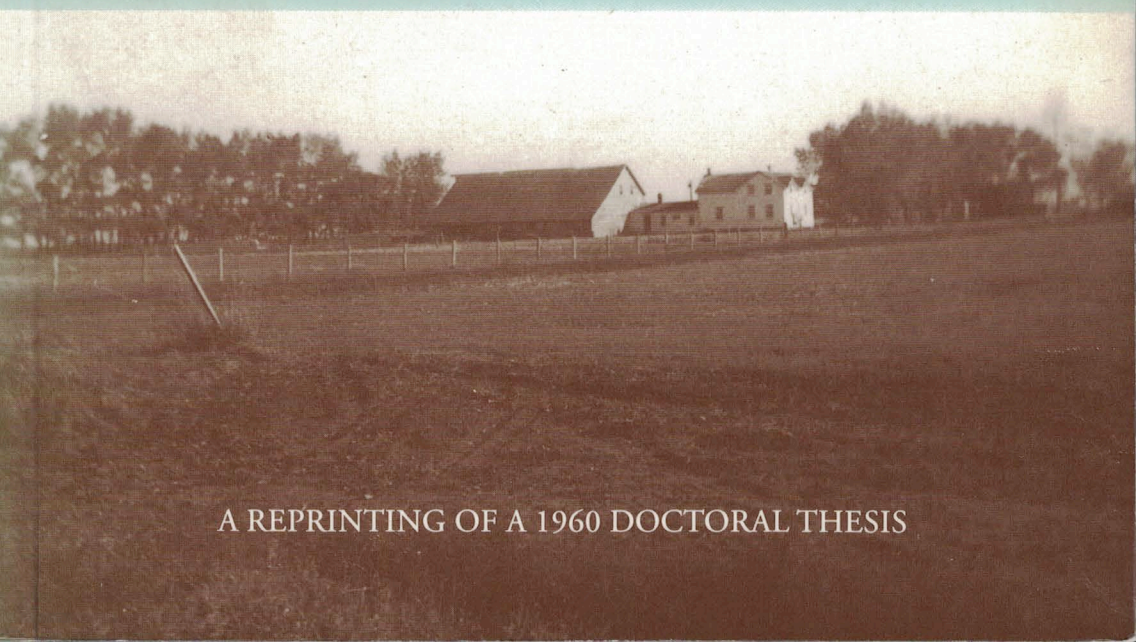


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THE  
MENNONITE  
SETTLEMENTS  
OF SOUTHERN  
MANITOBA

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BY  
JOHN H. WARKENTIN



A REPRINTING OF A 1960 DOCTORAL THESIS

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MANITOBA

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John H. Warkentin

A THESIS  
PRESENTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH  
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF  
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IN THE  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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Front cover/jacket: A 1955 farmstead northwest of Altona, Manitoba, depicting an architectural form that reflects the first house-barns in Mennonite villages in the 1870s. Photo by John Warkentin.

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**EDITOR'S FOREWORD**

In 1955 a young University of Toronto geography student spent a summer crisscrossing the vast prairie and extensive parklands that constitute the Mennonite settlements of Southern Manitoba. John H. Warkentin, who had spent his boyhood in Plum Coulee and his teen-aged years in Steinbach, had come back home. His purpose was to employ skills he had learned as a doctoral student of geography to understand and interpret the cultural landscape of his people. Five years later, in 1960, the study resulted in a doctoral dissertation entitled, "The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba." It was an historical geography, beginning with the decades even before the arrival of the Mennonites in the 1870s and continuing through the modernizing 1890s, the heady wheat boom of the 1910s, the depression in the 1930s, the rise of specialized farming in the 1940s and the spirited town building of the 1950s. It told the story of Mennonite people changing within the physical environment of Southern Manitoba. It was remarkably well-researched, exquisitely written and oftentimes a provocative work. Still, as Warkentin moved on to build a nationally recognized career at York University, he also moved from the subject of Mennonites to wider regional and national themes. Out of this wider interest came numerous publications, articles, books and atlases. But his research on the Manitoba Mennonites yielded only a single published article. It would become "a classic in its own right," an early concise essay on the "genealogy of an ethnic landscape."<sup>1</sup> The original dissertation itself, however, remained unpublished.

Forty years later the 1960 study is in your hands in the form of a book. This is a reprinting of the original 611-page doctoral dissertation. In 1960 the study had set out to advance the field of geography. Historical geography in the early part of the 20th century largely had been a description of the physical features and land patterns of a particular time and place. Such descriptions were based on the school of Environmental Determinism, that is, the assumption that the environment was worthy of description because it stood as an unshakable, unchangeable, and determining force in human life. Warkentin was amongst a young and energetic corps of scholars in North America who added a dynamic dimension to historical geography, with a special focus on the origins of contemporary landscapes, and hence an interest in frontier settlements and land use patterns. Warkentin would be influenced by one of the pioneers of this approach in Canada, the venerated Manitoba native Andrew Hill Clark. Clark encouraged rigorous field research and was committed to showing how people transformed the environment.<sup>2</sup>

The object of Clark's students, then, was to observe change over time, that is, the stamp that humans put on the land as they interacted with it. In this approach environmental determinism was out-of-date and human agency became the focus of study. These students would be later criticized for ignoring potentially harmful "human impacts upon the natural environment or...European-Indian contacts" and even for failing to appreciate the "intellectual contexts out of which patterns and landscapes were created."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps it is true the students were also too laudatory of the progress of conservative rural people, and especially eager to chart the immigrants' increasing integration with the modern world. Certainly by the year

