wisely

⁶ Glenn Danford Bradley, The Story of the Santa Fe (Boston, 1920), 117-118. Schmidt made the journey in 1875 and was greatly impressed with the Mennonite colonies which he described as "the best appointed farming communities I had seen anywhere." His reception was welcome until the Russian authorities learned of his actions, then he was forced to flee the country. Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work," 490-494.

⁷ Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, 73.

indicated that the Santa Fe would have a real advantage over other railroads if some of the first Mennonite immigrants from Russia settled on Santa Fe lands. Since Krehbiel had alerted him to the Funk brothers' reputed wealth, while showing them the Santa Fe lands Touzalin suggested that they deposit any unnecessary funds they might have in a bank to forestall the possibility of a robbery, but this the Funk brothers refused to do. When they eventually purchased land it became known that they had been carrying \$50,000 in cash on their land-hunting tour.⁸ Touzalin hoped to get four dollars per acre from the Funks for the two sections of land which they purchased in Marion County, Kansas, but finally settled for two dollars and fifty cents per acre because he realized the importance of that first sale. Touzalin also offered to sell a section of land to Krehbiel at the same price. When it developed that Krehbiel did not have sufficient funds to make an outright purchase Touzalin agreed to reserve a section of land for him at that price which Krehbiel could exchange for equal acreage in any region where the Mennonites then at Summerfield might eventually settle, and Krehbiel made a \$50 deposit on the reserved land.⁹

In December of 1873 Touzalin himself journeyed to Summerfield to conclude the negotiations for extensive tracts of Santa Fe land with the Mennonites residing there. In the resulting agreement which Krehbiel signed as trustee, the Santa Fe agreed to reserve exclusively for the Mennonites all unsold company-owned lands in two townships in Har-

⁸ Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, 75-76.

⁹ Ibid., 76-77.

vey County, Kansas, for a five year period. The railroad advanced the cost of transportation for all persons and goods. The Mennonites agreed to buy a specified number of sections of land before April 1, 1874, and would be given a 56 per cent discount from the company's appraised price on all such land, whether purchased with cash or on a time payment. The remaining reserved lands, without Mennonite approval, could not be sold to any non Mennonites. When finally purchased by Mennonite settlers they could be secured at a 36 per cent discount from the appraised price, plus taxes and ten per cent interest. Touzalin provided a private railroad car for the thirty Mennonites from the Summerfield and Iowa congregations who journeyed to Kansas in January, 1874, to select their lands. The railroad car was placed on a side-track and served as their hotel during their stay in Kansas.¹⁰

Just as the great 1874 influx of Mennonites began Touzalin resigned as land commissioner of the Santa Fe because of repeated disagreements with the company president, Thomas Nickerson,¹¹ and accepted a similar position with the Burlington Railroad in Nebraska.¹² Touzalin now set himself to the task of convincing the Mennonites that Nebraska, not Kansas as he had originally told them, was the most desirable location in America.

By 1878 Touzalin completed his term as land commissioner and was elected general manager of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad

¹⁰ Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, 80-82.

¹¹ Bradley, Story of Santa Fe, 126.

¹² Anonymous, "Albert E. Touzalin," Colorado Springs Gazette, September 24, 1889.

Company in Nebraska. Three years later he was made first vice president of the parent corporation, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, and moved to Boston, but failing health soon prompted his resignation.¹³ While serving as general manager of the Burlington in Nebraska, Touzalin had been influential in preparing for the eventual extension of the Burlington line to Denver, Colorado. Realizing the likelihood of eventual construction he proceeded with the necessary surveys and let contracts for the actual construction. When the decision to build was reached because the Union Pacific broke the 1880 agreement, Touzalin began actual construction the following day, much to the amazement of the directors who had expected a delay of several months.¹⁴

After recuperating from his initial illness, Touzalin accepted the post of first vice president and general manager of the Santa Fe Railroad system. He resigned after eighteen months to take the presidency of the Chicago, Burlington and Northern Railroad, which he held until his death in 1889. The last two years of his life he resided in Colorado Springs for reasons of health,¹⁵ his illness making his general physical condition quite pathetic.¹⁶

C. B. Schmidt characterized Touzalin as possessing "extraordinary personal magnetism" with which he "instilled into every one of his sub-

¹³Anonymous, "Albert E. Touzalin," Colorado Springs Gazette, September 24, 1889.

¹⁴Editorial concerning Albert E. Touzalin, Colorado Springs Gazette, September 24, 1889.

¹⁵Anonymous, "Albert E. Touzalin," Colorado Springs Gazette, September 24, 1889.

¹⁶Jansen, Memoirs, 135.

ordinates his own enthusiasm for the work of building up a commonwealth."¹⁷ Peter Jansen, who had many dealings with Touzalin in behalf of the Nebraska Mennonites, found him to be "a man of the strictest integrity and great ability."¹⁸ The successes of the Burlington Railroad in inducing Mennonites to settle on its Nebraska lands can be traced in large measure to the efforts of Touzalin, especially between the years of 1874 to 1878.

Burlington Proposals to the Mennonites

Officials of the Burlington Railroad had been aware of the Mennonite migration before Touzalin joined their land department and through general circulars and more specific propositions had already been alerting the Mennonites to the advantages of settling on the Burlington's Nebraska lands. J. M. Walker, President of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, declared in late 1873 that any Mennonites settling on Burlington lands in Nebraska would be granted a fifty per cent discount on the freight rates for the household goods and farming implements they would bring with them.¹⁹ In November of the same year the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company issued

¹⁷Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work," 487.

¹⁸Jansen, Memoirs, 135.

¹⁹"Memorandum of Agreement made by J. M. Walker for the C. B. & Q. about Freight belonging to Mennonites," November 12, 1873, in a Collection of letters and documents relating to the Mennonites in Nebraska, microfilmed at the Burlington Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois, January 14, 1949, by Melvin Gingerich. The Collection is presently located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas, and will be cited hereinafter as Burlington Collection.

general propositions to all Mennonites who might be interested in settling on the Burlington's Nebraska lands. The Company indicated that it would reserve for three years for purchase by the Mennonites all its lands in Sherman, Valley, Greeley, Howard, and Boone Counties at a price of \$2.15 per acre, provided that the Mennonites purchased at least 50,000 acres per year. The Burlington also promised to reduce passenger rates on the railroad; to provide accommodations for the Mennonites who would come to Nebraska to purchase lands; to procure a townsite on its lines for the Mennonites if they so desired; to grant free passes for five years to eight Mennonites for use on the Burlington lines; to donate lands for the erection of churches and schools; to attempt to secure the reservation of adjoining government lands within the tract of land the Mennonites would select for their use; and also outlined liberal credit plans for the purchase of the land. On single cash purchases of 10,000 acres or over the Burlington offered discounts of fifty per cent during 1874, forty per cent during 1875, and thirty per cent after 1875.²⁰ By the following year the Burlington had begun circulating a German translation of the general propositions to the Mennonites, signed by the Burlington President, John W. Brooks.²¹

By early 1875 the directors of the Burlington Railroad were well aware that the Mennonites were shrewd bargainers and were generally re-

²⁰"Propositions made by the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska to Mennonites intending to settle upon Lands of said Company," November 24, 1873, Burlington Collection.

²¹Proposition of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad to the Russian Mennonites, 1874, Burlington Collection.

ceiving terms more favorable than those granted other settlers. Therefore, the directors drew up a memorandum in which they proposed to lease to the Mennonites 11,000 acres of Burlington lands in Franklin and Webster Counties for a period of five years after which the Mennonites could purchase the land at a certain specified rate on five years credit. To obtain the five year lease the Mennonites would need to pay only a rental consisting of the taxes assessed against the land in question. The memorandum authorized the Burlington president to enter into such a contractual agreement with the Mennonites and it was hoped that by extending the long-term lease the railroad would be able to retain its "inside lands" which it could sell "at better prices and terms to parties other than Mennonites."²²

Some of the Mennonite immigrants were in dire financial straits and were unable to purchase land; some were under the erroneous impression that the Burlington had promised to provide work for them in Nebraska until they would be able to purchase lands of their own. For such persons the Burlington Railroad attempted to provide employment, mainly in the hope that such consideration would favorably influence future Mennonite immigrants from their locality in Russia.²³

Several of the general propositions the Burlington issued to the Mennonites, as well as some of the actual contracts provided free passes

²²Memorandum regarding leases of land outside the twenty mile land grant line in Nebraska, January 5, 1875, Burlington Collection.

²³Otto Synnesvedt to J. D. McFarland, July 17, 1876, Burlington Collection. Synnesvedt was an examiner and appraiser of land for the Burlington Railroad in Nebraska. Overton, Burlington West, 298.

to a number of Mennonite settlers. In 1876 Peter Jansen was reminding Touzalin of an earlier promise to provide him with a free pass so that Jansen could meet Mennonite immigrants soon to arrive in New York.²⁴

By 1878 other western railroads began to express their dissatisfaction with that practice. In their behalf, the New York, Lake Erie & Western Railroad Company's general passenger agent urged Touzalin to forego the practice because other western railroads were proposing to do the same thing, and such a proliferating practice would be bad for the total industry.²⁵

Burlington Advertises for the Mennonites

Of all the various techniques for interesting the Mennonites in the Burlington's lands, advertising was Touzalin's favorite. The Burlington stationed an agent in New York whose duty was to advise all immigrants of the advantages of settling in Nebraska. This agent attempted to distribute "Mennonite circulars" to all the various booking agents and to secure their aid, through salaries and gifts, in distributing the circulars to all incoming Mennonite immigrants. In a report on a party of 105 Mennonites who had recently arrived in New York bound for Yankton in Dakota Territory, the agent explained his method of operation to Touzalin. The agent had supplied each Mennonite with Burlington circulars describing the Nebraska lands.²⁶ The Burlington

²⁴ Peter Jansen to A. E. Touzalin, May 23, 1876, Burlington Collection.

²⁵ John Abbott to A. E. Touzalin, July 3, 1878, Burlington Collection.

²⁶ Many of the circulars were printed in the German language so that those immigrants who did not understand English (the overwhelming majority of the Mennonite immigrants) could read for themselves the authoritative words of University of Nebraska professors who wrote about the healthful climate and fertile soil of Nebraska.

agent learned from a booking agent, Funk of Philadelphia, that 500 to 600 Mennonites were scheduled to arrive in New York in July, 1876. Funk claimed to be entirely neutral and disliked to have any railroad agents at the landing when the passengers arrived. He did, however, provide a large table in the passenger room where the various railroads placed their advertising materials, the Burlington included. The Burlington agent assured Touzalin that Funk favored the Burlington Railroad because of the "expressed wish" of an official of the Pennsylvania Railroad.²⁷ Christian Krehbiel was also aware of Touzalin's many contacts and influences with the various eastern railroads which enabled him to secure additional settlers for Nebraska.²⁸ The Burlington's New York agent had early discovered that small gifts of money were welcomed by the booking agents and he had just given a certain Poggenburg ten dollars. Poggenburg thereupon promised that if the railroad was going to follow that practice he would distribute the Burlington circulars and promote their lands with far greater zeal.²⁹

When Touzalin learned that a group of Russian Mennonites was bound for Manitoba in 1876 he rushed a special circular to them contrasting the sub-arctic Manitoba wilderness with the fertile paradise of Nebraska.³⁰ The repeal of the Nebraska militia law with respect to the

²⁷ Burlington's New York Agent (name illegible) to A. E. Touzalin, June 15, 1876, Burlington Collection.

²⁸ Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, 87-88.

²⁹ Burlington's New York Agent to A. E. Touzalin, June 15, 1876, Burlington Collection.

³⁰ Overton, Burlington West, 442.

Mennonites gave further evidence of the speed and decisiveness of Touzalin's efforts. Kansas had exempted the Mennonites and Quakers from military duty in 1874,³¹ and in 1877 a Kansas newspaper reminded the Mennonites that in Nebraska they would be subject to state military conscription. It took only 29 days before a Burlington circular was in the mails, informing the Mennonites that in the interim the Nebraska law had been amended and conscientious objectors to military training and service who were members of pacifist religious groups were now also excluded in Nebraska.³² Reporting on the law, the Beatrice Express indicated that it was a "proper yielding to the wishes and religious principles of a numerous and honorable class of immigrants who . . . can now come among us without unnecessary restraint, or fear of being pressed into the military service." The editor hoped that the Mennonites would continue to settle in Nebraska until there was "a farmer on every quarter section of land."³³ The changing of the law was not too difficult a task for the Burlington to effect, for both the Burlington and Union Pacific Railroads virtually dictated the government of the state.³⁴ No person, for example, was elected to the Senate during that period whom the railroads opposed.³⁵

³¹Noble L. Prentiss, A History of Kansas (Topeka, 1909), 191.

³²Overton, Burlington West, 442. The text of the law is quoted in Theodore Schmidt, "The Mennonites of Nebraska," (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1933), 88-89.

³³Anonymous, "Mennonites Exempt from Military Service in Nebraska," The Beatrice Express, March 15, 1877.

³⁴Farmer, "Economic Background of Frontier Populism," 424.

³⁵Olson, History of Nebraska, 219-220.

The Burlington Railroad officials were well aware of the Mennonite tendency to follow their relatives and friends in choosing places of settlement, and apparently scrutinized the accounts of the Mennonite settlements very carefully. When the Mennonite periodical, Zur Heimath, printed in German, reported that a greater number of families had chosen Minnesota over Nebraska in 1877, a Burlington agent, C. J. Ernst, immediately wrote a short note which the paper subsequently printed, pointing out that there had actually been more Mennonite families choosing Nebraska than had gone to Minnesota. Ernst further indicated that although most immigrants were not immediately at home in America, those in Nebraska were, since they were with their friends and the harvest of 1877 was good.³⁶ The major objective of an eight page brochure, written in German, that the Burlington Railroad released in 1877 was to use the testimony of Mennonites already settled in Nebraska to interest their co-religionists in making a similar pilgrimage. In addition to a discourse by Professor Samuel Aughey of the University of Nebraska on the favorable climate of Nebraska and general advice for immigrants by Touzalin, the leaflet was composed of testimonials by the various groups of foreigners who had settled on the Burlington's lands in Nebraska. The Reverend Abraham Friesen, in behalf of the Jefferson County Mennonites, noted that the Burlington had sold them their land at "reasonable prices," and had constantly kept their welfare in mind. Elder Isaak Peters, in behalf of the Mennonites who had settled in York and Hamilton Counties, recommended the climate and land highly, and indicated that the Bur-

³⁶ Anonymous, "Bericht aus Nebraska," Zur Heimath, (Summerfield, Illinois), August 15, 1877.

linton still had excellent land available on easy terms and would deal fairly with the buyers. Peters admitted that to get water in Nebraska a well had to be deeper than in other states, but the entire process of digging a 30 to 100 foot well cost on the average only from \$30 to \$35 and the water secured was very good.³⁷ Touzalin himself wrote a short "Invitation to Nebraska" which appeared in Zur Heimath and which also concentrated on the existing Mennonite settlements on the Burlington's lands in Nebraska, the settlers all being willing, according to Touzalin, to tell of their welfare in Nebraska.³⁸

In addition to the specific propositions to the Mennonites and the general advertising circulars which found their way into the hands of Mennonite immigrants, the Burlington directed a considerable portion of its promotional activities specifically to the Mennonites through advertisements in the Mennonite newspapers. Zur Heimath was published in Summerfield, Illinois, by David Goerz, who had been the recipient of Bernhard Warkentin's letters concerning America. As the official organ of the Mennonite Board of Guardians it was distributed free to Mennonite immigrants from Russia from February to December of 1875. When Goerz moved to Kansas in 1875 he continued publishing the paper, but thenceforth on a subscription basis.³⁹ When first published, the paper was financed largely by the Inman Line Steamship Company and was

³⁷ Das südliche Nebraska, Burlington promotional pamphlet, Burlington Collection.

