

# Sowing Hatred or Producing Prosperity: Agriculture and Believers in Post-World War II Communist Siberia

Aileen Friesen, *Conrad Grebel University College*

In 1975, an article entitled “Sowers of Rancor and Hatred” appeared in *Znamia*, the regional newspaper of the district of Isil’kul’ in the province of Omsk, Siberia. The article focused on the village of Puchkovo, which had been overwhelmed by a sinister sect, the Mennonites. The author, M. Dud’ev, described how these sectarians had gathered for the Harvest Festival (*prazdnik urozhaia*), during which time they displayed their anti-Soviet beliefs by calling on each other to “sow the seeds of joy near the blacken soil of the enemy.”<sup>1</sup> As this article lamented the pernicious influence of Mennonites in the Siberian countryside, it pointed to a real dilemma on the collective and state farms of the Isil’kul’ district – they were full of Christians, particularly Mennonite Brethren believers who were German-speaking, evangelical leaning pacifists, with a strong agricultural tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the 1950s and over the next several decades, the intersection between the state’s commitment to facilitate the growth and modernization of agriculture and the revival of reli-

gious life in the Soviet Union produced a unique dynamic on these farms. In the district of Isil'kul', Mennonites, despite claims by some to the contrary, embodied many of the characteristics prized by the state for farmworkers: hard work, honesty, and sobriety. However, their motivation for embracing such principles – their belief in God – was problematic for this atheist state.<sup>3</sup> The opposite was also true – through their hard work, Mennonites, in essence, helped to build a state that persecuted them and represented principles contrary to their religious beliefs. The ways in which both sides interpreted agricultural work and the local environment illuminates the variety of methods that each employed to cope with these seemingly incompatible positions: sometimes they used agricultural work to actively confront each other, even employing each other's rhetoric to emphasize the difference between them. At other times, Mennonites and Soviet officials turned a blind eye to these tensions, engaging in deliberate silences to the benefit of both sides. Fundamentally, however, Mennonites required the separation as well as the economic and spatial resources that rural life afforded them in order to support their community (including their large families) and religious practices, while Soviet officials needed Mennonite labour to sustain agricultural production. This encouraged toleration, although flare ups of repression on the part of state officials still regularly occurred.

The case of Mennonites living and working on the collective farms of the Soviet Union offers a unique opportunity to bridge the divide between environmental and religious history. While scholars have explored the religious interpretations of nature “as something both authentically discovered, or discoverable, and humanly constructed,”<sup>4</sup> the relationship between religiously minded groups and their environment in an agricultural setting remains understudied. Royden Loewen, whose exploration of Mennonites' complex interaction with the land through farming raises many questions on the commonalities underlying this engagement across time and space, draws attention to how Mennonites understood agriculture as a means to preserve their religious community, a sign of God's blessing, and a way to order nature.<sup>5</sup> Yet most of these global Mennonite communities controlled, either privately or collectively, the land they worked. The case of the Soviet Mennonites provides an opportunity to interrogate these themes in a context in which Mennonites had little control over the policies governing the land and animals they cared for. Despite this absence of control, fundamentally Mennonites shared similar views with state officials on the importance of education, technology, as

well as the use of fertilizers and pesticides to improve the agricultural output of the land.

Since their entrance into the Russian Empire in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, the majority of Mennonites preferred to live in farming villages. Many believed that they could only live by the values reflected in their faith in a rural setting, viewing church, agriculture, and community not as separate spheres, but rather as mutually reinforcing pillars, which facilitated a just and godly life.<sup>6</sup> August Freiherr von Haxthausen described the Mennonites he met on his 1843 trip through south Russia as a “strict” people who “regard[ed] agriculture as a religious duty from which no one is exempted, unless by absolute necessity, according to the words of the Scripture, ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.’”<sup>7</sup> Despite the religious overtones assigned to Mennonites and their views on working the land, in reality, they showed a strong deference to rational forms of agricultural practices. As David Moon has described, during the nineteenth century, Mennonites, inspired by the latest scientific studies, brought experimental and innovative approaches to the challenges of agriculture on the Ukrainian steppe, such as planting a variety of wheat, a four-field crop rotation, irrigation (rarely done outside of Asiatic Russia), and widespread tree planting.<sup>8</sup>