2000 the mid-century approaches had been subsumed in their turn by post-modern analyses that criticized their predecessors' penchant to "celebrate achievement". Postmodernism also identified the ways in which geographical knowledge could be misused to legitimize staid community structures.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these changing approaches to the study of historical and human geography, Warkentin's study has withstood the test of time. The 1960 work is important for both Mennonite and non-Mennonite audiences. It described both the distinctive qualities of the Mennonite settlements and the universal themes of settlement in the prairies. The story of the "Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba" was part of a wider account in which humans shape landscape. The Mennonite houses, gardens, roads, fences, ditches, hedges, fields and towns spoke of adaptation to the land and a determination to build their communities on it. It was this process that compelled Warkentin to revisit the R.M.s of Hanover, Rhineland and Stanley in the 1950's, and propelled him to study other people than the Mennonites of Southern Manitoba in the succeeding decades. Warkentin's Master of Arts thesis had been a geography of the Dauphin area and his 1960 Mennonite work was nuanced by an interest in the wider development of historical geography of Canada. His interest in the geography of Canada can be traced from his first book, the 1964 *A Western Interior of Canada: A Record of Geographical Discovery, 1812-1917* to his most recent, the 1999 *A Regional Geography of Canada: Life, Land and Space*. In the years between a diversity of interests within Canadian historical geography resulted in numerous journal articles, book chapters and atlases. Although the subjects were usually rooted in Western Canada, their specific foci ranged widely: from dry land farming to water usage; from pre-historic Lake Agassiz to the rise of modern urban trade centres; from provincial to national land use patterns; from the sense of time to landscape imagination; from early explorers Henry Kelsey and David Thompson to early farmers in Manitoba. A sign of the wide contribution John Warkentin has made to his field came in 1993 when James R. Gibson edited the Festschrift, *Canada: Geographical Interpretations* bearing the subtitle, *Essays in Honour of John Warkentin*.

If the 1960 doctoral dissertation honed the skills of a rising historical geographer, the work itself has had limited exposure. True, the work was photocopied by Manitoba universities and Mennonite college libraries. Even then the photocopies were copies of other copies, and not only was the print itself fuzzy, the maps reproduced poorly and the photographs were non-existent. Still, over the years the dissertation was read by many determined researchers and few Mennonite local histories were written without extensively consulting Warkentin's work. Occasionally whole sections of local Manitoba histories and national Mennonite accounts seemed to be paraphrases of his pioneering efforts. Historians of communities and students of Mennonites in Canada seemed especially interested in Warkentin's precise and comprehensive description of the early open field system with its *Strassendörfer*, *Gewanne* and *Kagal*. They also were drawn to his frank and open discussion of the recent histories of urban places.

In 1999 John Warkentin was invited to bring the keynote address at the "1874 Revisited: 125th Anniversary Conference" hosted by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and the Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg. As



part of the commemoration of the first migration and settlement of Mennonites in Western Canada, this book publication project was launched. The effort was truly an inter-community effort. A secretary at the University of Toronto, Department of Geography, kindly retrieved the original copy from basement storage at the university and sent it to us. A generous grant from Delbert Plett's "Plett Foundation" in Steinbach, Manitoba, allowed us to hire graduate student Myron Dyck, formerly of Altona, to undertake the painstaking work of turning the massive text and its tables into computer format. The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society which had become a leader in reminding Manitoba Mennonites of their 125th anniversary, fortuitously chose the publication of this manuscript as one of its main ways to celebrate the anniversary. The staff at Country Graphics in Rosenort ensured that the 150 photographs and 50 maps were reproduced as well as possible.

The aim of the project was simple: reproduce as a classic work the 1960 dissertation. Only a few corrections were made to the text. The thorough field research, frank and intelligent discussion and well chosen prose comprise a study of merit publishable with only a few minor revisions. True, the conclusions and language reflect the culture of the 1950s when "great men" were given special notice and ethnic groups were more deliberately compared one to another than is common today. The cartography in turn reveals the technology of the 1950s, although the maps by Warkentin's hand reveal a pioneering work in historical geography. The photographs were small and repetitious, but they were a precise, perceptive, and comprehensive record of southern Manitoba, and they were explained by accompanying informal field notes.

For the current reader Warkentin's study is significant for several reasons. First, it remains a thorough narrative of the transplantation of an Old World "hidden landscape," for as Warkentin wrote "perhaps nowhere in North America has a peasant culture from Europe been so thoroughly re-established." Second, the study reminds all students of history, Mennonite and non-Mennonite alike, of the importance of geography in society, the dynamic relationship between people and land; even 40 years later the study is relevant as an environmental history of Mennonites in North America. Third, the work has become a primary source about Mennonites at mid-century; Warkentin's numerous references to developments of "today" are now, in 2000, historic references to life in the 1950s, a decade of profound change for Mennonite society in Canada. Fourth, the work is always honest; readers will not necessarily agree with Warkentin's analysis, for he moves readily between praise and criticism, offering sharp statements on what he believed constituted progress and regression, and reflecting a mid-century enthusiasm for technology, commerce and acculturation. Fifth, the dissertation represents a particular point in the evolution of Mennonite historiography. Historians who preceded Warkentin quoted from oral history sources and church-sanctioned accounts. His successors had access to a corps of personal records that in the 1950s were still venerated and inaccessible family treasures -- diaries, immigrant letters, memoirs, and household account books. But Warkentin must be credited for discovering his own set of sources. They were scientific records of landscape and more importantly, perhaps, the public record. Like no other study of Mennonites before, this one used census records, tax rolls, municipal by-laws, homestead claims, survey reports and studies of several

government departments. Sixth, this is a study of the ancestral home of tens of thousands of Mennonites across Canada: Warkentin set out to compare two starkly different communities, the East and West Reserves, but in the process presented the history of a single community composed of a cohesive people whose religious faith and commitment to agrarian society often contested the values of the wider society.

We are pleased to present this important study to the students of historical geography, Manitoba history and Mennonite society. The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society especially is to be congratulated for doing so on the occasion of the Manitoba Mennonites' 125th anniversary.

Royden Loewen, editor  
Chair in Mennonite Studies  
University of Winnipeg  
January 10, 2000

<sup>1</sup>. Interview with Prof. John Lehr, Department of Geography, University of Winnipeg, January 12, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>. Andrew Hill Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island: A Historical Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959).

<sup>3</sup>. Graeme Wynn, "The Writing of Canadian Historical Geography," *A Scholar's Guide to Geographical writing on the American and Canadian Past*, eds., Michael P. Conzen, Thomas A. Rumney, and Graeme Wynn (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993): 106.

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid*, 92.