³⁸ Anonymous, "Einladung für Nebraska," Zur Heimath, April, 1876.

³⁹ Harold S. Bander, "Zur Heimath," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, IV, 1042.

intended as an advertising sheet for their benefit, but other advertisements were also accepted.⁴⁰ The first Burlington advertisement appeared in the third issue of Zur Heimath and ran for the next three issues. The advertisement specified that one million acres of "the best lands in the world" were available from the Burlington Railroad in Iowa and Nebraska at six per cent interest on ten years credit. The advertisement assured potential settlers that the produce grown on the land would pay for the purchase price long before the ten years elapsed.⁴¹

Though the Santa Fe continued its advertisements in every issue of Zur Heimath, the next Burlington advertisement did not appear again until the following spring, in the April 15 issue. The new advertisement appeared for twenty-three consecutive issues until April 1, 1877. Calling attention to Nebraska's healthy climate, good water, and good agricultural opportunities, the Burlington advertisement pointed to the three Mennonite congregations also situated on its lands, all progressing well and praising their areas.⁴²

A third and final change in the content of the advertisement appeared in the May 15, 1877, issue. The new advertisement was continued consecutively for fourteen issues until December 15, 1877, after which issue the Burlington terminated its advertising in Zur Heimath. Appealing especially to European settlers, the advertisement suggested that

⁴⁰ John F. Funk, "Zur Heimath," Herald of Truth, June, 1875.

⁴¹ Burlington and Missouri River Railroad advertisement, Zur Heimath, April, 1875, and subsequent issues.

⁴² Burlington and Missouri River Railroad advertisement, Zur Heimath, April 15, 1876, and subsequent issues.

the terms of land sale in 1877 were more favorable than any previous ones. Special emphasis was given to the fact that the Mennonites were exempt from military service by law in Nebraska and the five Mennonite colonies in existence along the railroad were also mentioned.⁴³

The Burlington also ran large advertisements in the Familien-Kalender, an annual Mennonite almanac, initially published by John F. Funk and his brother in Elkhart, Indiana.⁴⁴ The Burlington advertisements appeared in five almanacs, covering the years of 1874 through 1878. In content, style, and format the advertisements were similar to those which appeared in Zur Heimath, though never identical. The 1874 advertisement offered a twenty per cent discount on all cash payments in full, as well as an additional premium of twenty per cent if one-half of the land was cultivated within two years.⁴⁵ The 1875 advertisement guaranteed free travel for those who eventually purchased lands and low rates for freight and families.⁴⁶ The 1877 advertisement was addressed specifically "To the Mennonites,"⁴⁷ and in 1878 the Burlington pointed out that the Mennonite settlements in Nebraska had made more

⁴³ Burlington and Missouri River Railroad advertisement, Zur Heimath, May 15, 1877, and subsequent issues.

⁴⁴ Harold S. Bender, "Familien-Kalender," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, II, 293.

⁴⁵ Burlington and Missouri River Railroad advertisement in Familien-Kalender, 1874, (Elkhart, 1874).

⁴⁶ Burlington and Missouri River Railroad advertisement in Familien-Kalender, 1875.

⁴⁷ Burlington and Missouri River Railroad advertisement in Familien-Kalender, 1877.

material progress than any other Mennonite settlements in the West in a comparable period of time. Potential settlers were invited to correspond with the Burlington Railroad for additional information, in either English or German.⁴⁸ The 1878 issue of Familien-Kalender also included large photographs of the Mennonite settlements in York and Hamilton and Jefferson County. The accompanying text indicated how long the Mennonite colonies had been in existence and how they were progressing.⁴⁹

The Burlington's chief competitor among the land grant railroads for the Mennonite immigrants was the Santa Fe Railroad in Kansas. After Touzalin had been serving the Burlington Railroad for only two years his successor with the Santa Fe, A. S. Johnson, reported that the Santa Fe was feeling the impact of his efforts in procuring Mennonite settlers for Nebraska. On August 10, 1876, Johnson wrote President Nickerson of the Santa Fe that "Mr. Touzalin is giving us a good deal of trouble just now by sending his agents into our settlements and making inducements for those unsettled to go to Nebraska. And misrepresenting us in all manner of ways."⁵⁰ Peter Jansen's remark to a Daily State Journal reporter in 1875 that none of the Mennonites who settled in Nebraska had departed for other states, whereas quite a number who initially settled in Kansas and Dakota Territory had left those areas to come to

⁴⁸ Burlington and Missouri River Railroad advertisement in Familien-Kalender, 1878.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, "Mennonitische Niederlassung in Nebraska," Familien-Kalender, 1878.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Waters, Steel Trails to Santa Fe, 233.

Nebraska also suggested the successfulness of the Burlington's efforts in securing Mennonite immigrants as settlers on its lands.⁵¹

⁵¹ Anonymous, "Russians in Nebraska," The Daily State Journal, March 26, 1875.

Chapter V

THE BURLINGTON SETTLES THE MENNONITES IN JEFFERSON AND GAGE COUNTIES

Cornelius Jansen

Cornelius Jansen's continued advocacy of emigration to America soon brought him into disfavor with the Russian government. In addition to promoting emigration through his correspondence and the published pamphlet, Jansen spoke at secret meetings attended by the Mennonite leaders. An informer present at one of the meetings denounced Jansen to the Russian police as the instigator of the Mennonite movement to leave Russia.¹ Though Jansen had been making plans to leave for America with his family, his departure date was suddenly accelerated when the Russian government exiled him, forbidding him to ever return to Russia.² On May 26, 1873, the Jansen family left their Russian home and embarked for America, going by way of Germany where they visited friends and relatives and where young Peter Jansen met his future bride. Landing in Quebec, the family proceeded to Berlin, Ontario, which they reached in early August, 1873.³ Cornelius and Peter Jansen left immediately for New York where they met the committee of twelve which was just returning to Russia. On August 25, 1873, the Jansens and a number of other Mennonite immigrant families arrived in Elkhart, Indiana, from where the men went west to look for suitable lo-

¹Jansen, Memoirs, 29.

²Reimer and Gaeddert, Exiled by the Czar, 72.

³Jansen, Memoirs, 30-34.

cations for Mennonite settlements.⁴ Prior to his departure from Russia, Cornelius Jansen had promised to visit the various western states and this he and his son now did. They found "good land and splendid locations for settlements in all these states. . . . The difference was more in the climate, from Kansas, where it got extremely hot in summer, to Dakota, where the winters came early and were cold, with lots of snow." Fortunately for the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, both Jansens were favorably impressed with Nebraska, which they viewed as "a happy medium as far as climatic conditions were concerned,"⁵

The Jansen family spent the winter in Ontario, but the next spring moved to Mount Pleasant, Iowa, where Cornelius Jansen found good schools where his children could learn the English language.

The "Kleine Gemeinde" Mennonites

From Mount Pleasant Cornelius and Peter Jansen went to New York, to meet a group of Mennonite immigrants from Russia.⁶ The immigrants represented the "Kleine Gemeinde Church" which a small group of dissatisfied Mennonites in the Molotschna colony had organized in 1814. In 1868 the young church was divided by another difference of opinion and the elder excommunicated both co-ministers and two deacons. The excommunicated nucleus was joined by a small number of followers who elected one of the ministers, Abraham Friesen, as their elder, and Friesen led the group

⁴ John F. Funk, "The Russian Emigration," Herald of Truth, September, 1873.

⁵ Jansen, Memoirs, 39-40.

⁶ Ibid., 40.

to America in the spring of 1874.⁷ Cornelius Jansen's wife was related to some of the Kleine Gemeinde immigrants, consequently Cornelius and Peter Jansen met them in New York⁸ and arranged to have the group remain temporarily in Clarence Center, near Buffalo, New York, where a large Mennonite congregation was in existence.⁹

Fluent in the English language and already an experienced traveler in the American West, Peter Jansen was appointed to lead a small delegation of the Kleine Gemeinde immigrants as they searched for a suitable location for settlement.¹⁰ Securing railroad passes the small delegation went west, touring the Dakota Territory, Kansas, and Minnesota as well as Nebraska.¹¹ On August 3, 1874, Jansen and his seven companions arrived in Beatrice, Nebraska.¹² The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad furnished a guide, Tobias Castor, who showed Jansen's party a large tract of rolling prairie land¹³ which was so im-

⁷Cornelius Krahn, "From Russia to Meade," Memnonite Life, VI (July, 1951), 18.

⁸D. Paul Miller, "The Story of the Jansen Churches," Memnonite Life, X (January, 1955), 38.

⁹Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, July 20, 1874, and July 22, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

¹⁰Cornelius J. Claassen, "Peter Jansen--Pioneer, Leader and Philanthropist," Memnonite Life, II (October, 1947), 42. Jansen's facility in English and his rapid "Americanization" were so remarkable that several Nebraska newspapers commented on it when Jansen and the delegation toured Nebraska. Anonymous, "More Russians," The Daily State Journal, August 4, 1874; Anonymous, "Memnonites [sic]," The Beatrice Express, August 6, 1874.

¹¹Miller, "Story of Jansen Churches," 38.

¹²Anonymous, "Memnonites," The Beatrice Express, August 6, 1874.

¹³Jansen, Memoirs, 41.

pressive that Jansen ventured the opinion that the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites would choose to settle in Jefferson County, Nebraska.¹⁴ The fact that the large tract of land was unbroken by alternating government lands was undoubtedly particularly appealing to the prospective settlers. The tract represented some of the land which the Burlington Railroad had selected beyond the twenty mile limit to fill out its allotted acreage.¹⁵

The delegates debated the relative merits of the Jefferson County tract of land and acreage in Butler County, Kansas,¹⁶ but finally chose the Jefferson County land despite warnings from Nebraska farmers that they would be unable to raise crops on the tablelands they had selected.¹⁷

On August 11, 1874, A. E. Touzalin concluded the purchase agreement with Abraham Friesen, Peter Heidebrecht, and Jacob Fast, who represented the approximately forty Mennonite families temporarily residing in Clarence Center, New York. The Mennonites agreed to purchase at least fifteen sections of land in one Jefferson County township and to assume the costs of reserving additional sections of land until May 1, 1875.¹⁸ In all, the Mennonites purchased approximately 20,000 acres, at an average price of \$3.75 per acre on six annual payments with six

¹⁴ Anonymous, "Mennonites," The Beatrice Express, August 6, 1874.

¹⁵ Jansen, Memoirs, 41.

¹⁶ Claassen, "Peter Jansen--Pioneer, Leader and Philanthropist," 42.

¹⁷ Jansen, Memoirs, 41.

¹⁸ Memorandum of Agreement between A. E. Touzalin and Abraham Friesen, Peter Heidebrecht, and Jacob Fast, August 11, 1874, Burlington Collection.

per cent interest on the deferred payments,¹⁹ which represented a thirty per cent discount from normal Burlington charges. On all cash purchases the Burlington Railroad agreed to give a forty per cent discount²⁰ --of which a large number of the immigrants took advantage, purchasing lands for \$3.51 per acre. Other Jefferson County residents indicated that the lands the Mennonite immigrants had purchased were "first-class in soil and location," and the Mennonites themselves were quite well pleased with the lands they had selected, as well as with their dealings with Touzalin.²¹ The Burlington charged \$10.25 per person to transport all adults from Chicago to Beatrice, Nebraska, and agreed to refund the fares of up to thirty persons who would purchase lands. The Burlington further agreed to issue free railroad passes for one year to two Mennonites and to charge one-half its regular freight rate for livestock and household goods transported on its line. An agent of the Burlington was sent to Clarence Center to assist the Mennonites in traveling to Nebraska, and the Burlington also agreed to house the Mennonites in the Plymouth School House, which it owned, for two weeks while they purchased lands and erected shelters.²²

In the evening of August 25, 1874, approximately 150 Kleine Gemeinde

¹⁹Jansen, Memoirs, 41.

²⁰Memorandum of Agreement between A. E. Touzalin and Abraham Friesen, Peter Heidebrecht, and Jacob Fast, August 11, 1874, Burlington Collection.

²¹Anonymous, "The Mennonites," The Beatrice Express, September 10, 1874.

²²Memorandum of Agreement between A. E. Touzalin and Abraham Friesen, Peter Heidebrecht, and Jacob Fast, August 11, 1874, Burlington Collection.

Mennonites arrived in Beatrice on the Burlington Railroad from Clarence Center, New York. In addition to the school, some were temporarily housed in the fairground building.²³ As soon as the settlers made their individual selections of land, they began to construct their temporary dwellings, frequently building sod houses, and by the time winter set in most were quite comfortably housed.²⁴ Shortly following their arrival Peter Jansen accompanied many of the family heads to St. Joseph, Missouri, where they purchased farm implements, lumber, and livestock for the entire group. They returned from their shopping foray with over 5000 feet of lumber, 53 horses, 37 head of oxen, 20 Studebaker wagons and other assorted farming implements.²⁵ Other purchases were made in Beatrice and grain and potatoes were secured from neighboring settlers.²⁶

Most of the settlers purchased more land than they were able to farm themselves and either resold it to newly arriving immigrants or divided it among members of the new generation when they began to establish homes.²⁷ With a large, unbroken tract of land at their disposal, the Mennonite immigrants established a number of distinct vil-

²³ Anonymous, "The Russians," The Beatrice Express, August 27, 1874.

²⁴ Jansen, Memoirs, 42.

²⁵ Anonymous, "The Mennonites," The Beatrice Express, September 10, 1874.

²⁶ Jansen, Memoirs, 42.