Mennonite appetite for agricultural land forced families to search for opportunities in new territories opened for colonization. During the late tsarist period, they quietly joined other settlers in the Great Siberian migration, in which five million pioneers left European Russia to settle the newly opened land of Siberia. Mennonites settled in two main areas: in individual villages west of Omsk and on the Kulunda steppe.<sup>9</sup> These early settlers had to adapt to the new economic and environmental challenges of the region. Unlike in Ukraine, where Mennonite farmers could plant and sell large quantities of grain quickly, Mennonites in Siberia had to deal with an underdeveloped market and with new conditions for growing crops, in which summer droughts and early autumn frosts could wipe out their harvests. The volatility of the new environment encouraged Mennonites to invest in milk cows and produce butter for the market.<sup>10</sup> Initially, Mennonites relied on local cattle. However, these cows proved disappointing and Mennonites soon began to transport purebred cattle from south Russia.<sup>11</sup>

In 1911, five Mennonite Brethren families established the village of Waldheim on 2,430 acres of land purchased from a local Cossack named Apollo Teliatnikov. The name of the village, loosely translated as “a forest home,” aptly described the local environ-

ment of birch forests that surrounded the settlement. Located approximately 160 kilometers west and slightly north of Omsk and thirty-five kilometers from the railway station of Isil'kul', the land of Waldheim (later renamed Apollonovka) is a part of an ecoregion of the forest-steppe or flat grasslands.<sup>12</sup> While the southern part of the Isil'kul' district was rich with black earth soil, the northern section, which includes Apollonovka, was characterized by the less fertile solonetzic soils with its high sodium content.<sup>13</sup> The initial Mennonite settlers to Apollonovka thrived despite the less than ideal soil conditions. After clearing the land, they planted wheat, oats, and barley.<sup>14</sup> In this settlement, they utilized a strict four crop rotation after several years of unsuccessfully experimenting with different approaches.<sup>15</sup>

With the takeover of power by the Soviet regime, Mennonites moved toward a collective model of agriculture. In 1923, the residents of Apollonovka formed an Association for the Joint Cultivation of Land (*Tovarishchestvo po sovmestnoi obrabotke zemli or TOZ*), named "Novyi kolos," in which they shared equipment while continuing to work their own land. Several years later, Soviet authorities completely reorganized agriculture through the creation of collective farms (*kolkhoz*).<sup>16</sup> In Apollonovka, collectivization began in the spring of 1930 with the arrival of communist representatives in the village who touted the benefits of the new system – no one, however signed up. In response, the state officials changed tactics, exiling two families to a northern section of Siberia, which secured the agreement of the village. At least initially, Mennonites were allowed into leadership roles on the collective farm with Heinrich Jansen serving as the chairman for most of the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> The collective was small, with only 53 men, 57 women, 25 adolescents, and 41 horses, cultivating almost 1,200 acres of arable land, on which they sowed wheat, oats, barley, millet, and peas.<sup>18</sup>

During this period, a small group of believers – approximately twenty people – kept the Mennonite Brethren church alive under the leadership of Isaak Tevs.<sup>19</sup> The diary of Margarita Pauls described how even though religious services continued to be tolerated by the state, many people simply stopped attending in the early 1930s.<sup>20</sup> Those committed to continue worshipping met in a brick prayer house, which according to a 1935 property inventory included 20 benches, 3 lamps, a pulpit, and an iron shelf.<sup>21</sup> In that year, the authorities closed the prayer house and all services stopped as local residents lived in fear of the repressive hand of the state.<sup>22</sup>

Shortages of tools, equipment, animals, and people created challenges for the re-establishment of Soviet agriculture after World War II. During the war, agricultural production had declined significantly; after the end of WWII, it would take ten years to reach its pre-war state.<sup>23</sup> To improve agricultural production, the Central Committee of the Communist Party decreed in 1950 that small collective farms would be consolidated.<sup>24</sup> In 1951, Apollonovka was joined to three other villages to form the Kirov collective farm (*kolkhoz*). Six years later, the Kirov collective farm was transformed into a branch of the Medvezhinskii state farm (*sovkhos*), which included six other branches, totalling 1,656 workers who performed duties in raising livestock, milking, and cultivating wheat, oats, barley, buckwheat, sunflowers and other crops. In 1973, another round of restructuring transferred the Kirov branch into the newly formed Novorozhdestvenskii state farm, which produced agricultural products of grain, milk, potatoes, cattle, and poultry worth approximately 1,902,686 rubles that year.<sup>25</sup>