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

From 1874 to 1881 approximately 7,000 Mennonites moved from South Russia to South Central Manitoba, where two blocks of land, the East and West Reserves, had been set aside for them. Much of the land in the East Reserve, located 30 miles southeast of Winnipeg, was of marginal quality, whereas most of the land in the West Reserve, just to the west of the Red River along the International Boundary was of good quality. On these lands the Mennonites established the nucleated settlement pattern they had known in Russia. They lived in *Strassendörfer* and divided the surrounding land into strips for individual use. Land titles were granted in accordance with the sectional survey, so that the strips could be laid out only by the mutual consent of all the farmers of a farm village. There were 20 to 25 families in the largest villages.

Over 120 farm villages were established in the two reserves, but by 1885 some had begun to disintegrate under the impact of the North American commercial agricultural economy. Their greatest weakness lay in the fact that the open field system had no legal basis. In the West Reserve many farmers moved to the quarter sections once large scale wheat growing was made possible by new implements, new railways and trading centres. In the East Reserve many villages succumbed because the land was too poor to support the inhabitants. In the 1920s the last of the strips were abandoned, but 17 farm villages still remain in the West Reserve, with the farmers operating units laid out according to the sectional survey. In the East Reserve no villages survive, but at one of the former sites it is still possible to see vestiges of the open field pattern.

In the West Reserve, grain farming was the dominant form of land use until the 1930s. A hierarchy of trading centres had developed by the 1890s and facilities such as drainage channels and roads, constructed after 1900, further aided the development of their grain economy. Mixed farming, however remained more important in the East Reserve.

After 1930, drought, low grain prices and the increasing urbanization of Manitoba caused the greatest geographical changes since the disappearance of the open field system. In the West Reserve, farmers attempted to overcome the economic problems of the 1930s by participating in the co-operative movement and by introducing row crops. By 1940, the West Reserve was well established as the centre of Manitoba's special crop growing area. In the East Reserve notable changes in agriculture began in the 1940s, when the growing demands of Winnipeg turned the East Reserve into a dairy and poultry producing area for the urban market.

These agricultural developments were accompanied by significant changes in settlement geography. In the West Reserve plants for processing agricultural products were established in the leading farm centres. In the East Reserve, Steinbach, a Mennonite village, became the leading trading centre for all of Southeastern Manitoba. And, in contrast to the general trend in Western Canada, new small farm service centres were established to supply the needs of farmers specializing in dairying and poultry raising. In both Reserves, town and country are now co-operating closely to build and maintain strong communities.

Three conclusions become apparent from a study of the geography of the Reserves since 1874: first, the Mennonites' unique settlement pattern did not survive in Canada, though vestiges of it still remain; second, in the two decades from 1930 to 1950 an important change occurred in the agricultural geography; third, there have been significant changes in the role of the central places in the Reserves.

John H. Warkentin, 1960



## INTRODUCTION

In Canada few rural areas have a hidden landscape where one form of settlement has replaced another: unlike Europe there has been no significant succession of landscapes.<sup>1</sup> In Western Canada, the predominant landscape is the one that developed under the regular rectangular survey. But within this region there are two relatively small areas in which one settlement pattern *has* been abandoned for another. These are the Mennonite Reserves of Southern Manitoba, and this thesis sets out to describe and explain their settlement geography.

On March 3, 1873, the Canadian government reserved eight townships of practically unsettled land in Southeastern Manitoba for the exclusive use of the Mennonites, a Protestant sect from Russia. The Mennonites were anxious to leave Russia because the government was threatening to revoke some of the special privileges they had been granted when they first settled in South Russia in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. In 1876 another Reserve of seventeen townships was set aside for them across the Red River from the original Reserve. These Reserves, respectively called the East and West Reserves, were settled in the years from 1874 to 1880 by approximately 7,000 Mennonites who migrated from South Russia to Manitoba. This was not a migration of individualistic pioneers, but a group migration in which entire communities from the steppes of Russia were transferred to the fundamentally similar prairies of Manitoba.

Manitoba at this time had no ready-made institutions awaiting incoming settlers, nor did Manitobans have much agricultural advice to impart. As yet the new province had poor communications, no municipal government, no public school system, and it was inhabited by farmers who had not dared to leave the wooded lands near the streams. Accordingly in social and agricultural organization the Mennonites fell back on their own institutions, the preservation of which had prompted the migration in the first place, and in farming relied on the agricultural techniques they had learned in Russia.

In both Reserves the vast majority of the Mennonites occupied the land in European-style nucleated settlements. Perhaps nowhere else in North America has a peasant culture from Europe been so completely re-established. This virtual transplanting was possible because the environments of South Russia and Southern Manitoba were so similar, and because the Mennonites were given an almost free hand within the Reserves, so that they could reconstruct their European agricultural society practically unhindered. These settlements, as a consequence, offer an interesting and important study in the geography of Canada, because they reveal how nucleated farm settlements fared amidst North American prairie agriculture.

It is quite evident that the geography of these settlements cannot be understood merely from a description of the settlements themselves as they exist today. The interrelationships of the existing features originated in the past, and we must take into consideration the factors that produced these changes. That this is a field for geographic research is acknowledged. Preston James, for instance, includes in his list of the aims of geographic research: "to define more precisely the sequence of changes associated with a specific process as it operates in specific places."<sup>2</sup> Obviously then, the study of the Mennonite settlements calls for an investigation of their geographical development through time by the use of both geographical and historical approaches.



Until recently historical geography was generally defined as the reconstruction of the regional geography of the past.<sup>3</sup> Hartshorne in his chapter on historical geography in the *Nature of Geography* also gives strong support to this view, but he admits that there may be another approach, namely, the study of the change in a landscape.<sup>4</sup> A number of geographers, especially Carl Sauer and the men trained by him, have done considerable work in studying landscape changes through time, and a significant body of literature has been produced along these lines.<sup>5</sup> That this approach is recognized by many geographers is evident from the treatment of historical geography in *Inventory and Prospect*, where it is defined as "the study of geographical change through time."<sup>6</sup> Clark, the author of the definition just quoted, has published a study on Prince Edward Island which demonstrates the new approach.<sup>7</sup> In his sequel to the *Nature of Geography, Perspective on the Nature of Geography*, Hartshorne has substantially revised his previous view of historical geography and now says: "There is no reason why it [any particular feature of an area] may not be studied, in its changes through time, as a part of the character of the area as whole, as the latter also changes through time."<sup>8</sup> He argues that it is still geography to study: "differences from place to place changing through time."<sup>9</sup>