²⁷ D. Paul Miller, "An Analysis of Community Adjustment: A Case Study of Jansen, Nebraska," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1953), 65-66.

lages, much as had been their practice in Russia. The residences were generally located close together on both sides of the section lines. Each family farm then extended back from the residence in a long, narrow strip to the next section line. Usually, the farms were one mile long and varied in width from a few hundred feet to one-fourth of a mile or more. The farm one-fourth mile wide contained 160 acres, some of the smaller farms only 60 or 80, but generally all were one mile in length, making a very unusual pattern of narrow strip farms.²⁸ The largest such settlement was at the edge of present day Jansen, Nebraska. Extending four and one-half miles in length, it was popularly known as "Russian Lane."²⁹

The Mennonite settlers soon discovered that with their crude instruments they were unable to dig deeply enough to strike well water, and for a time it appeared that the settlement might need to be vacated. Touzalin, however, came to their rescue, securing experienced well drillers who set up ten wells for the colony, free of charge. At depths of 100 to 150 feet excellent water in "inexhaustible quantity" was found.³⁰

²⁸D. Paul Miller, "The Story of Jansen, Nebraska," Mennonite Life, IX (October, 1954), 173.

²⁹Miller, "Analysis of Community Adjustment," 68. The town of Jansen was built on land the Mennonites had originally purchased from the Burlington Railroad in 1874 and which Peter Jansen subsequently acquired. He deeded it to the town which was named after him by the Rock Island Railroad, which built a line through what then became Jansen in 1886. Reimer and Gaeddert, Exiled by the Czar, 137.

³⁰Jansen, Memoirs, 42.

Touzalin and the Burlington remained vitally interested in the continuing progress of the Jefferson County Mennonite settlers. In 1875 Touzalin wrote to Robert Harris, President of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, reporting on a transaction he had recently concluded with Cornelius Jansen. Since many of the Mennonites did not have sufficient means to adequately stock their farms, Jansen proposed to ship in 150 cattle, 1500 to 2000 sheep, the necessary lumber for sheds, and to loan the livestock and building materials to his co-religionists for a share of the profits if the Burlington Railroad would agree to transport the sheep and lumber free from Chicago or other points further west. Following extended negotiations, Touzalin and Jansen finally agreed on a rate of ten dollars per railroad car for what they calculated would be twenty-five to twenty-seven carloads. Touzalin apologized to Harris that the rate was so low, but he felt it was the "best [that] could be made & have the enterprise go through."³¹

In 1875 seven Mennonite families left their Manitoba homes to join the Mennonite settlement in Jefferson County.³² Peter Jansen brought the matter to Touzalin's attention and asked whether those persons might be given a rebate on their transportation fares from Manitoba. Since the families had merely settled on the lands their fellow Mennonites in Jefferson County had already purchased and did not purchase any new lands of their own, Touzalin questioned whether they were entitled to

³¹ A. E. Touzalin to Robert Harris, June 2, 1875, Burlington Collection.

³² A. E. Touzalin to J. D. McFarland, November 20, 1875, Burlington Collection.

a rebate and requested the advice of the Superintendent of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad in Nebraska, William Irving.³³

Irving suggested that half-fare be charged since the Burlington's earnings were then "so deplorably light," but urged Touzalin to use his own judgment as to "how far it may be well to favor our Mennonite brethren."³⁴

Touzalin's response pointed to the severe competition the Burlington faced for Mennonite settlers, and tendered the suggestion that to meet that competition full rebates might be necessitated--other railroads were doing that and more to induce the Mennonites to settle on their

lands.³⁵ Irving then authorized Touzalin to grant full rebates to the families in question and to other Mennonites if such a policy would "tend to bring any of them [Mennonites] to us who would not otherwise come."³⁶ Accordingly, Touzalin arranged to return to the seven fam-

ilies the fares they had paid on the Burlington Railroad, a total of \$90.65,³⁷ a sizeable sum to refund to persons who had not purchased any land themselves but had merely settled on lands already purchased by other settlers. Once again the Burlington Railroad followed its policy of assisting in the establishment of prosperous agricultural communities

³³ A. E. Touzalin to William Irving, July 15, 1875, Burlington Collection.

³⁴ William Irving to A. E. Touzalin, July 16, 1875, Burlington Collection.

³⁵ A. E. Touzalin to William Irving, July 24, 1875, Burlington Collection.

³⁶ William Irving to A. E. Touzalin, July 28, 1875, Burlington Collection.

³⁷ A. E. Touzalin to J. D. McFarland, November 20, 1875, Burlington Collection.

along its line which would eventually provide traffic for the road-- the Burlington's interest in its settlers did not end with the sale of the land.

Peter Jansen

By 1876 the little colony consisted of approximately forty families with a population of over 280. Good houses and barns had been constructed and each family had from forty to fifty acres of land under cultivation. Peter Jansen had extended his holdings to over 1500 acres of land and owned over 1700 head of sheep.³⁸ On instructions from his father, Peter Jansen had purchased 960 acres of land from the Burlington at the same time that the Kleine Gemeinde group made their purchases. The Jansen acreage was located to the east of the large Kleine Gemeinde tract of land and the rolling lands proved a wise purchase as the Jansen sheep ranch was soon flourishing.³⁹ The remainder of the Jansen family moved to the ranch during the winter of 1876, and then to the town of Beatrice in the spring of 1877.⁴⁰

Though technically not an agent for the Burlington and Missouri,⁴¹ Peter Jansen continued to exert a great deal of influence on incoming Mennonite immigrants. He was well satisfied with Nebraska, with his

³⁸ Anonymous, "The Russian Settlement," The Beatrice Express, February 3, 1876.

³⁹ Jansen, Memoirs, 43.

⁴⁰ Gaeddert and Reimer, Exiled by the Czar, 145.

⁴¹ Anonymous, "The Mennonites," The Beatrice Express, September 10, 1874.

transactions with the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, and with his friend Touzalin,⁴² and endeavored to interest other Mennonites in the fine lands and climate of southeastern Nebraska, which he considered to be the best agricultural region in the western states.⁴³ Utilizing his free passes on the Burlington, he made frequent journeys to New York to meet incoming immigrants, assisted Touzalin and other agents in showing Burlington lands to Mennonite immigrants, and on at least one occasion served as Touzalin's interpreter when Touzalin dealt with a large group of Mennonite immigrants.⁴⁴

Jansen's election as justice of the peace in 1880 marked the beginning of a very active political career, on the local, state, and national level. In 1884 he was an alternate delegate to the National Republican Convention, in 1896 he was a delegate at large; in 1898 he was elected to the Nebraska state legislature as a representative, in 1910 as a senator. President McKinley nominated Jansen as one of the United States Commissioners to the Paris World's Fair in 1900; in 1904 Jansen was one of Nebraska's four representatives at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition; and he also served as the first president of the Nebraska Wool Growers Association. Though encouraged by friends to be-

⁴²J. J. Rochussen, who led a group of Russian Mennonites to view both the Burlington's and the Union Pacific's lands before returning to Minnesota, thought that Jansen was not only well satisfied but "makes capital out of both his fellow Mennonites and Touzalin." J. J. Rochussen to John N. Demison, May 15, 1875, Burlington Collection.

⁴³Anonymous, "Mennonites," The Beatrice Express, August 6, 1874.

⁴⁴H. R. Voth, Narrative of Alexanderwohl Mennonites in Lincoln, Nebraska, quoted in Smith, Coming of Russian Mennonites, 116-117.

come a candidate for governor, Jansen declined on the grounds that the governor was chief officer of the militia and might also be called upon to enforce the death penalty.⁴⁵

The Heubuden Mennonites

The Jansens and the Burlington Railroad were influential in locating a group of Mennonite immigrants in Gage County, just east of the Jefferson County settlement, in 1876. The new arrivals, under the leadership of Aaron Claassen, came from the Heubuden Church in the free city of Danzig, West Prussia. Convinced by his two and one-half year stay in Russia that the Mennonites would never find religious freedom there, Claassen had gone to investigate conditions in America. Though favorably impressed, he was unable to interest more than a very few members of the congregation in leaving, most being satisfied with the government provisions for non-combatant service.⁴⁶ The issue of accepting or rejecting the government's non-combatant provisions became a crucial one for the congregation, so grave that from the fall of 1874 until the summer of 1876 no communion services were held.⁴⁷

Finally, led by elder Johann Andreas, a small group of approximately thirty families, numbering 116 persons from both the Heubuden and Elbing-Ellerwald churches, departed on June 15, 1876, arriving at Mount Pleasant, Iowa, on July 3, 1876, where they were met by Cornelius

⁴⁵ Claassen, "Peter Jansen--Pioneer, Leader and Philanthropist," 43-45; Jansen, *Memoirs*, 55-64.

⁴⁶ W. C. Andreas, "Highlights and Sidelights on the Mennonites in Beatrice," *Mennonite Life*, I (July, 1946), 21.

⁴⁷ A. Driedger, "Heubuden," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II, 734.

and Peter Jansen.⁴⁸ Railroad agents of the Burlington and Missouri and the Santa Fe showed the potential settlers lands in Nebraska and Kansas. The group was unable to arrive at an immediate decision until the Reverend Peter Dick, tiring of the delay, purchased Santa Fe lands near Peabody, Kansas, and was followed by approximately half of the group. The other half remained in Nebraska with Claassen, whose Nebraska leanings were solidified by his deepening interest in one of Cornelius Jansen's daughters, whom he soon married.⁴⁹

The small group in Nebraska was soon joined by additional immigrants. On August 28, 1876, Peter Jansen met a small contingent in New York, his bride to be among them. The group wintered in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, before settling near Beatrice in Gage County the following year.⁵⁰ Elder Gerhard Penner brought additional families from the Heubuden Church to the Gage County settlement in the early summer of 1877.⁵¹ The steamer "Strassburg" which arrived in New York on June 18, 1878, listed eight Mennonite families planning to locate in the Beatrice vicinity,⁵² and

⁴⁸W. C. Andreas, "Historical Sketch, Second Mennonite Church, Beatrice, Nebraska," April 25, 1944, (unpublished manuscript located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas); Andreas, "Highlights and Sidelights on Mennonites in Beatrice," 21-22.

⁴⁹Andreas, "Highlights and Sidelights on Mennonites in Beatrice," 21-22.

⁵⁰Jansen, Memoirs, 47.

⁵¹Cornelius Krahn, "First Mennonite Church, Beatrice," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, I, 256.

⁵²Harold S. Bender, ed., "A Passenger List of Mennonite Immigrants from Russia in 1878," Mennonite Quarterly Review, XV (October, 1941), 270.

additional families came in 1879.⁵³

The Mennonites locating in Gage County, however, did not purchase lands from the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company, although the railroad's agents had been active in displaying the Burlington's lands and encouraged the immigrants to remain in Nebraska. Being fairly wealthy and thus able to take advantage of the generally low prices of depression times, most of the immigrants purchased the better farms and improved lands in Gage County through a local land office agency, Somers & Ellis.⁵⁴ One of the Mennonites purchased a 640 acre farm. The highest price that anyone paid for land was \$6.25 per acre. All payments were made in cash and the local newspaper considered that the Mennonites were "buying cheap."⁵⁵

Though the Burlington Railroad had not been successful in locating the immigrants on its lands, it was desirous of assisting their settlement progress. The Burlington thus agreed to cooperate with John Gerhard Wiebe, who was one of the group which had wintered at Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and had come to Beatrice in 1877. Wiebe immediately established a lumber yard which became the first stopping place for the incoming Mennonites. According to a two year contract, the Burlington agreed to transport all Wiebe's lumber for a very low freight rate, on the condition that Wiebe sell only to the Mennonite settlers. Wiebe was thus able to purchase lumber, of the quality and price he desired,

⁵³Smith, Coming of Russian Mennonites, 129.

⁵⁴Anonymous, "Immigration," The Beatrice Express, December 28, 1876.

⁵⁵Anonymous, "The Mennonite Purchases," The Beatrice Express, November 27, 1876.

directly from the sawmills, and still supply it to the Mennonites at prices which his competitors could not match. Since the Mennonites were quite well established by the time the contract expired, Wiebe decided not to renew the contract with the Burlington and thereafter sold to all comers, although not as cheaply as before, but his lumber yard continued to prosper.⁵⁶

Fortunately for the new settlers the Nebraska harvests of 1877 were very good. John Thiessen, one of the Jefferson County farmers, reported that spring wheat had yielded 15 to 25 bushels per acre; rye 10 to 25 bushels per acre; barley 25 to 35 bushels per acre; oats 50 to 60 bushels per acre; and the expected corn crop was from 50 to 70 bushels per acre.⁵⁷ By early 1878, although the Jefferson County settlers had been in Nebraska for only a little more than three years and the Gage County settlers for only slightly more than one year, the Mennonites already owned approximately 40,000 acres of land, were enjoying good crop yields, and in general were progressing very satisfactorily.⁵⁸

The passing of the years did not seem to lessen the Burlington's interest in its Mennonite colonists. One of the Burlington's original promises to the Mennonite immigrants had been to transport free of

⁵⁶ Anonymous, "Lumber Dealer First Sold to Mennonites," Beatrice Daily Sun, (Beatrice, Nebraska), August 14, 1932.

⁵⁷ Anonymous, "Erfreuliches aus Nebraska," Zur Heimath, September, 1877.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, "Mennonitische Niederlassung in Nebraska," Familien-Kalender, 1878.

charge the lumber for a Mennonite church. In 1883, Abraham Friesen and Peter Friesen reminded the Burlington Railroad of that initial promise, and outlined their plans for constructing a "Meetinghouse for Public worship" in Jefferson County. Pointing out that the church would be built on land which had been purchased from the Burlington Railroad, the Mennonites suggested that two carloads of lumber ought to prove sufficient.⁵⁹ The Burlington responded by transporting free the lumber with which the Mennonites constructed a church in 1884, and it also continued to aid the settlement by transporting sheep at a very low rate.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Abraham Friesen and Peter Friesen to J. D. McFarland, March 29, 1883, Burlington Collection.

⁶⁰ John Dalbert Erb, "The Influence of the Western Railroads Upon Mennonite Settlements in the United States," 1951, (unpublished manuscript located in the Goshen College Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Indiana), 33.

Chapter VI

THE BURLINGTON SETTLES THE MENNONITES IN YORK AND HAMILTON COUNTIES

The Alexanderwohl Mennonite Migration

Just after the Burlington Railroad settled the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites on its lands in Jefferson County, it endeavored to conclude an agreement with a much larger group of Mennonites it was temporarily housing in Lincoln, Nebraska. These Mennonites represented the Alexanderwohl congregation from the Molotschna colony in Russia. When they settled there in 1821, Tsar Alexander I had wished the Mennonites well in their undertaking and from thenceforth they were known as the "Alexanderwohl Mennonites." The passage of the Russian conscription law was the stimulus which led nearly the entire congregation to migrate en masse to America, the only instance in the Mennonite migration where an entire village left as a unit.¹ From the first the Alexanderwohl congregation had been one of the centers of the emigration movement. Their elder, Jacob Buller, had been a member of the committee of twelve and the congregation had already held meetings in 1872 and 1873 to discuss the situation. Only seven families from the entire congregation remained in Russia, and the departing members were joined by additional individuals from other congregations so that the total number of Alexanderwohl Mennonites that left for America in 1874 was over one thousand.²

The Alexanderwohl Mennonites left Hamburg, Germany, in two groups.