Consolidating these farms, according to the Communist Party, would allow for the efficient use of machinery and qualified professionals in the modernization of Soviet agriculture. Nikita Khrushchev strongly supported this initiative as he focused much of his energy on addressing the Soviet grain shortage and competing more effectively with American farms.<sup>26</sup> Khrushchev believed that technology must be employed to revolutionize Soviet agriculture; only by employing new machinery, synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and new seed could yields be increased.<sup>27</sup> He also brought millions of new acres under the plough, especially in the “virgin lands” of Kazakhstan, sowing much of it with wheat, in addition to pressuring local officials to show better results in the production of meat.<sup>28</sup> Under Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet state continued to pour significant resources into Soviet agriculture, emphasizing the use of mineral fertilizers and even studying the agricultural practices of fallowing and forgoing deep ploughing utilized in western Canada to encourage higher yields.<sup>29</sup> Despite the overall disappointing results of these initiatives – Soviet agriculture would experience nearly fifteen years of stagnation beginning in 1976 – from an ideological standpoint, Soviet authorities emphasized their success in transforming rural regions into bastions of agricultural productivity, inspired by communist values.

This rebuilding of state agriculture coincided with a “spiritual awakening” in rural Siberia. In Apollonovka, Elizaveta Pauls recalled how at a meeting on 23 August 1951, seventy-nine people asked for forgiveness (*proshchenie*). At that time, believers would

gather late at night to sing hymns and pray.<sup>30</sup> This movement grew throughout the rural communities of Isil'kul', as villages filled with Mennonites started to organize religious communities, many of them under the Baptist banner.<sup>31</sup> By the late 1950s, Soviet documents indicated that the Apollonovka community had approximately 150 members, who would gather regularly for church services on Saturday night, as well as twice on Sunday, in addition to taking communion once a month. Believers organized additional events and groups to deepen their religious life, including a twenty-person choir under the leadership of Ivan Tevs.<sup>32</sup> As this awakening gained momentum, the Soviet state redoubled its efforts to once again weed out religion, and local officials began implementing Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, which included the closing of churches and renewed efforts to engage in atheist propaganda among believers.<sup>33</sup>

Over the next three decades, the strength of the evangelical church in the rural villages of Isil'kul' district continued to plague communist officials. Many of these former Mennonite villages experienced an explosion in religious activity, including the villages of Ivanovka, Margenau, Solntsevka, Nikolaipol', and Puchkovo. A 1958 report by L. Serebrennikov, the commissar of the Council for Religious Cults for Omsk province, to the chairman of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults, Aleksei Puzin, described the religious landscape of Omsk province. He acknowledged that Mennonites living within the territory of the Solntsevka rural council (*sel'sovet*) performed their duties admirably on the collective farms and always fulfilled their payment obligations to the state. Among the general population, it was even suggested that work on the collective farms would improve if everyone belonged to the church.<sup>34</sup>

How did state officials and ardent believers in the Soviet system view these Mennonites? Articles appeared in the local press condemning the outlook and work ethic of believers in rural Siberia. In 1958, Iakov Gossen, an assistant brigadier of cattle breeding in the Mennonite village of Solntsevka, wrote a letter to the editor of *Omskaia pravda*, complaining about the work habits of his former coreligionists. Gossen began his critique by expressing his gratitude to the Communist party for its help in improving the state of agriculture in his local collective farm. The collective, he claimed, had significantly increased its productivity last year, thanks to this help as well as the hard work and active participation of local workers. Members of the Mennonite religious community, however, were not included in this group. In the name of religion, Gossen

contended that believers either skipped work or left early. He cited an incident the year before, in which a number of believers feigned illness in the middle of harvest, only to find the energy to engage in prayer.<sup>35</sup> Gossen identified the obsession of believers with the afterlife as impeding their work on the farm.

Ultimately, Gossen hoped that these believers would “open their eyes” and “become active workers in our society,” a sentiment shared by many Soviet officials, who claimed to object to both the unscientific worldview espoused by believers and their interpretation of human nature. In 1968, a writer for the *Agitator's Notebook* (*Bloknot agitatora*) used the example of Apollonovka to illustrate the fundamental incompatibility between the Soviet state and the Mennonite Brethren. He claimed that Mennonite preachers taught believers that they were sinful and that “the world is evil and everything good is from God.”<sup>36</sup> This outlook, according to the author, was incompatible with communist ethics, which viewed humanity positively.