This thesis is an endeavour to explain the changing geography of the Mennonite Reserves of Manitoba, and it is therefore a study of the factors that have changed the geography of the Reserves, from the time that they were occupied by farmers in the 1870's to 1955 when the field work was done. According to the recent statements by Clark and Hartshorne, cited above, this study could be termed historical geography. Since, however, historical geography has previously been defined as the reconstruction of a past geography, the use of the term is liable to lead to some confusion. In order to avoid a confusion of terms I prefer to define this thesis simply as a study of the changing geography of the Mennonite Reserves of Southern Manitoba.<sup>10</sup> My particular concern is the settlement geography of the Reserves. Settlement geography, according to a recent definition,<sup>11</sup> is concerned with the facilities men build in the process of occupying an area. It is one aspect of the study of geographical change.<sup>12</sup> The geographical expression of the agricultural settlements of Western Canada includes the farming and trading settlements, together with their fields, pastures, farmsteads, barns, street layouts, business premises and residences, and also the transportation and drainage facilities that have been developed. Naturally, since this is a geographical study, the settlement elements will be studied against the total background of the geography of the Reserves.

To obtain an adequate understanding of the settlement geography of the Mennonite settlements I believe that a cross-disciplinary approach is definitely necessary. In these areas the value of investigating the geography of the settlements through time lies in the fuller comprehension of the Mennonite areas that it provides, and the very advantages it offers in gaining an understanding of the settlement processes at work within them. The changes in the geography of the Reserves are the result of changes in the utilization of these areas by successive generations of inhabitants. In order to explain the changes in their geography we must look more to cultural causal relations, because the period of settlement has been too short for any important changes in climate, slope or soil.

In order to understand the settlement geography of the Reserves it is only necessary to go back as far as the first decade of settlement. However, in order to gain some knowledge of the landscape that confronted the Mennonites, a brief

resume of what was known and thought about the land in the Reserves before the settlers' arrival is included in this study. Similarly, it is also essential to know something of the agricultural techniques and attitudes that the Mennonites brought to Canada from South Russia, because to a large extent they determined the nature of the settlements. This background material is included in the appendices.

The Mennonite settlements are of special significance in the settlement geography of the prairie region. The Mennonites were the first large agricultural group to settle in the newly established province of Manitoba; they were the only settlers to transpose their European settlement patterns, without serious modifications, to Western North America; and these areas today lead the way in diversified farming in Manitoba. The distinctive features of the Mennonite settlements within the geography of Western Canada can be summarized in three broad categories:

1. *Time of Settlement*: before the advent of the railway and before other settlers ventured away from the rivers and woods;
2. *Mode of Settlement*: nucleated, rather than dispersed settlements;
3. *Attitude to Canada*: they wished to avoid being absorbed into the rural society that developed about them in Manitoba.

The special circumstances under which these colonies developed throw a revealing light on the process of settlement in the Canadian West, because the factors which produced changes in the settlement geography of the West from pioneer times on have rarely been displayed so fully and clearly as in the Mennonite colonies. The relationship between two types of land surveys is well shown; the effects of the changes in transportation from pre-railway to modern trunk highways can be studied in few other agricultural areas in the West: the impact of drought and depression on the settlements, the effects of improvements in drainage, and the results of diversification of agricultural activities are well illustrated; and the settlements are ideal for tracing the changing functions of the trading centres in an agricultural area.

If the approach of studying settlement geography through time were not used, many of the processes might well be overlooked, for so little of many once important features now remains, that their effect upon the present landscape is forgotten. To this disappearance may be attributed the fact that the significance of the Mennonite Reserves, as almost the sole example of the transfer of a European settlement pattern to Western North America, has never appeared in geographical literature. Department of Agriculture officials in Manitoba are not even aware that these settlement patterns existed!<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the two Reserves are dissimilar in both internal resources and relative location within the province (particularly in respect to neighboring settlers and relation to Winnipeg), adds the dimension of comparative geography to this study, because it enables us to see how settlers with basically the same cultural background, established and developed their Manitoban settlements under contrasting conditions. The study in comparative geography begins with the initial settlement and is carried right to the present as the settlers in each Reserve continuously re-evaluated their habitats as (1) they developed the resources within the two areas and (2) the external relationships of the Reserves changed.

## SOURCES AND METHODS

Research in geographical change presents some special problems. On one hand the source material does not all lie in libraries or archives ready for use, nor on the other hand will exhaustive field work, including interviews, bring all the data required. The scale of the study can also present difficulties. In this dissertation the scale set one of the main problems because the area investigated is so large (approximately 900 sq. miles) that detailed field work over the entire area was impossible. Yet at the same time it comprises only three municipal divisions so that government records are lacking in detail; they do not supply information on significant characteristics that can be observed in the field and require documentation. In the East Reserve, for instance, there is no area breakdown of Census of Canada land use data, so that it is obviously impossible to document past variations in land use.

Only for the pre-settlement landscape of 1872-75 and for the present settlement geography was there enough reliable information available to enable me to reconstruct the geography of the Reserve, at the scale at which I am working.<sup>14</sup> For the former the land surveyors' field note books supplied the necessary data, for the latter my own field work, carried out over an eight month period, mostly in 1955, provided the information. For the years in between it is impossible to reconstruct a documented geography of the Reserve for any one year because there is not sufficient data available. It is quite possible, however, to reconstruct the geography of the Reserve in the 19th century when the agricultural villages were at their peak, and then to proceed to analyze how various significant factors such as the building of railways and the rise of trading centres, the development of drains and roads, the disintegration of the open field system, the impact of the drought and depression and recent growth of Winnipeg produced the present landscape in the Reserve.

Therefore in this study there is a reconstruction of the geography of 1872-75, a study (though not a complete re-creation) of the geography of the 19th century, an analysis of the evolution of the geography of the Reserve since 1900,<sup>15</sup> and a study of the geography of the Reserves in the 1950's.

In the course of my investigation I found that information could be collected most efficiently by doing field and library work alternatively. In this way leads given by one method could be followed up by the other, until a pattern of the changing geography of the areas could be discerned.