¹ Cornelius Krahn, "Alexanderwohl," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, I, 48-49.

² C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (4th ed., revised by Cornelius Krahn, Newton, Kansas, 1957), 454.

The first group, under the leadership of elder Jacob Buller, departed on August 10, 1874, on the S. S. Cimbria.³ The vessel docked in New York on August 27, 1874,⁴ and the prospective Mennonite settlers, approximately 85 families numbering nearly 800 persons, immediately departed by train for Elkhart, Indiana, where they arrived on August 31, 1874.⁵ Funk and the other Elkhart Mennonites fed and housed the group. During the brief stopover in Elkhart, representatives of four different railroads approached Buller and his companions and unsuccessfully attempted to convince them to purchase their lands. The following afternoon the Mennonites boarded the same train on which they had come and continued on to Lincoln, Nebraska,⁶ arriving on September 3, 1874.⁷

³John F. Funk, "The Emigration Movement," Herald of Truth, September, 1874.

⁴Selected Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York and Philadelphia, 1873-1879, (Microfilm selections of the records of the Bureau of Customs, filmed in Washington at the National Archives and located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.)

⁵John F. Funk, "Progress of the Russian Emigration," Herald of Truth, October, 1874. The exact number in Buller's group is difficult to determine. H. Barman suggests that there were 475 Mennonites aboard the Cimbria ("Geschichte der Alexanderwohl Mennoniten Gemeinde bei Goessel, Kansas," Bundesbote-Kalender, 1926, 32); Kempes Schnell, basing his observations on an article by Funk within his papers, suggests that there were 700 Mennonites who arrived in Elkhart ("John F. Funk and the Mennonite Migrations of 1873-1885," Krahn, ed., From the Steppes to the Prairies, 83); Funk in the Herald of Truth suggests nearly 800 Mennonites; whereas the Beatrice Express reported that 400 Mennonites arrived in Lincoln (September 10, 1874) and the Daily State Journal noted that "over 400 Mennonites" arrived in Lincoln (September 5, 1874), but three days later noted that there were "[one] thousand Russians now in this city," and no other groups had arrived in the meantime. Thus, it seems probable that Funk's figure is most nearly correct-- Buller's contingent included between 700 and 800 Mennonites.

⁶Schnell, "Funk and the Mennonite Migrations," 83.

⁷The Daily State Journal, September 5, 1874.

Buller, while a member of the committee of twelve, had harbored inclinations of settling in Dakota Territory but according to Christian Krehbiel he was now determined to settle in either Minnesota or Nebraska, and accordingly led his followers directly to Nebraska.⁸

The second group of the Alexanderwohl Mennonites, under the leadership of Dietrich Gaeddert, Peter Balzer, and Peter Ratzlaff, departed from Hamburg on the S. S. Teutonia on August 16, 1874, arriving in New York on September 3, 1874.⁹ Midway across the Atlantic Ocean the Teutonia caught fire but it was quickly brought under control. It was the last successful voyage for the vessel, for on its next trip across the Atlantic it sank.¹⁰

All immigrants landing in New York were required to pass through Castle Garden, the landing depot for immigrants from 1855 until 1890 when the station was moved to Ellis Island. Immigrants were registered at Castle Garden and usually remained there until they secured tickets and provisions necessary to continue their journey in America.¹¹ It was at Castle Garden that representatives of the various railroads and

⁸ Krehbiel, Prairie Pioneer, 90.

⁹ Selected Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York and Philadelphia, 1873-1879. J. J. Friesen, only a very young child when he crossed the ocean on the Teutonia, recalls that they arrived in New York on September 2, 1874, instead of September 3, as the official records indicate. Likely the vessel arrived in New York on the prior date, but the passengers did not officially disembark until the following day. J. J. Friesen, "The Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874," 6, J. J. Friesen Collection, located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.

¹⁰ A. J. Dyck, "Hoffnungsau in Kansas," Mennonite Life, IV (October, 1949), 18-19.

¹¹ Christian Krehbiel, "Second Report of the Mennonite Board of Guardians," Herald of Truth, November, 1874.

state immigration agencies besieged the immigrants with offers and claims of all types. The routine procedures at Castle Garden included a medical examination. For the passengers of the Teutonia this consisted of passing single file over a small stepladder while a doctor glanced at them. The Mennonites all passed the examination, spent the night in Castle Garden, and left on September 4 for Elkhart, Indiana.¹² The Teutonia passengers had been met in New York by David Goerz, Wilhelm Ewert, Cornelius Jansen, and C. B. Schmidt,¹³ Dietrich Gaeddert and Wilhelm Ewert led a number of Alexanderwohl Mennonites directly to Kansas, but sixty-seven families continued on to Lincoln, Nebraska, on a special Burlington immigrant train, to join the advance party led by Jacob Buller.¹⁴ In Chicago the Burlington Railroad assumed jurisdiction over the special immigrant train. Captivated by Schmidt's "interest" and "kind treatment" on the journey up to that point, the Mennonites requested that he accompany them to Nebraska. Burlington officials quite naturally refused, so Schmidt was obliged to travel by a regular passenger train. When the Burlington train arrived in Lincoln, Schmidt

¹²Friesen, "Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874," 6, J. J. Friesen Collection.

¹³Barman, "Geschichte der Alexanderwohl Mennoniten," 32.

¹⁴Funk, "Progress of the Russian Emigration," Herald of Truth, October, 1874. In a September 19, 1874, letter to David Goerz, Bernhard Warkentin indicated that he had been travelling with the Alexanderwohl group for fourteen days and that it was being led by Touzalin and Peter Jansen, which would tend to suggest that it was Peter Jansen, not Cornelius Jansen as Barman stated, who met the Alexanderwohl Mennonites in New York. Warkentin also noted that Gaeddert was in Kansas looking at land. Thus, contrary to J. J. Friesen's suggestion that Gaeddert had personally led the Teutonia Mennonite passengers to Nebraska ("Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874,"), it is evident that Gaeddert led some of the Alexanderwohl Mennonites directly to Kansas.

was waiting at the depot.¹⁵ The second group of Alexanderwohl Mennonite immigrants arrived in Lincoln on September 8, 1874,¹⁶ and Lincoln was then practically inundated with prospective Mennonite settlers--over one thousand were in the city.¹⁷ Attempting to provide suitable lodging for over one thousand persons was a gigantic task and Touzalin labored mightily to house one and all.¹⁸ The regular Burlington immigrant home in Lincoln was far too small to accommodate all the Mennonites and the Burlington quickly erected another large frame structure at the fairgrounds. Built in the form of a cross, the interior was 18 feet wide and each limb of the cross was 258 feet long.¹⁹ The building was not yet completed when the second group of Alexanderwohl Mennonites arrived in Lincoln and carpenters were still adding the finishing touches to the roof and the floor.²⁰ In addition to the regular immigrant home and the one nearing completion, the Mennonite families were housed in other buildings at the fairgrounds and in railroad

¹⁵ Voth, Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites in Lincoln, Nebraska, 116; John B. Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," The York Republican (York, Nebraska), August 12, 1937.

¹⁶ Friesen, "Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874," 6, J. J. Friesen Collection.

¹⁷ Anonymous, "The B. & M. R. R. in Europe," The Daily State Journal, September 12, 1874.

¹⁸ The Daily State Journal, September 13, 1874.

¹⁹ Anonymous, "The B. & M. R. R. in Europe," The Daily State Journal, September 12, 1874.

²⁰ J. J. Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 6, J. J. Friesen Collection.

passenger cars on side tracks.²¹

The Period of Indecision

A committee of five Mennonites was appointed to tour the Burlington lands and Touzalin and Peter Jansen led them first to Burlington lands in Franklin and Webster Counties, Nebraska.²² Some of the Mennonite young men accompanied the party to that area to help dig wells, but because of the deep water level they were unable to produce satisfactory wells. Then, apparently on the recommendation of a grain buyer from Sutton, Nebraska, who had settled in that area after emigrating from Odessa, Russia, some years before, the Burlington agents also showed the Mennonites land north of Sutton and the Little Blue River.²³

Schmidt had secured the committee's promise that they would not decide on a final location until they had also seen the Santa Fe lands in Kansas.²⁴ Peter Jansen accompanied the Mennonite delegates to Kansas, "to see that the land sharks of Kansas don't come any little game over them, and, if they are not suited down there, to bring them back

²¹J. J. Friesen, "Recollections on our Journey in 1874 and of Pioneer Life," 3, J. J. Friesen Collection.

²²Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

²³Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 6-7; Friesen, "The Landseeking Expedition in 1872 and Incidents on Their Way to America & in Pioneer Life," 4; Friesen, "Our Fathers Settled Here in 1874," J. J. Friesen Collection.

²⁴Anonymous, "Henderson, Nebraska feiert goldenes Jubiläum," Christlicher Bundesbote, (Newton, Kansas), August 31, 1937.

to this State."²⁵ While the committee inspected the lands the Burlington and Missouri and the Santa Fe Railroads offered for sale, the Burlington continued to care for the Mennonites in Lincoln. The chill night air necessitated fire wood which the Burlington provided for the immigrants in abundance. Most of the food and other essential items were purchased in Lincoln.²⁶ Many of the young Mennonite boys helped to keep the family larder supplied by assisting the butcher at the slaughter house. For their help they received the livers of the butchered animals which they divided among themselves and gave to their mothers who fried the liver for part of their family meals.²⁷ On Sundays the Mennonites conducted their own religious services, occasionally meeting under a large circus tent at the fairgrounds.²⁸ Apparently the sermons were geared to their emigration experiences and problems-- one of the Mennonites, speaking in German, strongly urged the group to settle permanently in Nebraska, and not in Dakota Territory, where the winters were of greater severity and of longer duration.²⁹

The Debate

After the railroad lands had been investigated the committee pre-

²⁵Anonymous, "The Mennonites," The Beatrice Express, September 10, 1874.

²⁶Voth, Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites, 116.

²⁷Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 8, J. J. Friesen Collection.

²⁸The Daily State Journal, September 15, 1874.

²⁹The Daily State Journal, September 18, 1874.

sented to the entire congregation the conditions they had discovered in Nebraska and Kansas.³⁰ A huge open meeting was arranged with the committee seated in front of the Mennonite lodgings, Touzalin and Peter Jansen (serving as Touzalin's interpreter) standing in an open buggy in front of the committee, and the prospective Mennonite settlers eagerly crowding around. The Santa Fe agent, Schmidt, stood in the midst of the Mennonite immigrants, from which vantage point he responded to Touzalin's offers and statements.³¹

Touzalin began the meeting by offering to the Mennonites the lands he had earlier shown them in Franklin and Webster Counties. The delegation objected to those lands because wells needed to be dug from 75 to 150 feet before water could be secured, because the prairie had only sparse grass cover which would provide insufficient hay for feeding cattle, and because the road from the railroad to the land led for over five miles through sandy hills.³² Touzalin was prepared to meet the objections and promised that the Burlington would either drill a well and put in a pump on every quarter section of land or drill a well and put up a windmill on every section of land; that the Burlington would furnish free of charge all the hay the Mennonites might need for the winter; and that the railroad would also build a temporary plank

³⁰ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

³¹ Voth, Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites, 117-118.

³² Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

road between the Mennonite settlement and the nearby towns.³³ Also traveling with the Alexanderwohl group was Bernhard Warkentin. Many railroad agents had already tried to tempt Warkentin with the best offers their company's could give to the Mennonites, yet Warkentin thought Touzalin's offers to be "fabulous."³⁴ In behalf of the Burlington, Touzalin offered to provide every family with a security bond of \$20,000 whether they settled on railroad or government land; to build an immigrant house with a capacity of 150 to 200 families and give it to the congregation; and to transport 250,000 feet of lumber to the settlement at the Chicago price. For cash purchases, the Burlington would sell its land for an average price of \$2.00 to \$2.50 per acre--a reduction of forty-five per cent from the appraised price. A thirty-five per cent reduction was offered for a down payment of one-tenth of the total cost and a twenty-five per cent reduction for payment made on the ten year credit plan with six per cent interest.³⁵ No matter how appealing the conditions were, however, the Mennonites just were not interested in the Burlington lands in Franklin and Webster County.³⁶ Indeed, it became increasingly evident to Touzalin that the committee had been so favorably impressed by the Santa Fe lands that they were inclined to accept Schmidt's offer.³⁷

³³Voth, Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites, 117.

³⁴Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," The York Republican, August 12, 1937.

³⁷Voth, Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites, 117.

Touzalin consequently abandoned his effort to sell the Franklin and Webster County lands and offered instead the lands north of Sutton in York and Hamilton Counties which he had also shown the Mennonites.³⁸ If the Mennonites would settle there, Touzalin said, the Burlington would transport to Nebraska free of charge the train load of freight the Mennonites had waiting in Philadelphia; it would charge no freight for all the lumber, coal, grain, and other supplies the Mennonites might need; and would give free railroad passes to certain designated Mennonites. From his location in the midst of the congregation, Schmidt promised that the Santa Fe would match each of Touzalin's offers. The discussion soon centered on the prices the Burlington would charge for the lands. Touzalin's every offer was more inviting than the preceding one, but Schmidt matched every offer. Finally, Touzalin promised that if all the Mennonites remained in Nebraska the Burlington Railroad would "give them the necessary land for nothing." Schmidt did not match the offer of free land, probably because he could sense that the committee was on the verge of choosing Kansas and, as he later explained to one of the Mennonites, he wanted to salvage some financial returns for the Santa Fe. His instructions, however, had been to bring the Mennonites to Kansas "at any cost."³⁹ In response to a query from the Reverend H. Richert, the committee's principal spokesman, Touzalin

³⁸Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," The York Republican, August 12, 1937.