Despite these differences, the author, N. Ianev, emphasized that the Soviet state was not opposed to believers, but against unscientific ideas.<sup>37</sup> Ianev implied that believers could be saved from their faith and become contributing members of the collective farm if they accepted the progress that only Soviet ideology could plant. To convince believers of their erroneous outlook, local party officials emphasized the necessity of organizing ideological training among collective farm workers. A secret report to Puzin described how the village of Ivanovka lacked enough cultural enlightenment measures: even young people who were not religious decided to attend religious services to occupy them during their free time.<sup>38</sup> To indoctrinate local farm workers, the Communist party carried out events under the banner of cultural-enlightenment, hosting lectures on topics of scientific and political significance. One senior agronomist read lectures on such topics as “Winter Agrotechnics,” “How to achieve high and stable grain harvests,” and “The correct cultivation of soil.”<sup>39</sup>

Soviet officials often singled out religious milkmaids as troublemakers. They complained that these women rushed through their work to move on to more holy obligations. Gossen criticized milkmaids for abandoning cows before the milking was completed, in order to attend church services.<sup>40</sup> In one complaint submitted in 1957, Soviet officials claimed that ten out of eleven milkmaids had left the cows in distress as they shirked their duties in the name of God.<sup>41</sup> In a 1958 report, local officials also charged that milkmaids in the Mennonite village of Miroliubovka had contaminated Soviet

spaces by reading the gospel and hiding religious tracts in the “Red Corner” where books allocated for the education of communist workers were kept.<sup>42</sup>

Soviet newspapers also used pastoral images to communicate the ingratitude of believers for the beauty, abundance, and advancement of life that surrounded them on earth. For instance, in a 1971 article titled, “Those who are Striving for the Bread of Life” the author described the village of Puchkovo as a rural utopia where signs of progress dovetailed effortlessly with nature; large poplar trees reached for the sun along a street of houses equipped with gas stoves, as tractors worked the fields.<sup>43</sup> After establishing the natural beauty and the technological advancements that had reached rural Siberia, the author contended that Mennonites appreciated none of this, as they obsessed over the happiness awaiting them in heaven. In another article entitled “The Grey Faces of Apollonovka,” the author described the village as an idyllic setting – with plowed fields, old birch trees, and forests where children could pick mushrooms and berries without fear – before launching into how local ministers harmed this peaceful landscape through their religious fanaticism which emphasized suffering for their faith.<sup>44</sup>

While Soviet officials lamented how the presence of Mennonites disrupted the pastoral serenity of rural life, Mennonites continued to engage in work on Soviet farms. A list composed in the 1960s of believers in Apollonovka showed that they worked as tractor drivers, herders, combine drivers, pig-tenders, carpenters, accounting clerks, and a number of other positions.<sup>45</sup> Later Soviet documents confirmed that even the preachers of Apollonovka performed their duties as herders, tractor drivers, chauffeurs, and mechanics admirably. A report submitted in 1985, for example, described the preacher Ivan Abramovich Peters as a strong asset to the state farm, acknowledging his many years of service as a herdsman. The description of Ivan Jansen, also a preacher living in Apollonovka, admitted the same point—Jansen was a conscientious worker who had received financial rewards for his contribution to the state farm in his position as a tractor driver.<sup>46</sup>

In general, Mennonites showed a strong desire to conscientiously perform their work, exhibiting a sense of accomplishment and humble pride in their contribution to local agricultural life. They also benefited from initiatives implemented by the state to encourage the development of the rural economy. For example, Aganetha Wilms, who was born in 1937, recalled her work as a beekeeper on the state farm with fondness, describing in great detail the intrica-



cies of her profession, from how to organize the colonies to the collection of the honey. Her grandfather had established the local apiary, after Khrushchev had decided that each state farm should have bees.<sup>47</sup>

Mennonites had few objections to the application of science to agriculture, and for that matter, in progress. While they believed that God ultimately controlled the harvest, historically this did not prevent Mennonites from intervening in God's plan with the application of scientific initiatives and from altering their approaches not on the basis of prayer, but rather on the recommendations of experts. Even to this day, Mennonites in Apollonovka claim to leave the harvest in God's hands, while employing fertilizer, pesticides, and machinery in pursuit of higher yields.<sup>48</sup> During the Soviet period, Mennonites actively pursued Soviet education to improve their skills for work on the state farm and deepen their knowledge of agricultural practices, even though local officials often thwarted this desire by refusing "troublemaking" German-believers the same educational opportunities as others. Nonetheless, when offered the opportunity to study, Mennonites leaped at the chance. For instance, Margarita Drei, one of the most accomplished milkmaids of Apollonovka, originally dreamed of studying agronomy like her father. In the end, she managed to study animal husbandry by correspondence; for four years, she worked diligently to perform her duties in the barn while fulfilling her program of study.<sup>49</sup>