Interviews supplied data of great importance. Advice and material furnished by local antiquarians proved invaluable. These men pointed out places to visit such as abandoned settlements, and directed me to persons worth interviewing. I was able with their help to get a comprehensive coverage of possible sources of information about the landscape. In both Reserves a sufficient number of pioneers were still alive in 1955 to provide me with valuable data on the landscape of the 19th century. Data obtained from interviews is most useful as background information; the chronological detail usually cannot be relied upon and always has to be checked. The pioneers supplied me with data on life on the farms and in the village, on farming techniques and implements, on attitudes to livestock, new crops and new

techniques, on routes, on the building of roads and drains, and on the centres where they traded. Many people besides pioneers were interviewed. Farmers of course were interviewed with regard to present farming methods, and agricultural representatives, soils specialists, plant pathologists and so on also provided considerable insight into the geography of the Reserves. Representative businessmen in every service centre were interviewed in order to get information on the role of each trading centre and the extent of its influence. Proprietors of all manufacturing and processing plants also were consulted. Many persons in the urban centres, particularly newspaper editors and people engaged in the cooperative movement, supplied much more information than that relating solely to the towns themselves.

In conducting interviews a questionnaire in the form of a check list was occasionally used, especially when interviewing farmers with respect to current land use practices, and businessmen with regard to the trading hinterland of their particular enterprise. In interviewing pioneers this was of no aid, and the most useful technique was to get them to talk about particular topics, record this data and check it with field work or in newspapers, and then return with new questions, and continue the querying. If I had an unusually well informed interviewee I would return to visit him whenever I wanted more information to solve a problem or wanted to obtain his interpretation of some feature of the landscape. In this way I have spent a few days in aggregate time with a number of people. It usually did not prove too practical to question pioneers in groups, because of the tendency to indulge in personal reminiscences or to engage in disputes. One very efficient way of getting background information about landscape was to take the old gentlemen on field trips and have them point out the locations of old roads or settlements.

Newspapers supplied much information about the Mennonite Reserves in the 19th century, even though there were no papers published by the Mennonites themselves in the early years. Fortunately the Winnipeg and Morden newspapers carried many stories on the settlements. These accounts are particularly useful for geographers because the editors were not interested in the Mennonites as individuals but rather as a farming group, and hence there are many descriptions of the unique landscape produced by the Mennonites and how it gradually changed. It would have been impossible to study the geography of the Reserves in the 19th century without the newspaper accounts. Newspaper articles are particularly important in supplying dates for happenings described by the pioneers, and they brought to light many facts which could later be brought to the pioneers for amplification. The newspapers are also the best source of information on the founding of the trading centres and their development.

Public records and government reports are of great value. The land surveyors' notebooks have been referred to. The Annual Reports of the Canadian Department of the Interior supplied much information on the early geography of the Reserves. Also the Public Archives of Canada have files of letters and reports from representatives of these Departments which are invaluable. Various other government reports are essential to trace particular developments in the landscape. For instance the Reports of the Manitoba Department of Public Works contain information on drainage and on roads. Municipal records proved invaluable for studying the settlements in the early years, particularly for locating the land operated from the agricultural

villages. The Mennonite colonists also kept some records which provided essential data in this regard.

Fur traders and scientific explorers' accounts contain some useful information on the pre-settlement landscape. Travellers' descriptions of the Reserve supply background material but they are too spotty in their coverage to do anything more. Only a few diaries were located and they were of limited use, but a number of small books of pioneers' reminiscences have been published which are very valuable. The historical accounts of Mennonite settlement also have much useful material. Old photographs are unfortunately very scarce, but the few that I found were of great use. Farmers' magazines frequently ran cuts of Mennonite villages and farmsteads and also of the trading centres.

Among the most important sources of information were maps and air photographs. All the maps of Manitoba in the Public Archives of Canada and in the Manitoba Legislative Library were studied. These maps not only served as useful sources from which data could be compiled but also provided leads in locating traces of former settlements, roads and railway lines on air photographs and in the field. The entire air photo cover of both Reserves was studied. Many long abandoned villages, roads and field patterns were located on the photos and then visited.

Field work was carried on while these other investigations were in progress. Villages were visited and the width of village lots were measured, the house types studied and the houses measured and photographed, and so on. Field observations brought to light much data that had to be checked in written records to ascertain its significance. For instance, a slight ridge trending through a field south-eastwards of Rosenfeld was the first indication of an early railway line (quickly abandoned), which a search in the newspapers revealed was significant in explaining the relationships between various trading centres.

In collecting data on the present landscape I was at one time or another on practically every road in both Reserves, visited many farms, and every service centre and agricultural village. Naturally this included interviews with farmers and townspeople alike. For further information on the agricultural landscape I enlisted the help of school teachers in selected districts. The teachers, at my request, had their pupils prepare land use maps of their parents' farms according to specifications that I supplied, and in this way I obtained a good impression of the nature of the farm enterprise in different parts of the Reserve in 1955.

Thus by constantly checking back and forth from one source of information to another as the study progressed, an adequate amount of reliable data on the landscapes of the two Reserves was accumulated. It should be stressed, however, that field work was essential not only to collect data, but to make the documentary material usable in interpreting the landscape and the processes which shaped it. Also the material obtained by interviews and from newspapers was checked by field work.

### NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

**Dessiatine:** A unit of land measure used in the Mennonite settlements of South Russia. One dessiatine equals 2.74 acres.

**Reserves:** In the 1870's the Canadian government set aside two areas in the Red River Lowland for the exclusive use of the Mennonites. These were designated the East and the West Reserve (Figure 1), and the word "Reserve" is still in use among the Mennonites. The term "West Reserve" is still especially convenient because the area so designated included the Mennonite settlements now within Rhineland and Stanley Municipalities. The area set aside as the East Reserve coincides with Hanover Municipality.

**Survey System of Southern Manitoba:** The survey system is rectangular with all township lines east and west, or north and south. Each township consists of 36 sections, or 640 acres each, making a block six miles (plus the widths of six 99 foot road allowances) square. The townships are numbered northward from the 49th parallel (Townships) and east or west from the Principal Meridian (Ranges) which lies one mile west of Headingley, Manitoba. Tp. 7, R4E, designates the seventh township north of the 49th parallel, and four ranges east of the Principal Meridian. In this study there is no danger of confusing the townships east and west of the Principal Meridian so a shorter form of designating townships has been adopted. The example is written: township 7-4.