³⁹Voth, Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites, 117-118; Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," The York Republican, August 12, 1937; Anonymous, "Henderson, Nebraska feiert goldenes Jubiläum," Christlicher Bundesbote, August 31, 1937.

magnanimously indicated that the Burlington would not charge the Mennonites anything for the expenses they had incurred in Lincoln, but that if they went to Kansas the Santa Fe would have to furnish the necessary transportation.⁴⁰

The Alexanderwohl Mennonites did not decide where they would settle immediately following the conclusion of the meeting.⁴¹ Though they had been offered a fifty per cent reduction on the prices of the Kansas lands as well as a section of land for the poor, the poorer immigrants seemed desirous of remaining in Nebraska, while most of the other immigrants wished to go to Kansas.⁴² The decision was soon made, and, as Touzalin had feared, the great majority of Mennonites elected to leave Nebraska, most going to Kansas, but some also to Minnesota,⁴³ Manitoba and the Dakota Territory.⁴⁴ On Tuesday evening, September 22, a large portion of the Mennonites then in Lincoln left on the Atchison and Nebraska Railroad for Kansas,⁴⁵ arriving in Topeka the following night. The approximately 102 families that departed on that train

⁴⁰Voth, Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites, 117-118.

⁴¹The meeting likely took place on or prior to Saturday, September 19, and Warkentin indicated that the final decision would probably be made by Monday, September 21. Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," The York Republican, August 12, 1937.

⁴⁴Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, October 12, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

⁴⁵The Daily State Journal, September 23, 1874.

numbered 557 persons and filled eleven passenger coaches and upon arrival in Kansas immediately set about touring the Santa Fe's lands prior to making individual selections.⁴⁶

The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad had housed over one thousand Mennonites in Lincoln for three weeks, and those who chose to settle in Nebraska remained in Lincoln for three additional weeks. Touzalin had been confident that the entire group would settle in Nebraska on the Burlington's lands and was "furious" when the great majority departed for other states, apparently blaming Warkentin in part for their departure.⁴⁷ Touzalin had been outmaneuvered in the contest between the Burlington and the Santa Fe for the Alexanderwohl Mennonites by the man he had originally hired to help bring the Mennonites to Kansas for the Santa Fe. Touzalin had trained Schmidt too well.

The Burlington Contract

Of the total group, thirty-five families numbering between 205 and 207 persons had decided to remain in Nebraska and they settled on lands in York and Hamilton Counties which they purchased from the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company.⁴⁸ Other than for the al-

⁴⁶ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 24, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

⁴⁷ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

⁴⁸ Eva Abrahams (Mrs. Peter J. Friesen), Family Diary, now in possession of A. W. Friesen, Henderson, Nebraska; J. J. Friesen, "List, The Mennonite families who first settled in the western part of York and the eastern part of Hamilton Counties in Nebraska, Oct. 14, 1874," J. J. Friesen Collection. Friesen lists the names of the original

ternate sections of land belonging to the Burlington Railroad, the area had already been almost completely settled by homesteaders. The homesteaders were largely of American stock, descendants of settlers in the Atlantic seaboard states, although there were some Germans, Swedes, and Irish. The homesteaders each had approximately thirty to forty acres of land under cultivation, the rest of the prairie was a "great sea of unbroken grass" marked only by their log cabin's and dugouts.⁴⁹ Though all signs pointed to a bountiful harvest in 1874,⁵⁰ the homesteaders' hopes were dashed by the Rocky Mountain grasshoppers. The area where the Mennonites settled in the fall of the year was invaded by the grasshoppers on July 26, 1874. Coming in hordes so thick that they obscured the sun, they quickly settled on the cultivated areas and began their feasting.⁵¹ By nightfall the corn had all been devoured and mere stumps remained. The grasshoppers also stripped the garden patches, gnawed holes in carpets which had been placed over plants in vain attempts to salvage them, and finally attacked the prairie grasses. After they had eaten they bored holes in the ground, filled them with eggs, and then died. In places their dead bodies covered the earth in

thirty-five settlers and a consultation of the official passenger lists of the S. S. Cimbria and the S. S. Teutonia reveals that, with one possible exception, all the families who chose to remain in Nebraska had been passengers on the S. S. Teutonia--contrary to Dyck's assertion in "Kansas Promotional Activities with Particular Reference to Mennonites," 40-41.

⁴⁹ A. E. Sheldon, "The Mennonite 'Einwanderung' to Nebraska," The Mennonite, LII (September 21, 1937), 8.

⁵⁰ Everett Newton Dick, The Sod House Frontier, 1854-1890 (New York, 1937), 203.

⁵¹ Sheldon, "Mennonite 'Einwanderung' to Nebraska," 8.

depths ranging up to six inches. The disastrous grasshopper invasion, the corresponding fear that the grasshoppers would hatch the following spring and devour anything they might plant, and the effects of the financial crisis of 1873 led many homesteaders to offer to sell their lands at prices which were far less than the Burlington was asking for its lands. For some reason, however, the Mennonites believed that the homesteads were reserved for soldiers or those who had served in the army and were unavailable to those who did not believe in military service. Thus, thinking that the homestead land was "Soldaten Land," the Mennonites purchased their lands from the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company.⁵²

Touzalin concluded the purchase agreement with the remaining Mennonites in early October, 1874.⁵³ According to the provisions of the

⁵²J. J. Friesen, "Early Nebraska Settlers Faced Grasshopper Plague," Mennonite Weekly Review, (Newton, Kansas), April 22, 1948; J. J. Friesen, "Our Fathers Settled Here in 1874," 6-8, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁵³Apparently Touzalin first extended an offer for at least fourteen sections of land in Clay County, Nebraska, directly south of Hamilton County. The Burlington Collection includes a tentative Memorandum of Agreement dated October 3 which provided that the Burlington would erect an immigrant house for the Mennonites, would bore a well for each purchaser, would supply a guide to help locate lands and render other services free of charge, would grant \$300 to poor families and for the first two years of the ten years provided for land payments would not collect any interest from the ten poorest families providing they had not purchased more than 160 acres of land, would transport 45,000 feet of lumber free from Chicago to Sutton, Nebraska, would bring the belongings of the group from Philadelphia free of charge, would provide free transportation to the Mennonites from Lincoln to the station nearest their final location, and would provide two of the Mennonite leaders with free passes on the Burlington from Chicago to their location for one and one-half years. The Burlington was prepared to grant forty per cent reductions on the appraised land prices for cash purchases and thirty per cent reductions for lands purchased on the ten year credit plan at six per cent interest. As a guarantee that it would carry out the agreement the Burlington indicated its willingness to place \$5000

contract, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad agreed to construct a dwelling for those families who were not in a position to erect their own houses immediately and indicated that the immigrant house would remain the property of the Mennonites. Though the contract did not specify the number, the Burlington agreed to dig "wells sufficient to meet all their needs," and if several families living together would prefer it, to erect wells with windmills and tanks attached, all without charge. The Burlington Railroad agreed to supply a guide who could speak both English and German and who would locate lands and provide other services. All the hay the Mennonites needed for the first winter would be supplied at the Sutton railroad station for \$2.50 per ton, and if the Mennonites should need additional hay the following year, that would also be provided at the same rate. The Burlington also agreed to set aside \$1000 to construct and improve bridges and roads; to transport 250,000 feet of lumber from Chicago to their location free of charge; to provide \$1000 worth of food and clothing for poor people during the first winter or to loan them limited sums of money at five per cent interest; and to give six of the Mennonite leaders free passes on the Burlington to Chicago for one year or longer. The Burlington Railroad further promised to grant the Mennonites a fifty per cent reduction on the transportation of farming implements, cattle, household goods, and other articles; and to attempt to secure the lowest freight rates for their luggage in Philadelphia,

with Cornelius Jansen. Memorandum of Agreement between Touzalin and the Mennonites of South Russia then at Lincoln, Nebraska, October 3, 1874, Burlington Collection.

even sending an agent to help expedite the process. In the hopes of still attracting those Alexanderwohl Mennonites who had already departed for Kansas, the Burlington promised to provide free passage to "the whole of the Mennonite people now in this country . . . from Lincoln, from Topeka or wherever they may be located with their baggage and household goods." Also, the Burlington agreed to transport coal for the Mennonites at cost, to reserve for them free of charge a body of four townships wherever they desired, and to assist the poorer Mennonite families in securing the government lands in those four townships. The lands themselves were to be sold for a reduction of forty-five per cent for purchases paid in cash, for thirty-five per cent for those who paid a portion in cash, and a reduction of twenty-five per cent was given to those who purchased land on ten years credit paying six per cent interest. Finally, as assurance that the contract would be faithfully executed, the Burlington agreed to provide a sum of \$10,000 to be placed with any impartial person the Mennonites designated.⁵⁴ The contract was similar to the one the Burlington had previously extended to the Mennonites offering them lands in Clay County, except that it was more generous. Additional monies were granted to poor persons, a far greater amount of lumber was shipped free of charge for the settlers, more free passes were granted to Mennonite leaders, and the Burlington also granted reductions to persons making their en-

⁵⁴Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company contract with the Mennonites at Lincoln, Nebraska, 1874, taken from the Burlington files and quoted in full in Erb, "Influence of the Western Railroads Upon Mennonite Settlements in the United States," 31-32.

ture land payments in cash or even partially in cash. The Burlington even offered to double the guarantee that it would fulfill the contract terms.

It was evident that Touzalin was according the Mennonites preferences which the Burlington was not, according to policy, granting to other purchasers of its lands. On January 1, 1873, the Burlington liberalized its policies in Nebraska, especially those relating to payments for land purchases. Under the new conditions the settler making his land payment in cash received a twenty per cent reduction on the appraised price of the land. The settler who had chosen the long credit plan and then paid in full after one year received an eighteen per cent reduction on the appraised price, if he paid in full at the end of two years fifteen per cent was deducted, and if he paid in full after three years, ten per cent was deducted.⁵⁵ On the ten year credit plan the Mennonites were promised a reduction of twenty-five per cent without being required to pay in full after any specified number of years; if they paid a portion in cash they received a thirty-five per cent reduction; and a full payment in cash meant a forty-five per cent reduction. The contract Touzalin concluded with the Mennonites provided rates which were more than twice as generous as those provided by the stated Burlington policies, an indication of Touzalin's efforts to secure Mennonites as settlers on the Burlington lands.

Of the thirty-five original families, thirty-four purchased land

⁵⁵Overton, Burlington West, 340.

from the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad during the first year. Twelve families purchased land in Hamilton County and twenty-two families purchased land in York County.⁵⁶ Most of the purchases were for 160

⁵⁶ Somewhat puzzling are several references to a Mennonite settlement in Clay County begun at that time. The previously cited Familien-Kalender of 1878 noted that the large Mennonite colony north of Sutton lay in Hamilton and Clay Counties and had grown so fast that it extended into York County. Peter Jansen recalls that in 1875 "large settlements were started by our people in Clay and Hamilton Counties," (Memoirs, 42); the October, 1875, Zur Heimath refers to the "neuen Mennoniten-ansiedlungen in Clay County" which did not fare too well in the 1875 harvests whereas Hamilton County did; and the Daily State Journal of December 1, 1874, mentioned that the Burlington was drilling wells for the Mennonites north of Sutton in Clay County. Those references notwithstanding, it appears that no Mennonites settled in Clay County at that time. J. J. Friesen, in his voluminous writings regarding the origins of the Henderson, Nebraska, Mennonite community, never makes reference to any settlement in Clay County. The Reverend A. W. Friesen indicated to the author both in a personal interview and in a letter dated June 16, 1962, that "none of these early settlers bought land in Clay County. As stated they settled north of the Blue River with a few on the south side. The Blue river seems to be the line of demarkation [sic] up to this day between the german settlers of Clay county and the Mennonites. The germans in Clay county also came from Russia, Odessa it seems to me, but came a year or so earlier than 1874." Friesen indicated that even today there are no more than several Mennonite families residing in Clay County. The confusion may be partly explained by the fact that other German settlers in Nebraska were frequently mistaken by the press for Mennonites. Funk noted in the February, 1874, issue of the Herald of Truth, that a Lutheran colony from Odessa, Russia, which settled in southern Nebraska was erroneously referred to by the press as a Mennonite colony. The Russian colony in Clay County wrote to their friends in Russia via a Burlington circular, indicating that their lands lay from one to seven miles from Sutton and that they were of the Reformed Church ("An unsere Verwandte und Freunde in Russland!" February, 1874, Burlington promotional leaflet in Burlington Collection). One of the original land contracts between the Burlington Railroad and the Mennonite settlers noted Sutton, Clay County, as the settler's address, although the purchased land was located in Hamilton County. The Burlington operated a railroad station in Sutton, Clay County, which was the mailing address for the Mennonite settlement and likely led many to assume it was also the location of their settlement. A check of the land office records of Clay County, would, however, be necessary to clarify this matter.

acres of land, some were for less, and one family purchased 320 acres.⁵⁷ The thirty-five families purchased approximately 6000 acres of land and reserved nearly another 1000 acres for friends and relatives they expected to arrive later. Prices ranged from \$3.50 per acre for cash purchases to \$6.00 per acre on the credit plan.⁵⁸ Within the settlement the Mennonite families crowded as close together as the alternating homestead lands permitted. In only two places did the Mennonite owned land not connect at the corners with lands owned by other Mennonites. Relatives endeavored to select lands close to each other--four family heads purchased one section of land, cast lots to determine which quarter section each would buy, and then built their homes close together near the center of the section.⁵⁹ The contracts themselves specified the conditions the Burlington Railroad imposed on the Mennonite purchasers. For example, Peter Wall purchased forty acres in Hamilton County for \$4.20 per acre at six per cent interest on the ten year credit plan. Wall made his last payment in 1884 and the forty acre purchase eventually cost him \$228.48--\$168.00 for the principal and \$60.48 for interest. According to the contract, Wall agreed to improve and bring under cultivation one-tenth of the acreage each year for the first three years; not to cut any wood except for fuel or construction of

⁵⁷ J. J. Friesen, "The Number of Acres of land our fathers bought in 1874," J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁵⁸ J. J. Friesen, "Remaking a Community--Henderson, Nebraska," Mennonite Life, V (October, 1950), 10.