Yet some Mennonites also recognized the significance of agricultural experience rather than education in the proper performance of their duties. Ivan Peters, who worked for decades as a herder, recalled the harm imposed on local agriculture by the Soviet system, which prioritized book knowledge over concrete experience. He regaled how herders had to be sensitive to the needs of the animal, which they learned through experience. In contrast, experts imposed their "knowledge" on the animals, forcing the herders to follow this plan even if it caused damage.<sup>50</sup>

Despite Soviet objections that Mennonites refused to acknowledge the beauty of the nature that surrounded them, interviews with former state farmer workers indicated otherwise. Margarita Drei and Ivan Peters both identified nature as a place where they experienced God. Peters spoke of watching a hedgehog in the forest and being in awe of God's creation. He also recalled experiencing God while watching over the herd during a particularly harsh storm.<sup>51</sup> In this context, the beauty of the local environment and the fulfillment of one's work served as a backdrop for Mennon-

ites to ponder and celebrate their faith. Drei spoke of her desire to be connected with nature, of the calming influence of nature in her life; just as the Soviet newspaper articles conflated nature and agriculture as part of the same cosmology. Drei also equated the peace found in taking a walk in God's forest with the joy she experienced watching the combines during harvest.

For state officials, celebrating the achievement of workers on the collective farm formed an important part of the mobilization of Soviet ideology. Milkmaids, in particular, were a valuable group of workers called upon to embody the qualities promoted by the Soviet regime, including a zealous work ethic. The presence of Mennonites among this vanguard of the Soviet state complicated this vision as both believing and non-believing milkmaids worked together in barns. Such work was difficult as until the end of the 1950s, these women milked by hand between ten to twelve cows without access to running water and electricity, three times a day.<sup>52</sup> Mennonite women remembered their work fondly, as they cared deeply for these cows, naming their charges and showing their devotion through their patient and attentive treatment of the animals. Mennonite women interpreted their performance of milking, however, not as an act in support of building an atheist Soviet state, but rather as a blessing from God.<sup>53</sup> Singing hymns on their way to work, they performed their task with enthusiasm and skill, in order to showcase the strength of their character and their usefulness to God.

Proving their usefulness to God did not preclude Mennonites from participating in Soviet competitions to showcase the accomplishments of rural workers. Soviet officials viewed these contests as a means by which to improve the productivity of its farm workers, particularly in animal husbandry.<sup>54</sup> To facilitate this interaction, both believers and the Soviet state at times engaged in "deliberate silences." The example of Margarita Drei (Jansen) illustrates the efficacy of such an approach. In 1976, she not only participated in, but also won a competition in the mastery of milking held in the region of Isil'kul' at a neighbouring collective farm. Judging by the description in the paper, this was clearly a social event, complete with singing and a cultural program. After her victory, Drei was presented with a medal and a present. The photograph accompanying the newspaper article showed a young woman, with a shy smile, high cheekbones, in a collard blouse with her hair neatly held back in a bun.<sup>55</sup> In the picture, she epitomized the health and vitality of the Soviet state – the fact that she was a practising Christian was simply not mentioned. Twice Drei trav-

elled to Moscow for milking competitions after winning both local and regional contests. She recalled how much she enjoyed the pageantry of these competitions, as women dressed in white prodded their cows to stand correctly as they performed the milking. Drei spoke with passion about this trip, communicating a strong sense of satisfaction that this memory from her youth still held for her.<sup>56</sup>

At other times, unable to engage in deliberate silences, Mennonites and Soviet officials had to confront the differences between them. Local celebrations of the harvest festival (*Erntedankfest*) illustrate the tensions that festered in farming communities as both sides competed to impose their own interpretation of the harvest: either as a symbol of Soviet progress and ingenuity or of God's grace and blessings. In Siberia, *Erntedankfest* stretched back to the early Mennonite settlers. In the colony of Slavgorod in the Altai region, for instance, Mennonites held their first harvest festival on 1 September 1909. Gathered under a large tent, complete with tables and benches decorated with green branches, Mennonites gave thanks for the colony, and for the harvest during a church service. After the service, a large group of Mennonites shared a meal of borscht made in great cast iron cauldrons under the bright Siberian sky.<sup>57</sup>

Despite attempts by the Soviet regime to control and standardize holidays and celebrations, unofficial religious events like *Erntedankfest*, continued to be hosted. Such events occupied a semi-legal position within the Soviet Union.<sup>58</sup> While Soviet officials in Omsk province, to a certain extent, tolerated this display of religiosity, they expressed concern that religious networks would be strengthened through such gatherings. Not only did these events encourage hundreds of believers from different villages to meet and fortify their ties, but local officials also feared that religious groups might use these events to recruit new followers. In a 1958 report, Serebrennikov communicated this concern to Puzin, relaying that believers invited non-believers to events celebrating religious holidays, particularly to prayer meetings associated with *Erntedankfest*.<sup>59</sup>