The numbering of the sections is shown in the diagram. Each section is further divided into four quarter sections, designated NE1/4, SE1/4, NW1/4 and SW1/4.

**SUBDIVISION OF A  
TOWNSHIP**

31	32	33	34	35	36
30	29	28	27	26	25
19	20	21	22	23	24
18	17	16	15	14	13
7	8	9	10	11	12
6	5	4	3	2	1



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- 1 Hans Boesch, *USA, Die Erschliesung eines Kontinentes*, Bern, 1956, makes much of this point in distinguishing North America from Europe.
- 2 P.E. James, "Towards a Further Understanding of the Regional Concept", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 42 (1952): 208. Similarly J.O.M. Broek, "Progress in Human Geography", in P.E. James, ed., *New Viewpoint in Geography*, Washington, 1959: 41. E.A. Ackerman has recently published a strong statement supporting this kind of research. See E.A. Ackerman, *Geography as a Fundamental Research Discipline*, Chicago, 1958.
- 3 For instance, E.W. Gilbert, "What is Historical Geography", *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 48 (1932): 122.
- 4 Richard Hartshorne, *The Nature of Geography*, Lancaster, Pa., 1939: 176-84.
- 5 A.H. Clark, "Historical Geography", in P.E. James and C.F. Jones, editors, *American Geography, Inventory and Prospect*, Syracuse, 1954: 86. Also see C.O. Sauer, "Foward to Historical Geography", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 31 (1941): 1-24, and Derwent Whittlesey, "The Horizon of Geography", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 35 (1945): 1-34.
- 6 Clark, "Historical Geography": 71. S.W. Wooldridge and W.G. East in their book, *The Spirit and Purpose of Geography*, London, 1951: 80-102, have a vigorous defense of this view of historical geography.
- 7 A.H. Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island, A Historical Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada*, Toronto, 1959: v-vi; 222-223.
- 8 Richard Hartshorne, *Perspective on the Nature of Geography*, Chicago, 1959: 102.
- 9 *Ibid*: 103.
- 10 It is unfortunate that the term geographical history is really lost to geography through its commonly accepted meaning as the influence of geography on history. Consequently there is at present no ready solution for this confusion in terminology. Fortunately current research is being focused on this problem and there is hope that the terminology will be clarified.
- 11 C.F. Kohn, "Settlement Geography", in *American Geography, Inventory and Prospect*: 125.
- 12 See Hartshorne, *Perspective*: Chapter VIII: 81-107, for a discussion of how the systematic elements of geography can be studied as geographic change through time.
- 13 In interviews with some agricultural officials familiar with the Mennonite areas I have found that they have no explanations for the peculiar patterns left by the early Mennonite land divisions, and, if anything, call upon natural agencies to explain them.
- 14 On a provincial scale it is possible to reconstruct the geography of Manitoba for selected years.
- 15 J.O.M. Broek, *The Santa Clara Valley, California: A Study of Landscape Changes*, Utrecht, 1932, calls this the study of the social-economic determinants.



## Chapter 1

### TRADERS, EXPLORERS, SURVEYORS VIEW THE LAND

Few descriptions exist of the pre-settlement landscape of the areas which the Canadian government reserved for Mennonite settlement in the 1870's. (Figure 1 shows the Reserves.<sup>1</sup>) Most travellers simply mentioned the Manitoba Central Lowland in passing and did not bother to go into any detail about this flat, rather uninteresting plain. G.M. Dawson's treatment in his Boundary Commission Report of 1875 is typical.<sup>2</sup> He describes the topography between the Lake of the Woods and the Red River in graphic detail yet his section on the Central Lowland consists only of a few geological observations, rather than a description of the country. Nevertheless some first hand descriptions are available, and even though these early accounts are sketchy, they provide a picture of the country as it must have appeared to the pioneer farmer.

#### Descriptions

##### East Reserve

H.Y. Hind's report of his explorations between Lake Superior and Red River in 1858 contains the only early description of the East Reserve landscape that I have been able to find.<sup>3</sup> Hind made a traverse from the Roseau River to the Red River Settlement passing through what became the western part of the Reserve.<sup>4</sup> Part of the way he travelled along the trail which led from the Settlement to Crow Wing, Minnesota (Figures 1P and 2P). The trail followed glacial Lake Agassiz beaches wherever possible, and through present township 7-4 it was on a ridge 2 to 6 feet above the prairie. To the west of the trails Hind's map designated a "Fine Level Prairie with a few small hummocks of Poplar and Willow". This is out of the Reserve, but to the east, within the Reserve, "woods" are indicated, and in the eastern part of the township 7-4, a "vast wet prairie" is shown (Figure 3P). Hind makes some remarks about a swamp immediately to the north of the Reserve, that are equally applicable to the low areas of the Reserve.

[In] the great Nine Mile Swamp...water lodges in marshy intervals, for the distance which has given its names to this wet prairie. A strong Scotch plough, drawn by a stout team of oxen, would soon effect the drainage of the Nine Mile Swamp. It partly originates from the excessive luxuriousness of the grasses growing upon this level expanse, which, in a humid season, holds up sufficient water to give permanency to the wetness of this portion of the prairie.<sup>5</sup>

These swamps occur at the break in slope between the flat, Red River Plain and the gently rising land to the southeast (Figure 2). Despite Hind's rather optimistic remarks, adequate drainage measures were not undertaken until 1907.