⁵⁹ J. J. Friesen, "The Map of the First Mennonite Settlement in 1874 in York and Hamilton County, Nebraska," 1, J. J. Friesen Collection.

buildings and fences. If Wall abided by the regulations and made his payments, he would then be given a deed to the land, although the railroad would reserve a strip of land 200 feet wide to be used for right of way or other railroad purposes. Touzalin signed the contract.⁶⁰

Establishing the Community

While still in Lincoln, most of the Mennonite families in the process of purchasing Burlington lands also bought horses, cows, oxen, harnesses, wagons, cook stoves and other household equipment. Those who had purchased teams and wagons loaded them with the accumulated merchandise, and drove across the prairies to the immigrant house which the Burlington Railroad was constructing for the Mennonites in accordance with the contract. Young men and older boys drove the cows behind the teams while the older people, women and children followed several days later on the Burlington Railroad. Arriving in Sutton they were met by the men and boys and went on to the immigrant house, twelve miles north and four miles east of Sutton. One mile east from the present village of Henderson, the Burlington built the immigrant house in the center of the area within which the Mennonites purchased their lands. Some of the homesteaders and residents of Sutton helped to transport the 207 Mennonites to the immigrant home, where they arrived on October 14, 1874.⁶¹ The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad transported free the eight carloads of lumber the immigrant home re-

⁶⁰Contract No. 8503 of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska with Peter Wall, October 20, 1874, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁶¹Friesen, "Our Fathers Settled Here in 1874," 2-4, J. J. Friesen Collection.

quired,⁶² but when the Mennonites arrived the home was not quite completed and carpenters were still shingling the roof.⁶³ The home was a large frame building, 24 feet wide and 80 feet long, without any interior partitions. Tar paper covered the walls but not the ceiling, and the rafters, studdings and joints were exposed to view. The floor was made of wide, smooth boards⁶⁴ and the entire building rested on blocks above the ground. Each family was assigned a certain location in the building according to the number in the family and all had to sleep on the floor. Stoves were set up outside to do the cooking. Not all the Mennonites could find room in the immigrant home and some moved into houses which had been built by earlier settlers but had been vacated for the winter. As soon as everyone was temporarily housed, the men and older boys began to build their individual homes, leaving early every morning from the immigrant home. Most of the first dwellings were made of sod. A common size home had walls eight feet high and about two and one-half feet thick, was thirty-two feet long and approximately twenty feet wide. A few settlers with ample funds built frame houses and although everyone succeeded in getting his home ready for the winter, a few families spent the first winter in the deserted homes of settlers and homesteaders.⁶⁵

⁶² A. E. Touzalin to Charles E. Perkins, November 14, 1874, Burlington Collection.

⁶³ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 9, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁶⁴ Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," The York Republican, August 12, 1937.

⁶⁵ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 9-14, J. J. Friesen Collection.

Despite the fact that the Mennonites received valuable assistance from the Burlington Railroad and from their homesteading neighbors, the first winter was a difficult one. Most of the original settlers were poor and purchased their lands on credit.⁶⁶ One of them reported in a letter to Zur Heimath that machinery was scarce, there was little opportunity for earning extra money, and that the people were generally poor.⁶⁷ During the first winter, Iowa Mennonites shipped three tons of apples, 240 heads of cabbage, 175 sacks of flour, 82 sacks of wheat, two sacks of oats, 82 sacks of corn, and potatoes to their beleaguered brethren in southeastern Nebraska. The foodstuffs had all been donated by the Iowa Mennonites and were shipped free of any freight charges by the Burlington Railroad to Sutton, Nebraska.⁶⁸

Even prior to their departure for America the Alexanderwohl congregation recognized that there were some poor families in their midst who would be unable to finance their migration. On February 11, 1874, they instituted a treasury into which the wealthy paid cash according to their ability. The funds in the treasury were then loaned, without interest, to the neediest families. Approximately \$8,486.25 was paid into the treasury and by January, 1875, \$7,610.63 had been loaned to needy individuals. Records were kept in a "Schnurbuch" (Cordbook) so

⁶⁶ A. W. Friesen, personal interview with the author in Henderson, Nebraska, June 19, 1962.

⁶⁷ Anonymous, "Aus Nebraska," Zur Heimath, February, 1875. Mennonite frugality in purchases and trading even became the subject of a short newspaper account in the Daily State Journal, October 11, 1874.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, "Dankabstaltung," Zur Heimath, May, 1875.

constructed that it was easy to determine if anyone had meddled with the records.⁶⁹ The "Schnurbuch" reveals that of the original thirty-five settlers in the Henderson area, thirteen borrowed money from their own congregation.⁷⁰

The grasshopper invasion of 1874 which proved so treacherous to the midwestern states actually aided the Mennonite immigrants. The previous year the grasshoppers had filled the ground with their eggs and many homesteaders feared that they would hatch in the spring and continue to molest the crops. As spring approached, some homesteaders brought some sod out of the field, heated it, and to their dismay found that the grasshoppers hatched. Convinced of the futility of planting crops, many homesteaders were willing to rent their plowed fields to the Mennonites for one dollar per acre. The spring, however, was cold and rainy. The greater part of the grasshopper eggs were destroyed and those that hatched were small and soon died.⁷¹ Most of the Mennonite immigrants had rented homesteader's lands, however, and all who sowed seed in 1875 harvested a small crop--sufficient for bread and feed--and thus the Mennonite farmers were aided by the willingness of the homesteaders to rent their lands.⁷²

⁶⁹Gingerich, "The Alexanderwohl 'Schnurbuch,'" # 45.

⁷⁰The Alexanderwohl "Schnurbuch," located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.

⁷¹J. J. Friesen, "Jotting Incidences on the Way to America in 1874 & here in Pioneer Life," J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁷²Friesen, "Early Nebraska Settlers Faced Grasshopper Plague," Mennonite Weekly Review, April 22, 1948; Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 19-24, J. J. Friesen Collection.

Touzalin quickly began to follow through in fulfilling the terms of the agreement. The Burlington Railroad provided a man with well digging equipment who drilled a well for each settler who had purchased land from the Burlington Railroad. The settler assisted with two men and his team of horses, and frequently his neighbors pitched in as well. The wells were approximately ninety to one hundred feet deep and gave good water.⁷³

Correspondence Burlington officials at the Boston headquarters soon received, however, indicated that all was not well with the new Mennonite settlement. After leading a group of Russian Mennonites in a survey of Union Pacific and Burlington Railroad lands in Nebraska, J. J. Rochussen returned to Minnesota where he was living when Touzalin requested his assistance in immigration matters. Rochussen declined the offer and took it upon himself to write to John H. Dennison, Secretary-Treasurer of the Burlington and Missouri in Boston,⁷⁴ to explain that "great discontent" prevailed among the Russian-German Mennonites who had settled north of Sutton. The discontent, Rochussen felt, stemmed from the 1874 agreement embodying "extravagantly favorable conditions" which Touzalin had concluded with the Mennonites and which he had not kept after the first year.⁷⁵ Touzalin extended identical terms

⁷³Friesen, "Recollections on our Journey in 1874 and of Pioneer Life," 5, J. J. Friesen Collection; Anonymous, "The Mennonites of Clay County," The Daily State Journal, December 1, 1874.

⁷⁴Dennison was serving as Secretary-Treasurer in 1858 and continued in that position for some time. He was also active in organizing town-site companies in Iowa and Nebraska. Overton, Burlington West, 108, 183, 285-288.

⁷⁵J. J. Rochussen to John H. Dennison, May 15, 1875, Burlington Collection.

to the Mennonites who might come in 1875,⁷⁶ and Isaak Peters accordingly wrote numerous letters to Russia in an attempt to interest future Mennonite immigrants in purchasing land from the Burlington Railroad. Peters, like Cornelius Jansen, had been expelled by the Russian government. He had arrived in the settlement on January 6, 1875, and settled two miles west and three and one-half miles south of the immigrant house on land near the Little Blue River⁷⁷ which was given to him free by the Burlington Railroad.⁷⁸ Peters' arrival had been quite unexpected but he immediately became the elder and leader of the entire settlement.⁷⁹ In his letters to Russia Peters explained the conditions Touzalin had extended to those Mennonites who would come in 1875, emphasizing the fine climate and lands which made Nebraska "the best state."⁸⁰ In one of those letters Peters admitted that deep well water was a hindrance, but pointed to the wonderful American machinery which obviated the problem. Peters also mentioned that four families had returned from Minnesota and had taken land in Nebraska. Peters felt that

⁷⁶ A. E. Touzalin to Isaak Peters, February 1, 1875, Burlington Collection. In the letter Touzalin also promised to assist the poor families by building wells for them and releasing them from any land payments for two years.

⁷⁷ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 15-17; Friesen, "The Car Procession and Sight Seeing Trip to Some of the Corners of the Land on Which our Fathers Settled in 1874," 9, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁷⁸ A. W. Friesen, personal interview with the author in Henderson, Nebraska, June 19, 1962.

⁷⁹ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 21, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁸⁰ Isaak Peters to Leonhard Sudermann, September 13, 1875, J. J. Friesen Collection.

the only major difference among the various states was climate--those preferring cold climates could go north, those partial to hotter climates could go south, and those favoring a moderate climate could choose a middle state such as Nebraska. Hard work and trust in God would mean success no matter where the immigrants would settle, although Peters wondered whether Kansas could escape droughts and noted that Minnesota's winters were very severe.⁸¹ Some Mennonites did come to Nebraska as a result of Peters' letters and became disillusioned when Touzalin's promises remained unfulfilled, especially those relating to the boring of wells. The settlers began to ask Peters "where are all thy promises?" Because they communicated their discontent to their friends and relatives still in Russia, Peters expected that though some Mennonite immigrants would still come to Nebraska, a large group could hardly be expected.⁸² According to Rochussen, Touzalin had not paid the cost of boring five wells, had not granted the rebate on a few cars of lumber and on several occasions had not waived small sums of purchase money. Rochussen encouraged Dennison to investigate the situation and informed him that he was refusing Touzalin's offer of employment because Touzalin was "so changeable, so wild in his ideas, so prone to abandon plans after having only just commenced to work them out, so uncertain as to temper and so arrogant and domineering."⁸³

⁸¹ Isaak Peters to Leonhard Sudermann, September 13, 1875, J. J. Friesen Collection. Sudermann was planning to emigrate to America and came in 1876, settling in Kansas. He had been a member of the committee of twelve which visited North America in 1873.

⁸² Isaak Peters to Cornelius Jansen, March 17, 1876, Burlington Collection.

⁸³ J. J. Rochussen to John N. Dennison, May 15, 1875, Burlington Collection.

George Tyson of the Burlington's Boston office acknowledged Rochussen's letter, expressing regret that the Mennonites were discontented and promising that attention would be given to the matter.⁸⁴

Rochussen also wrote Touzalin and respectfully declined to work with him because "the feeling among the Sutton Mennonites about your breach of the contract you so rashly concluded with them in 1874 is too strong." Rochussen indicated that when the immigrants had asked Touzalin to have the freight on wheat reduced he had done nothing, but when they had written Dennison concerning the matter the concession had been promptly granted.⁸⁵

The following year a young Catholic priest, Father Lechlestner, reported to Touzalin on the Mennonite situation in Peters' congregation.⁸⁶ He ventured the opinion that the Mennonites were being "troubled by outsiders," and suggested Rochussen, who had had previous dealings with the Union Pacific land department, as a possibility. Lechlestner in-

⁸⁴George Tyson to J. J. Rochussen, May 25, 1875, Burlington Collection.

⁸⁵J. J. Rochussen to A. E. Touzalin, May 15, 1875, Burlington Collection.

⁸⁶Rochussen, aware of Touzalin's plans to have Lechlestner assist him in promoting Catholic immigration to Nebraska had earlier advised Touzalin to be wary of relying on the "energetic but indiscreet" young priest. Rochussen urged Touzalin not to give Lechlestner a season's pass on the Burlington's lines, not to send him to Chicago to meet a group of Franciscans, nor to send him to Russia as an agent of the Burlington land department. Rochussen thought Lechlestner to be "very unpopular with his fellow priests by reason of his . . . conceit," and advised Touzalin to deal with any prospective Catholic immigrants himself, although it might be useful to give Lechlestner a salary to stand alongside "with his mouth shut." J. J. Rochussen to A. E. Touzalin, May 15, 1875, Burlington Collection.

formed Touzalin that the Union Pacific had offered the Mennonite settlers near Sutton favorable terms if they would purchase Union Pacific lands and would furthermore make good any losses the Mennonites might sustain by selling out at Sutton. Moreover, some of the Mennonites believed that the Burlington Railroad was favoring Jansen and his friends in Jefferson County by charging them lower freight rates. Lechlestner saw an additional contributing cause to the general dissatisfaction in Isaak Peters, "the unruly soul in the settlement."⁸⁷

In the past Isaak Peters had been the cause of a considerable amount of dissension. As Preacher and elder of his congregation in Russia, Peters maintained strict and rigorous requirements, exercising such strict church discipline that a division developed in the congregation from which Peters was finally expelled shortly before he emigrated to America. The Russian government expelled him too, because he advocated non-resistance and emigration. Arriving in Nebraska in 1875, Peters was chosen elder of the Bethesda Mennonite Church but by 1880 he withdrew with a minority of the congregation to organize a new church.⁸⁸ It is entirely possible that some of Peters' religious disagreements with his fellow Mennonites may have caused him to blame Touzalin and the Burlington Railroad for some difficulties; nevertheless, it seems clear that Touzalin was somewhat lax in fulfilling all the provisions of the 1874 agreement and the extension of its provisions to

⁸⁷Ferd. Lechlestner to A. E. Touzalin, April 24, 1876, Burlington Collection.

⁸⁸H. F. Epp, "Isaak Peters," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, IV, 153.

later Mennonite immigrants. According to the contract, for example, the immigrant house the Burlington had constructed in the center of the community was to be the property of the Mennonites and for some years the Mennonites did use the building in summers for a church meeting place, but during the winters they met in the warmer homes of settlers. The Burlington finally sold the immigrant house to one of the Mennonite settlers who transported it to his farm and for a time the Mennonites continued to use one-half of it for their church.⁸⁹

An incident which occurred during one of the first years of the settlement evidenced the continued rivalry between the various states and land agents for the Mennonite settlers. One of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite immigrants, Gerhard Petker, built his sod house in a low basin in York County. A heavy spring rain threatened to flood the home and Petker's family was evacuated by another of the Mennonite settlers living nearby. The home was flooded and the mud walls collapsed. When news of the event reached Kansas, some of the settlers and land agents there wrote to Mennonites still in Russia indicating that most of the entire Mennonite settlement in Nebraska had been "drowned out by a flood."⁹⁰

In 1867 the town of Henderson sprang up in the midst of the Mennonite settlement, approximately one mile west of the immigrant house.

⁸⁹Friesen, "The Landseeking Expedition in 1872 and Incidents on Their Way to America & in Pioneer Life," 8, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁹⁰Friesen, "The Map of the First Mennonite Settlement in 1874 in York and Hamilton County, Nebraska," 2, J. J. Friesen Collection.

It was named after one of the original homesteaders, David Henderson, who homesteaded in Henderson township in 1866.⁹¹

For a number of years additional Mennonites from Russia joined the small settlement and the Mennonites slowly purchased the land from the homesteaders situated among them--generally paying about \$25 to \$30 per acre of land in the early years--until the Henderson community became almost exclusively Mennonite. At the present time, in the town of Henderson which has a population of approximately 750, there are at most two or three non-Mennonite families. The surrounding area too is almost completely Mennonite--for ten miles to the east of Henderson, five miles south, eight miles north, and ten miles west.⁹² Though Congressional legislation never provided the solid Mennonite communities the immigrants had desired, the growing prosperity of the immigrants and the passage of time eventually achieved the same result.

⁹¹J. J. Friesen, "Why This Historical Marker?" Mennonite Weekly Review, September 8, 1937.