At times, this tension between Soviet and Christian values caused officials to actively intervene to prevent believers from organizing large-scale celebrations. In autumn of 1958, Mennonites in the village of Staraia Sharapovka invited over 300 people to join them for a religious service. Local party officials took measure to prohibit the event from unfolding as the Mennonites had planned.<sup>60</sup> Despite efforts to discourage *Erntedankfest*, Mennonites persevered. Two years earlier, a group of Mennonites had organized the

celebration of *Erntedankfest* on the same day that one of the collective farms was set to mark its twenty-fifth anniversary. A representative of the community, David Jansen, approached the chairman of the collective farm, Comrade Zubenko, to request that Mennonites be allowed to hold *Erntedankfest* after the ceremony. Zubenko denied this request. Undeterred, Mennonites simply changed the date, allowing the community and believers from the surrounding villages to celebrate the harvest on their own terms.<sup>61</sup>

Mennonites did not always humbly accept Soviet interference into their celebrations. At times they aggressively challenged the legitimacy of local officials who disrupted their events. In one case, believers from Apollonovka even submitted a petition to Leonid Brezhnev, to complain about their treatment at *Erntedankfest* held on 12 October 1980. Elena Epp, whose youthful signature was affixed to the document, still remembers with glee her personal participation in writing the letter, in which Mennonites accused local officials of violating basic civility by interrupting believers as they gathered to give “thanks for the abundant harvest and good weather.” They contended that the chairmen of the rural council, a local policeman, and a party coordinator had interrupted this celebration of God’s mercy by engaging in “coarse activities.” Mennonites complained especially about the chairman, who burst into their religious service shouting and pushing the elderly and youth. The believers of Apollonovka, which is how they identified themselves, expressed their indignation since as “citizens and workers” they had fulfilled their duty by bringing in the harvest and now wanted to enjoy themselves.<sup>62</sup> By using the language of the regime to defend their traditions, Mennonites challenged the authority of Soviet officials who dictated how Mennonites could celebrate their hard work and success.

Mennonites did not withdraw from daily work on collective and state farms in the Soviet Union during the post-war period. They worked diligently to perform their duties, albeit within the confines of the Soviet agricultural hierarchy that limited the independence of their actions. While their promotion to positions of authority within the system was severely curtailed by their religious identity, Mennonites validated their labour not only through their faith, but also through the metrics of the Soviet state. Similarly, the state, more often than not, chose to focus its attention on attacking believers in the churches, leaving them alone while they worked in the fields, building Soviet agriculture.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> M. Dud'ev, "Seiateli zloby i nenavisti" *Znamia* no.17 (1975), 2-3.
- <sup>2</sup> Two main Mennonite groups existed at this time: Church Mennonites (*Tserkovnye Mennonity*) and Mennonite Brethren (*Bratskie Mennonity*). This schism in the Russian Mennonite church occurred in 1860. Tension continued to exist between the groups. According to one Soviet document produced in 1959, the Mennonite Brethren considered Church Mennonites to be "inferior believers." See Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Omskoi oblasti (henceforth GIAOO), f-p.17, op.1, d.7541, l.18.
- <sup>3</sup> I will primarily use the term 'Mennonite' for this paper, but these people self-identify as Baptists, have a complicated relationship with the Mennonite identity, and using "Mennonite" as an ethno-confessional identity after the 1950s is quite problematic. Unfortunately, the labels of Baptist or German-Baptist are equally problematic. For more on the history of this group, see Petr Epp, *100 let pod krovom Vsevysnogo: istoriia Omskikh obshchin EKHB i ikh ob'edineniia, 1907-2007* (Omsk: Samenkorn, 2007); Peter Epp, "A Brief History of the Omsk Brotherhood," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 30 (2012): 113-32.
- <sup>4</sup> John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion, and Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 10.
- <sup>5</sup> Royden Loewen, "The Quiet on the Land: The Environment in Mennonite Historiography," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 23 (2005): 160.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.
- <sup>7</sup> August Haxthausen, *The Russian Empire, its People, Institutions and Resources*, trans. Robert Farie (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856), 423.
- <sup>8</sup> David Moon, *The Plough That Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 176, 210, 253, 265. For an closer investigation of Mennonite agricultural practices in Russia during the mid-nineteenth century, see John R Staples, *Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe: Settling the Molochna Basin, 1784-1861* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Harvey L. Dyck and John R. Staples, eds., *Transformation on the Southern Ukrainian Steppe. Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies. Vol 1: 1812-1835*, trans. Ingrid I. Epp (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).
- <sup>9</sup> Smaller Mennonite communities settled in other areas, including near the city of Pavlodar in the province of Semipalatinsk. See Yulia I. Podoprigora, "The Formation and Development of the Mennonite Congregations in Kazakhstan: From the End of the Nineteenth Century to the Early Twenty First Century," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 30 (January 2012): 37-44; Yulia I. Podoprigora, *Nemtsy Pavlodarskogo Priirtysh'ia* (Alma-Ata: Biz Bibliotek, 2010).
- <sup>10</sup> A.R. Betkher, "Osobennosti razvitiia khoziaistva u razlichnykh lokal'nykh grupp nemetskogo naseleniia zapadnoi Sibiri v kontse XIX- nachale XX vv," in *Kliuchevye problemy istorii rossiiskikh nemtsev*, ed. A.A. German (Moscow: ZAO "MSNK-press," 2004), 278. For more on Mennonite early agricultural life in Siberia, see P. P Vibe, *Nemetskie kolonii v Sibiri: sotsial'no-ekonomicheskii aspekt* (Omsk: Omskii gos. pedagogicheskii universitet, 2007).