J.A. Dickinson, a member of Hind's party, made a traverse through the northern part of the Reserve in 1858 to try and locate a route for a road from Lake of the Woods to the Red River Settlement. He set out along the south bank of the Seine River (Figure 2P). Of Oak Creek, the present site of Isle des Chenes, Dickinson wrote,

Figure 1

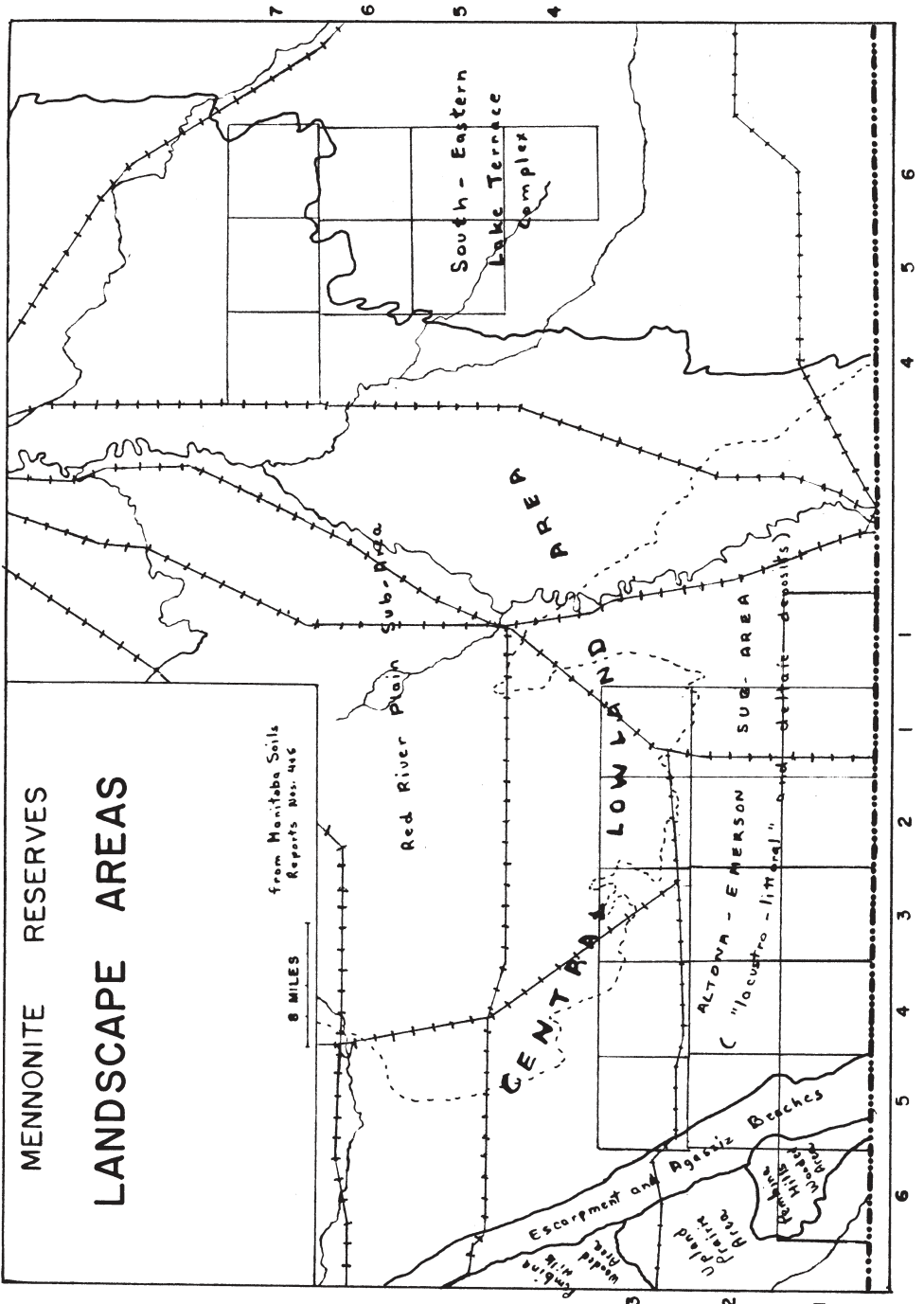
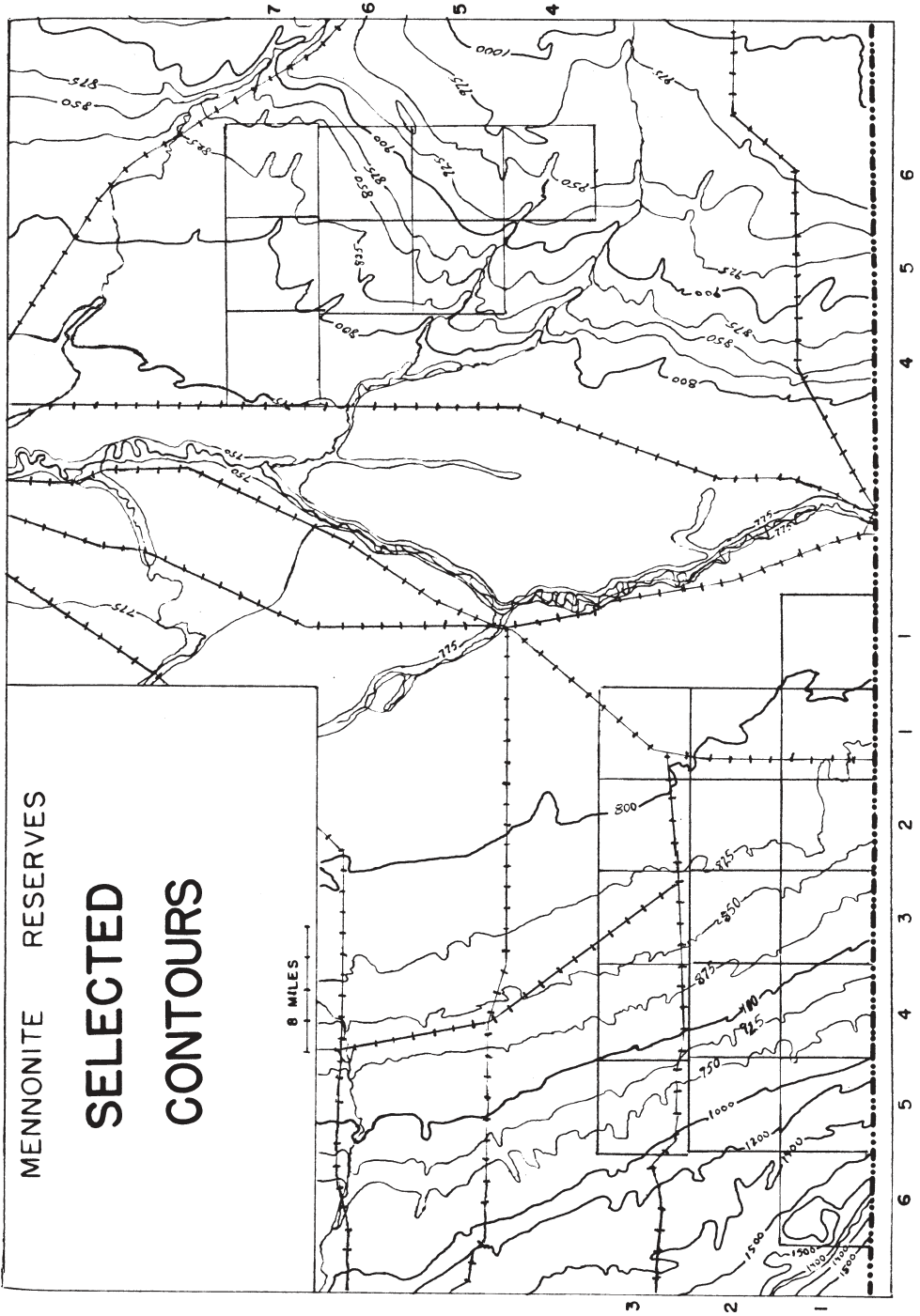