⁹²A. W. Friesen, personal interview with the author in Henderson, Nebraska, June 19, 1962.

Chapter VII

THE BURLINGTON ATTRACTS AND LOSES OTHER MENNONITES

Competition for the Burlington

Competition for the Mennonite immigrants remained keen throughout the 1870's. Disturbed at the Burlington's success in settling Mennonite immigrants on its Nebraska lands, in 1875 the Union Pacific Railroad Company made a concerted effort to secure Mennonite settlers for its own lands. Convinced that the immigrating Mennonites had never properly investigated its lands, the Union Pacific invited the Mennonite Executive Aid Committee to send a delegation to inspect the Union Pacific lands in Nebraska. Six men made the journey and viewed Union Pacific lands north of Columbus and in other localities. They found the land extremely productive and discovered that wells needed to be only ten to twenty feet deep before "excellent drinking water" was found. The land prices ranged from two to ten dollars per acre and the Union Pacific offered either a ten per cent reduction for cash payments or a ten year credit plan. The Union Pacific also promised liberal freight reductions, even if the Mennonites would purchase government lands. Elder Isaak Peters of the York and Hamilton County Mennonite settlement accompanied the delegation for part of the journey and was also favorably impressed with the Union Pacific lands. The delegates were enthusiastic enough to utilize the Herald of Truth to encourage the immigrating Mennonites to view the Union Pacific lands which were "as rich as, and more favorably located than, any of the unsettled

lands which we saw on this or any other trip through the West,"¹

The Union Pacific, the Santa Fe, other western railroads, and the Canadian province of Manitoba continued their efforts to attract the incoming Mennonite immigrants. The Burlington Railroad also faced competition from Brazil and other South American republics who endeavored to entice Mennonites and other Russian colonists to their shores.² Brazil, for example, was offering prospective settlers free transportation to Brazil, free lands, freedom of religion, exemption from taxation for ten years, daily rations for one year, the right for settlers to elect their own municipal officers, schoolhouses in each district, and lumber for the erection of houses. Each family was also offered two mules, two stock hogs, poultry, two shovels and similar implements with payment to be made in five annual installments without interest. Such offers, Touzalin realized, he was in no position to match. But he was confident that the western states of America offered superior advantages to prospective settlers and that if the Burlington Railroad adopted proper measures it could secure for Nebraska "the best class of these people who are migrating or about to migrate."³

First Mennonite Settlers

Though Touzalin continued his efforts to settle more Mennonites

¹John Shenk, et al., "A Trip to the Far West," Herald of Truth, September, 1875.

²Ferd. Lechlestner to A. E. Touzalin, April 24, 1876, Burlington Collection.

³A. E. Touzalin to Charles E. Perkins, June 17, 1878, Burlington Collection.

on the Burlington lands the settlements in Jefferson and Gage County and Hamilton and York County were the only major Burlington successes. The Burlington had little influence on the first Mennonites who settled in Nebraska, most of whom moved there from their homes in the eastern states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa. In 1870 or 1871, Henry Yother, a Pennsylvania bishop in the Old Mennonite Church, settled in Gage County, Nebraska. By the end of 1871 there was only one additional Mennonite in the area beside Yother.⁴ An Old Mennonite settlement was begun in 1873 west of Milford in Seward County. On April 3, 1873, three Ohio Mennonite families settled there,⁵ and soon eight additional Amish Mennonite families arrived from Illinois.⁶ Though some of the early settlers in Seward County purchased their land from the Burlington Railroad,⁷ most of them bought land from homesteaders already in the region, paying from six to nine dollars per acre.⁸ The congregation grew slowly--in 1878 there were fifty-five members⁹

⁴C. Henry Smith, The Mennonites of America (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1909), 289; John F. Funk, "Bro. Henry Yother," Herald of Truth, January, 1872. Mennonites represent many different conference groupings, the largest of which is the Old Mennonite conference. The second largest group are the General Conference Mennonites, and the great majority of the Mennonite immigrants in the 1870's are now numbered in that group. Some also represented the Mennonite Brethren conference.

⁵Schmidt, "The Mennonites of Nebraska," 67; Erb, "Influence of Western Railroads Upon Mennonite Settlements in the United States," 34.

⁶Eugene Phillip Clemens, "Origin and Early History of the Mennonite Church in Nebraska," Mennonite Historical Bulletin, XVII (January, 1956), 1.

⁷Erb, "Influence of Western Railroads Upon Mennonite Settlements in the United States," 34.

⁸Schmidt, "The Mennonites of Nebraska," 67.

⁹Erb, "Influence of Western Railroads Upon Mennonite Settlements in the United States," 34.

and approximately twenty-one families in the area. They were well satisfied with the land which could be purchased for from six to fifteen dollars per acre in 1877. Living only twenty-two miles from Lincoln, the state capitol, the Mennonites had access to good markets and their thirty to eighty foot wells produced good water.¹⁰ In the 1880's those early settlers were joined by additional Mennonites who settled mainly in western counties where cheaper lands were available than in the eastern counties which were being settled with great rapidity.¹¹

The Wiebe Group

The Mennonite migration was at its peak during 1874 when nearly 6,500 immigrants arrived in the United States.¹² In addition to settling the Kleine Gemeinde and the Alexanderwohl Mennonites on its lands during that summer, the Burlington also attempted to sell its lands to a group of Mennonites under the leadership of Jacob A. Wiebe. But the Nebraska nemesis, deep well water, was the reason that Wiebe gave for choosing to settle in Kansas rather than in Nebraska. The group had left Russia on May 30, 1874, and arrived in New York on July 15, 1874.¹³ At the time that Wiebe and the approximately twenty-four families in

¹⁰N. J. Petersheim to Editor of Herald of Truth, March 16, 1877, Herald of Truth, May, 1877.

¹¹Clemens, "Origin and Early History of the Mennonite Church in Nebraska," 1.

¹²Leibbrandt, "Emigration of German Mennonites," II, 28.

¹³Jacob A. Wiebe, "The Founding of Gnadenu, " Krahn, ed., From the Steppes to the Prairies, 98-99.

his group arrived in New York, Cornelius and Peter Jansen were also in the city and persuaded Wiebe to temporarily leave his followers in Elkhart, Indiana, until suitable lands for settlement had been located in Nebraska or other states.¹⁴ The families remained in Elkhart in homes John F. Funk provided for them while Wiebe and another member of the party went west to investigate lands. Though they travelled throughout Nebraska they finally decided to locate in Kansas because there wells were shallow. Since the members of the group were not particularly wealthy Wiebe felt that if they would remain in Nebraska the expenses connected with drilling deep wells would prove a real hardship. Until the transaction with C. B. Schmidt for Santa Fe lands in Kansas was concluded, however, Schmidt feared that the Mennonites would still decide to locate in Nebraska. As for many of the Mennonite immigrants, the first years were trying ones for Wiebe's group, and Cornelius Jansen loaned the settlers \$1000 to assist them in their beginnings.¹⁵

The Hutterian Brethren

The Burlington and Missouri also attempted to settle a large colony of Hutterian Brethren on its Nebraska lands in the summer of 1874. The Hutterian Brethren had originated in Austria as part of the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century and have continued to practice non-resistance and the community of goods in colonies they have established in England and in North and South America. The American press commonly

¹⁴Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, July 20, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection.

¹⁵Wiebe, "Founding of Gnadenau," 99-101.

regarded the Hutterites as Mennonites, though that was technically not true. In 1874 Peter Jansen informed the Daily State Journal that though the Hutterites had some of the distinguishing characteristics of Mennonites, they were not "regular Mennonites."¹⁶ A group of Hutterite Brethren arrived on the S. S. Hammonia in New York City on July 19, 1874, and the approximately eighty families proceeded immediately to Nebraska under the charge of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad.¹⁷ The group of approximately 250 adults and 150 children arrived in Lincoln on July 22, 1874, and the 400 Hutterites filled nine railroad coaches and one baggage car. The Burlington Railroad housed the immigrants in the Lincoln immigrant house, in the fairground buildings, and at an old "Union House,"¹⁸ while the Burlington land agents showed the group its lands, especially 10,000 to 15,000 acres south of the Platte River.¹⁹ At first, the Hutterites were quite pleased with the Nebraska lands where they planned to settle. While the leaders were viewing the various Burlington lands the group made only the most necessary purchases in Lincoln, even though they appeared to be amply supplied with cash--the New York Herald had reported that the colony brought \$120,000 in gold along with them. In addition to farmers;

¹⁶ Anonymous, "More Russians," The Daily State Journal, August 4, 1874.

¹⁷ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, July 20, 1874, July 21, 1874, and July 22, 1874, Bernhard Warkentin Collection; John F. Funk, "The Russian Emigration," Herald of Truth, August, 1874.

¹⁸ Anonymous, "A Big Accession," The Daily State Journal, July 23, 1874.

¹⁹ The Beatrice Express, July 30, 1874.

mechanics, carpenters, blacksmiths, tinsmiths and shoemakers were found in the group, all intending to practice the community of goods in the Nebraska colony they planned to establish.²⁰ A large portion of the Hutterites soon decided, however, that the Dakota Territory where their friends had already settled, was more appealing than Nebraska and left by train for Dakota.²¹ An incident reported in the Daily State Journal revealed how difficult it could be for the immigrants to decide where to locate--disagreements concerning the final location sometimes even split families. A father of three or four boys was determined to journey to Dakota and his wife was equally determined to remain in Nebraska. A long argument in German and Russian settled nothing. One of the colony's leaders was called, and, on the floor of the immigrant house, counted out one thousand dollars in gold coin for the husband and another thousand for the wife. After the division was made, the couple shook hands and separated, the husband boarding the Dakota bound train, his wife remaining in Nebraska with the children.²² It is likely that those who initially remained eventually also left Nebraska, for no Hutterite colonies were ever established in Nebraska, and the Nebraska newspapers did not mention that any Hutterites remained in Nebraska. When the first group of Alexanderwohl Mennonites arrived in Lincoln the Daily State Journal commented that "they are a

²⁰ Anonymous, "The Mennonites," The Daily State Journal, July 29, 1874.

²¹ Anonymous, "Bound to Dakota," The Daily State Journal, August 8, 1874.

²² Anonymous, "A Russian Divorce," The Daily State Journal, August 15, 1874.

better looking class of people than the blue-jacket men and women who were here a short time since [Hutterites], and who went up to enjoy the barrenness and inviting insalubrity of Dakota."²³

Statistics

Though there is no available evidence of any Burlington influence, two additional small Mennonite groups settled in Nebraska in the early 1870's. Two families settled in Knox County in the northern part of the state near the Missouri River, reporting that they had "good land, well watered and timbered," and that government land was available as were homestead claims which could be purchased for from \$100 to \$300.²⁴ According to a report by the Mennonite Board of Guardians, fourteen families from Jacob Buller's group also settled in Nebraska in the fall of 1874. The families were not members of the Alexanderwohl congregation, but had merely traveled with the group. They settled on government land in Franklin County, and, finding the initial going difficult, requested financial aid from the Board of Guardians.²⁵

The Mennonite Board of Guardians estimated that approximately eighty Mennonite immigrant families, numbering over 400 persons, had chosen to make their homes in Nebraska by the fall of 1874.²⁶ The ensuing years brought more Mennonite immigrants to Nebraska, but the later

²³The Daily State Journal, September 5, 1874.

²⁴Herald of Truth, March, 1875.

²⁵Krehbiel, "Second Report of the Mennonite Board of Guardians," Herald of Truth, November, 1874.

²⁶Ibid., 180.

arrivals tended to locate in the general area where their friends and neighbors had earlier settled--often on the excess land the earlier settlers had purchased or reserved, or on lands purchased from other settlers, the government, or the railroad. In 1875 at least twenty additional families chose to settle in Nebraska,²⁷ and additional persons came in 1876,²⁸ 1877,²⁹ and later years. Of the ten thousand Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to America during the Mennonite migration wave of 1873 to 1883, approximately one-half chose Kansas as their new home. The other five thousand Mennonites located in Nebraska, Dakota, and Minnesota.³⁰ Thus, Touzalin had been unable to secure for Nebraska the number of Mennonite settlers that he so ardently desired. Yet those Mennonites who did settle in Nebraska represented the successful colonization efforts of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad and its chief Nebraska land agent, A. E. Touzalin.

²⁷ John F. Funk, "The Emigration from Russia," Herald of Truth, September, 1875.

²⁸ A. E. Funk, "Russian Emigration," Herald of Truth, August, 1876; John Shenk, "Arrival of the Vaterland," Herald of Truth, September, 1876.

²⁹ John F. Funk, "The Russian Emigration," Herald of Truth, August, 1877.

³⁰ Leibbrandt, "Emigration of Russian Mennonites," II, 33.

Chapter VIII

THE BURLINGTON, THE MENNONITES, AND NEBRASKA--CONCLUSIONS

The preceding chapters have focused on the various attempts of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska, in competition with other western land grant railroads and foreign countries, to secure Mennonite settlers for its Nebraska lands. An attempt will be made here to place those activities and their results in their proper perspective.

The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad was very active in promoting foreign emigration to America and its foreign advertising was undoubtedly responsible for many immigrants who landed at Castle Garden. But although the Mennonite settlements in Nebraska represented the successful colonization efforts of the Burlington, the total Mennonite migration did not. Neither the Burlington nor any western land grant railroad was responsible for the decision of the Russian Mennonites to migrate to the United States in the 1870's. The Mennonites were prospering in Russia and had the Tsar not revoked their special privileges there would have been no reason for them to migrate. Once the exodus was underway not all the Mennonites who migrated were motivated solely because their religious freedoms were jeopardized--some went also for adventure, to escape from crowded conditions, for a new start in a new land. But the stimulus for the great migration was the abrogation of the religious guarantees the Mennonites enjoyed in Russia, and had that not occurred, few would have departed. Moreover, the committee of twelve which investigated conditions in North America made no firm contracts

or commitments. Consequently, almost all the Mennonites who left Russia did not come to America planning to settle on the Burlington lands, the Santa Fe lands, or any other railroad lands. They merely came, leaving the decision concerning their exact location to be settled after their arrival.

However, the fact that such a large number of the immigrants chose to settle in the United States rather than in Canada suggests that the western land grant railroads did exert some influence in the choice of the general area of settlement. All the conditions which the Mennonites deemed essential--cheap, fertile land, closed communities, religious guarantees, economy of transportation--were available in fuller measure in Canada than in the United States, yet over half of the migrating Mennonites settled in the United States. The presence of many Mennonites in the eastern United States partly explains that decision, but the inviting terms on good lands which the western land grant railroads offered were also of some importance. The extent of the railroads' influence in that regard, however, is extremely difficult to measure.