- <sup>11</sup> A.R. Betkher, *Khoziaistvo i material'naia kul'tura nemtsev Sibiri* (Omsk: Izd-vo Nauka, 2013), 65.
- <sup>12</sup> See, "Karta Sel'skokhoziaistvennykh raionov Sibirskogo kraia» <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/128/> (accessed 14 July 2016).
- <sup>13</sup> GIAOO, f.r-2421, op.1, d.41 k.1-2.
- <sup>14</sup> Petr Epp, *Ne ischezli po milosti Gospoda: Waldheim-Apollonovka, 1911-2011* (Steinhagen: Samenkorn, 2011), 83.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> The issue of collectivization is too complicated to be addressed in this paper. For more on the experience of Siberian Mennonite during collectivization, see A. I. Savin, *Etnokonfessiiia v Sovetskom gosudarstve. Mennonity Sibiri v 1920-1930-e gody: emigratsiia i repressii: dokumenty i materialy* (Novosibirsk: Posokh, 2009), 550–701; P. P. Vibe, "Nemtskie kolonii nakanune massovoi kollektivizatsii," in *Istoriia i etnografiia nemtsev v Sibiri*, ed. P. P. Vibe (Omsk: Izd-vo OGIK muzeia, 2009), 284–301.
- <sup>17</sup> For more on the experience of collectivization and dekulakization of Mennonites in Ukraine, see Colin P. Neufeldt, "Separating the Sheep from the Goats: The Role of Mennonites and Non-Mennonites in the Dekulakization of Khortitsa, Ukraine (1928-1930)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 83, no. 2 (April 2009): 221–91; Colin P. Neufeldt, "Through the Fires of Hell: The Dekulakization and Collectivization of the Soviet Mennonite Community, 1928-1933," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 16 (January 1998): 9–32; Colin Peter Neufeldt, *The Public and Private Lives of Mennonite Kolkhoz Chairmen in the Khortytsia and Molochansk German National Raiony in Ukraine (1928-1934)* (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2015).
- <sup>18</sup> GIAOO, f.r-1938, op.1, d.2, l.10-27.
- <sup>19</sup> GIAOO, f.r-1938, op.1, d.92, l.114.
- <sup>20</sup> Diary of Margarita Paul in the possession of Petr Epp.
- <sup>21</sup> GIAOO, f.r-1011, op.1, d.92, l.112.
- <sup>22</sup> Epp, *100 let pod krovom Vsevyshnego*, 239–41.
- <sup>23</sup> N. M. Dronin and Edward G. Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia, 1900-1990: The Interaction of Climate and Agricultural Policy and Their Effect on Food Problems* (New York: Central European University Press, 2005), 155.
- <sup>24</sup> R.R. Khisamutdinova, "Realizatsiia idei N.S. Khrushcheva ob ukрупnenii kolkhozov v 1950-1953 gg.," *Vestnik Orenburgskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta*, no. 3 (7) (2013): 101.
- <sup>25</sup> [http://isilk.omskportal.ru/ru/municipal/localAuthList/3-52-215-1/officialsite/archivedep/virt-expo/PageContent/0/body\\_files/file0/pres\\_1410021130.pdf](http://isilk.omskportal.ru/ru/municipal/localAuthList/3-52-215-1/officialsite/archivedep/virt-expo/PageContent/0/body_files/file0/pres_1410021130.pdf) (accessed 12 February 2017)
- <sup>26</sup> For more on Khrushchev's experience of American agriculture, see Stephen J. Frese, "Comrade Khrushchev and Farmer Garst: East-West Encounters Foster Agricultural Exchange," *History Teacher* 38, no. 1 (2004): 37–65.
- <sup>27</sup> Aaron Hale-Dorrell, "The Soviet Union, the United States, and Industrial Agriculture," *Journal of World History* 26, no. 2 (2016): 322.
- <sup>28</sup> Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia, 1900-1990*, 177–79. For more on Khrushchev's Virgin Land Program, see Paul R Josephson et al., *An Environmental History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 136–81.