The various western railroads with large land grants at their disposal viewed the influx of thousands of Mennonite immigrants with great anticipation. But conditions for the Burlington Railroad were far from propitious when the Mennonite immigration began. Following their investigation of the Burlington and Missouri's and the Union Pacific's land grants in 1873, none of the committee of twelve had favored locating in Nebraska. Though the lands appeared to be fertile, they had sparse grass cover, little timber, and jealously guarded the water deposits. Any Mennonites the Burlington would secure as settlers on its

lands would be attracted only by convincing advertising and salesmanship. The Burlington's task was made more difficult by the Mennonite tendency to settle where their co-religionists had preceded them, and some of the first Mennonite immigrants had settled in Kansas in January of 1874. For that, the chief Burlington land agent, A. E. Touzalin, had only himself to blame, for while employed by the Santa Fe he had secured those first settlers for Kansas. His wise selection of C. B. Schmidt as a Santa Fe agent also hampered later Burlington efforts as Schmidt ably carried forward the colonization work of the Santa Fe after Touzalin resigned to join the Burlington staff. The Mennonite desire to settle together was quite understandable. The Mennonite immigrants were strangers in a strange land. They did not understand the language of their new neighbors, they had to remain constantly alert so that no one would take advantage of them, and they were faced with new farming problems, new pests, and new diseases. Their financial resources were frequently meager, and their faith was often tested to the limit.¹ It was only natural that they desired to be among those of their own number. Thus, Kansas and the Santa Fe had a decided advantage over other states and railroads because the first Mennonite immigrants who located there were reasonably satisfied with their lot.

To be sure, there had been Mennonite settlers in Nebraska when the great migration began, but their influence on the coming of any Mennonite immigrants to Nebraska was of no real significance. Their number

¹Melvin Gingerich, "The Reactions of the Russian Mennonite Immigrants of the 1870's to the American Frontier," Mennonite Quarterly Review, XXXIV, (April, 1960), 138.

was very small, they were members of a different Mennonite conference group, and they had settled on government and homestead land in counties other than those where the Burlington Railroad owned the lands it was offering for sale.

Peter Jansen's decision to purchase Burlington lands in Nebraska in the fall of 1874 was an important one to the Burlington and Missouri. Not only was he influential in the decision of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites to purchase Burlington lands but the presence of Peter and Cornelius Jansen on the Burlington's Nebraska lands gave the company a certain stature and respectability. Cornelius Jansen had been one of the first Mennonites in Russia to advocate emigration to America. His efforts had been so alarmingly effective that the Russian government found it necessary to exile him. That he and his family located on the Burlington's Nebraska lands was a strong talking point for Burlington agents. Peter Jansen's interest in settling Mennonite immigrants in Nebraska also proved beneficial to the Burlington. Many of the Jansens' friends and relatives came to Nebraska to view the Burlington lands at their suggestion, and Peter Jansen served Touzalin well as an occasional interpreter in contract negotiations with the Mennonites and in meeting incoming immigrants in New York. The Burlington officials were wise in providing the Jansens with free railroad passes and in fulfilling their contract obligations so that the Jansens continued to boost Nebraska as a desirable place of settlement for Mennonite immigrants.

But, had it not been for the Burlington's promotional efforts, even the Jansens would probably not have settled in Nebraska. Even before Touzalin became land agent in 1874 the Burlington and Missouri had

been inviting Mennonites to settle on its lands and extending to them general propositions. Such general propositions, however, though reflecting the Burlington's interest in securing Mennonite settlers, were unlikely to have the desired results. It was the personal contact of Touzalin and other land agents with the Mennonites which proved far more effectual. It seems apparent that one of the chief reasons that the Burlington Railroad secured Mennonite settlers for its lands was that it actively and personally sought them and was not content to await their arrival as a result of general advertising. Burlington advertisements appeared in Mennonite papers and periodicals. The advertisements themselves were usually not of a general nature but frequently called attention to the Mennonite colonies already established on the Burlington's Nebraska lands, inviting prospective settlers to contact the Mennonite colonists for further information. Burlington agents in New York made every effort to supply all the Mennonite immigrants with Burlington advertising materials and to divert them to Nebraska if at all possible. The free accommodations the Burlington provided for the Mennonite immigrants enabled many of them to view the Nebraska lands even when they were uncertain if they intended to settle there permanently. The free housing in Lincoln the Burlington provided for over one thousand Mennonites for over three weeks in 1874 testified to the zeal with which the Burlington Railroad sought Mennonite settlers for its lands. Finally, the liberal terms the Burlington gave the Mennonites for cash and credit purchases--more liberal than those it was offering other settlers according to its stated company policies--further evidenced their specific attempts to procure

the Mennonites as settlers.

The Burlington and Missouri did not, of course, concentrate only on securing Mennonites as settlers on its lands. Its agents endeavored to colonize persons of other ethnic and religious backgrounds as well. But, for Touzalin and other Burlington officials, the Mennonites represented the best settlers that could be secured. In 1878, with several hectic years of colonization activities already behind him, Touzalin wrote the Burlington Vice-President, Charles E. Perkins, to report on the various settlers.

The Russo-German population in the Southern portion of Russia consists of over one million people. They belong to five sects, ranking in point of agricultural worth as well as wealth in the following order: Mennonites, Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics. The first two classes are especially a people possessing in a high degree the characteristics of industry, frugality, and temperance, and rank among the best farmers in the world. No better people in the world could be found for utilizing every acre of land in the various districts which they may settle, and wherever they may go, a dense population, producing a large export surplus will be the results of their location.²

In the letter, Touzalin averred that the Burlington had already settled approximately three thousand Russian settlers on its lands who were in a "contented and prosperous condition partly from the aid given them by the company, but chiefly through their own endeavors, and are giving us active cooperation in securing their brethren in Russia." Frequently coming with few belongings and little capital, the immigrant beginnings in Nebraska were often marked by severe hard-

²A. E. Touzalin to Charles E. Perkins, June 17, 1878, Burlington Collection.

ships. To ease such initial difficulties, Touzalin proposed to Perkins that the Burlington adopt general policy measures which would at the same time insure that a large portion of the desired settlers would choose the Burlington lands. Touzalin urged that the Burlington continue its advertising campaign to bring Nebraska to the immigrants' attention, provide special rates and terms on large land areas, make loans available for the purchase of livestock and farming implements, attempt to secure the lowest possible rates of fare by ocean and railroad from Russia to Chicago, transport the immigrants' livestock, lumber, and agricultural implements from the East to Nebraska at the lowest possible rates, and transport the immigrants to Nebraska as cheaply as possible. Touzalin informed Perkins that many of those policies were already being implemented and reiterated the basic Burlington policy of furthering the future traffic interests by establishing prosperous communities rather than attempting to earn large profits through land sales.³ That policy was borne out by Touzalin's transactions with the Mennonites. If the Alexanderwohl group agreed to remain in Nebraska, Touzalin was prepared to give them free land. He arranged to have free wells dug so that the immigrant farmers would have a better start. He refunded all the fares seven Mennonite families paid on the Burlington in 1875 when they joined the Kleine Gemeinde settlement even though they purchased no land themselves.

The Burlington officials were well aware that they had not been

³A. E. Touzalin to Charles E. Perkins, June 17, 1878, Burlington Collection.

as successful in colonizing Mennonites as they had hoped, but they were well satisfied with those settlers they had secured. Professor James D. Butler, in a pamphlet explaining how the Mennonites utilized prairie grass for fuel, concluded that of all the Mennonite immigrants "the best class have made their homes in Nebraska, and in that State are to be found the most prosperous colonies."⁴ Thus, the early realization by Burlington officials of the desirability of securing Mennonite settlers, the carefully planned and executed advertising campaign directed specifically to them, the willingness to change state laws if necessary to provide more appealing conditions, the extremely liberal financial terms offered, and the great ability of Touzalin all contributed to the Burlington's success in settling some Mennonite immigrants on its lands.

The committee of twelve in 1873 and the delegation of 1875 noted that the Union Pacific Railroad Company possessed much high quality land in Nebraska which they were prepared to sell at reduced prices. Though the reductions were not as generous as those offered by the Burlington, it is unlikely that that was the sole reason why the Burlington secured Mennonite settlers and the Union Pacific did not. The Union Pacific also advertised its lands in German pamphlets and brochures,⁵ but they were of a general nature and the Union Pacific did not make any really concentrated attempts to interest Mennonite settlers in its

⁴James Davie Butler, Cheap Fuel for the Prairies (pamphlet probably written in the late 1870's, located in the Library of Congress, Washington D. C., photostat copy in the Bethel College Historical Library).

⁵Anonymous, Land-Buch der Union Pacific Eisenbahn-Ländereien, 1874, Union Pacific promotional brochure, located in the Bethel College Historical Library.

lands until the summer of 1875. By then it was too late as most of the incoming immigrants were determined to locate where their friends and relatives had already settled. The failure of the Union Pacific to attract Mennonite settlers for its Nebraska lands while the Burlington was enjoying a modicum of success further attests to the influence of the Burlington on the coming of the Mennonites to Nebraska.

The depth of the Nebraska water level handicapped the Burlington Railroad in its efforts to conclude contracts with Mennonite immigrants. Though the free wells which the Burlington provided for the first settlers dissuaded their fears, at least one large group of potential settlers turned toward Kansas because they feared the expenses of deep wells. The expense entailed in drilling a well was an important factor for the 1874 immigrant to consider, but those who remained and purchased Nebraska lands found such an ample water supply that today nearly all the Mennonite farms in the Henderson area are irrigated from an apparently inexhaustible water supply.⁶

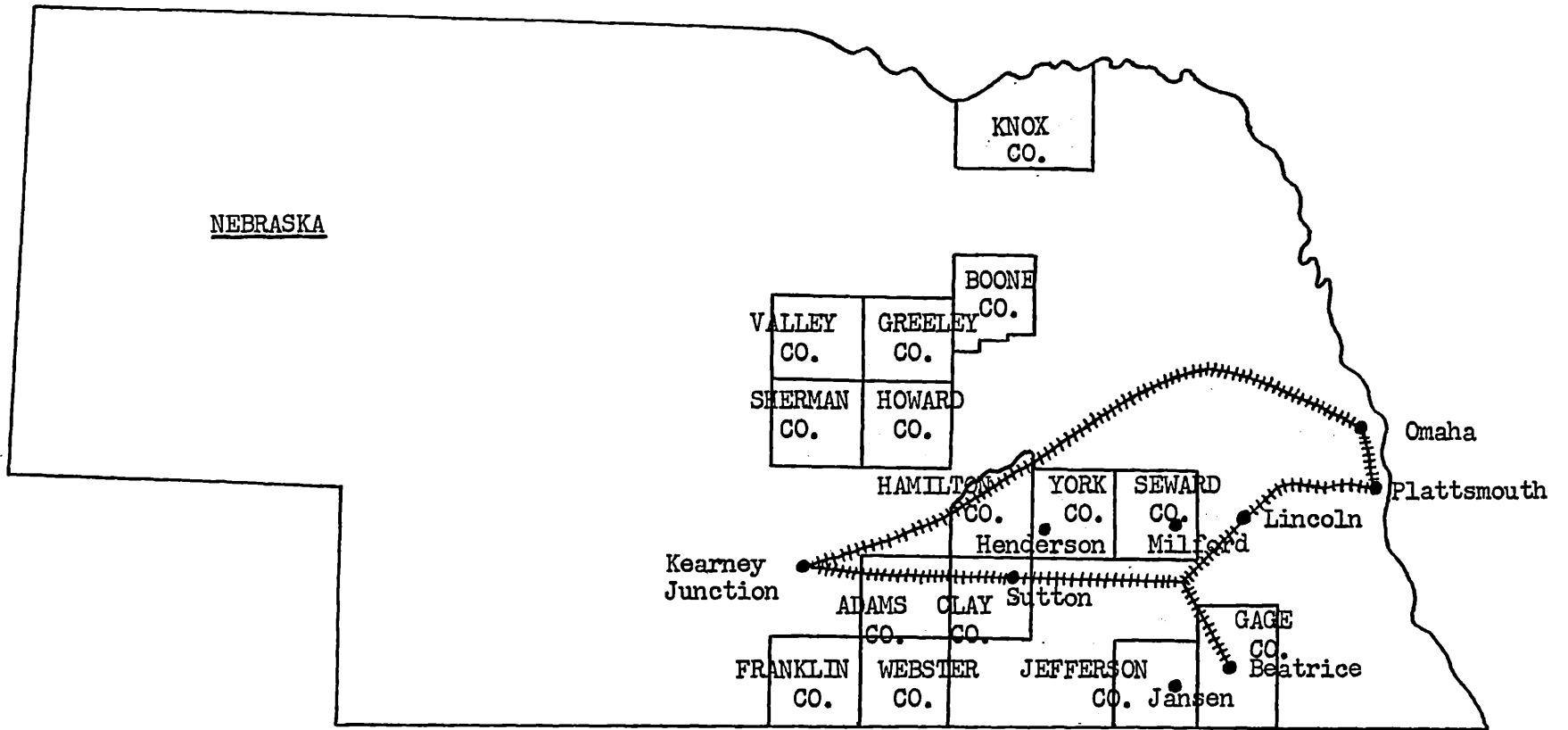
In retrospect it is also interesting that the Nebraska Mennonites succeeded in structuring closed homogeneous communities even though the United States Congress never responded to the Mennonite memorials and petitions with legislation providing the large blocks of land the Mennonites desired. In Jefferson County the Burlington sold the Mennonites the large block of land it had appropriated beyond the normal twenty mile land grant limit and the effectiveness of the Mennonites in es-

⁶ A. W. Friesen, personal interview with the author in Henderson, Nebraska, June 19, 1962.

establishing a relatively closed community can be inferred from the Beatrice Express reference to their colony as "The Russian Settlement,"⁷ and the local use of the term, "Russian Lane." In York and Hamilton Counties the Mennonites gradually purchased their neighbors' lands until they established the solidly Mennonite community presently existing.

It was coincidental that the Mennonite migration from Russia occurred at the same time that the western land grant railroads were so actively seeking immigrant settlers for their lands. The Mennonite immigrants left Russia primarily because their religious freedoms were jeopardized. They came to the United States seeking locations where they would be assured of practicing their religious beliefs, of establishing closed communities if at all possible, and of settling on fertile lands. The locations they ultimately chose within the western states of America were determined in large measure by the western railroads. The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company of Nebraska was aware of the Mennonite migration from the first. Especially because of its chief land agent, A. E. Touzalin, the Burlington envisioned the benefits of colonizing the Mennonite immigrants on its lands, and actively sought and won a sizeable number as settlers.

⁷The Beatrice Express, February 3, 1876.



Source: Report of the Directors of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska, 1873. Boston: T. R. Marvin & Son, 1874.

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