- <sup>29</sup> Dronin and Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia, 1900-1990*, 224.
- <sup>30</sup> Epp, *Ne ischezli po milosti Gospoda*, 294.
- <sup>31</sup> For more on the history of these communities, see Epp, *100 let pod krovom Vsevysnogo*.
- <sup>32</sup> GIAOO, f.p-17, op.1, d.7541, ll.109-110.
- <sup>33</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals since World War II* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), 131-56; Emily Baran, "I SAW THE LIGHT": Former Protestant Believer Testimonials in the Soviet Union, 1957-1987," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 52, no. 1 (January 2011): 163-84.
- <sup>34</sup> A. I. Savin, *Etnokonfessiiia v sovetskom gosudarstve: mennonity Sibiri v 1940--1980-e gody: religioznyye dissidenty: dokumenty i materialy* (Novosibirsk: Posokh, 2015), 31-32.
- <sup>35</sup> Ia. Gossen, "Pochemu ia vyshel iz sekty" *Omskaia pravda*, 5 July 1958, 3.
- <sup>36</sup> N. Ianev, "Raby tsarstva nebesnogo" *Bloknot agitatora* no.13 (1968): 38.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 40.
- <sup>38</sup> GIAOO, f.p-17, op.1, d.7250, l.127
- <sup>39</sup> GIAOO, f.p-17, op.1, d.6536, ll.15-16.
- <sup>40</sup> Ia. Gossen, "Pochemu ia vyshel iz sekty" *Omskaia pravda*, 5 July 1958, 3.
- <sup>41</sup> GIAOO, f. p-17, op.1, d.7250, l.93.
- <sup>42</sup> GIAOO, f.p-17, op.1, d.7541, l.24.
- <sup>43</sup> N. Radul, "Alchushchie khleba zhizni," *Znamia*, 15 June 1971, 4.
- <sup>44</sup> O. Podkovyrov, "Serye liki Apollonovki," *Molodoi sibiriak*, 26 May 1981, 4.
- <sup>45</sup> GIAOO, f.r-1011, op.1, d.379, l.45-47.
- <sup>46</sup> GIAOO, f.r-1011, op.1, d.841, ll.61-63
- <sup>47</sup> Interview with Aganetha Wilms. Conducted by Aileen Friesen on 20 May 2015.
- <sup>48</sup> Interview with David Epp. Interview conducted by Aileen Friesen on 18 May 2015.
- <sup>49</sup> Interview with Margarita Drei. Interview conducted by Aileen Friesen on 12 May 2015.
- <sup>50</sup> Interview with Ivan Peters. Interview conducted by Aileen Friesen on 13 May 2015.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Ivan Peters.
- <sup>52</sup> Epp, *Ne ischezli po milosti Gospoda*, 472.
- <sup>53</sup> Interview with Margarita Drei.
- <sup>54</sup> GIAOO, f.p-415, op.8, d.141, l.1.
- <sup>55</sup> M. Dud'ev, "Sostiazanie v masterstve," *Znamia* (1976): 3.
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Margarita Drei.
- <sup>57</sup> Gerhard Fast, *In den Steppen Sibiriens* (Rosthern: J. Heese, 1957).
- <sup>58</sup> Savin, *Etnokonfessiiia v sovetskom gosudarstve*, 16. For more on Soviet festivals, see Malte Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).
- <sup>59</sup> GIAOO, f.p-17, op.1, d.7541, l.75.
- <sup>60</sup> GIAOO, f.p-17, op.1, d.7541, l.75.
- <sup>61</sup> GIAOO, f.p-17, op.1 d.7250, ll.35-36.
- <sup>62</sup> GIAOO, f.r-1011, op.1, d.719, l.35.