Figure 2



This would be an admirable place for a settlement, the land being as rich as any in the whole country, and there being a large supply of oaks, averaging 1'6" in diameter, and poplars suitable for fencing. On the south side of Oak Creek the open prairie stretches away to the horizon, the greater part of that which was within view being dry, there being only a few patches of wet land.<sup>6</sup>

At this point he was directly north of the Reserve. Continuing southeast, Dickinson journeyed through prairie; the track wound a bit in order to avoid small wet places, and there were numerous clumps of small aspens and willows in every direction. He kept about two miles south of the Seine, "a beautiful and rich prairie lying between us and it, and on the south, one mile distant, runs a well-wooded ridge parallel with our course."<sup>7</sup> This ridge was one of the Lake Agassiz beaches which approached the eastern end of the Reserve, leaving the lowland and starting to enter the highland with its lake-terrace features. "We wound round numerous and large clumps of aspens, from 5 to 30 feet high and willows for seven miles, when we came to a rising ground so densely covered with aspens and fallen timber that it was impossible for carts to go further." Therefore they left the carts, "soil here becomes lighter,...light sandy and clay loam...timber all burnt."<sup>8</sup>

Dickinson's traverse indicates that the northern part of the Reserve was a flat, poorly drained country, but with sufficient timber in the immediate neighbourhood to satisfy all the settlers' immediate wants. During the return trip to Red River Settlement he crossed the Seine at a place about 35 miles from its mouth, "At this crossing place there are two or three houses, the commencement of a settlement, which is likely to be quickly extended."<sup>9</sup> This settlement developed into the French-Canadian village of Ste. Anne (Figure 4P).

These few remarks by Hind and Dickinson are not much to go by, but they do clearly indicate that in 1858 the northern part of the Reserve was poorly drained prairie with timber near at hand. The southern part of the Reserve was not visited but Hind's maps indicate that it was wooded.

### West Reserve

Considerably more information is available about the West Reserve. Alexander Henry, the younger, traded with the Indians in the vicinity in 1800, and his journals contain some observations on the landscape. Most of the Reserve was prairie when Henry saw it, consequently he always emphasized the wooded banks of the streams: "the banks [of the Riviere aux Marais, in township 1-1E] are wooded throughout, principally by oak and bois blanc."<sup>10</sup> He also described the course of the Pembina River where it leaves the escarpment:

It then bends SE for the same distance, when it turns East and enters the great level plain, where its banks are well lined with large wood...We had a quarter of a mile of strong wood to pass through on either side of the Panbian River to reach the plains.<sup>11</sup>

These woods were later to supply the West Reserve Mennonites with their first building material.

Henry generally seems to have followed the course of the Pembina River in his journeys from his post on the Red River to his post in the Pembina Mountains near the present town of Morden, through country that is today on the United States

side of the Boundary, but the following description of the Red River Valley is also true of the West Reserve, which only lies a few miles north of the area described.

The country from Red River to this mountain [Pembina] is one level plain, without a hill or stone. The grass would be rather long were it not for the buffalo. On ascending the mountain, the face of the country suddenly changes, the soil is sandy, and stones are frequent. The ground is rough: dry wooded valleys and high barren hills are the principal objects...On the east lies the large level plain, where there is not a stick of wood to be seen excepting along the Panbian River, which runs in a serpentine course until it is lost in the view eastward...North and south the prospect is soon terminated by rising grounds, partially wooded, but westward the winding course of the Panbian is seen in a deep valley for many miles...<sup>12</sup>

Henry had a good eye for country, as indicated in the following description of the course of a stream from the steep grade of the Pembina Escarpment (Figure 2), over some Lake Agassiz beaches and sandy deltaic deposits at its foot, down to the heavier clays and loams deposited in the deeper portions of Lake Agassiz.

Their first course [that of small rivers issuing from the Pembina Hills] is through deep valleys, where the beds are almost choked with stones. Then on leaving the hills, the valleys end, and the beds of sand and blue gravel, with a few large stones lying nearly on a level with the meadows. After 5 or 6 miles nothing but sand is to be seen, and then, in a few miles more, some mud and mire, through which even buffalo have great difficulty in crossing.<sup>13</sup>

In 1806 Henry was in this area again, and prepared another description of the rivers; this time from a point probably six miles south of the site of Morden.

At our feet issued out of the mountain two rivulets, whose banks retained their wood for about 3 leagues in the plains, where the water then spreads into a number of small streams; which run apart through the meadow till they reunite to form Plumb River, whose tufts of wood one could scarcely discern...I have many times beheld these plains covered with buffalo at all seasons of the year; now not one solitary old bull enlivens the prospect. This summers extraordinary rain, having over flowed the low country, has caused the buffalo to resort to the high lands southward.<sup>14</sup>

When the Mennonites arrived in 1875 and 1876 they found practically the same landscape that Alexander Henry had described 70 years earlier, but they interpreted the country from an agricultural point of view. Their earliest settlements were not close to Emerson on the Red River (their closest trading centre), because that would have meant occupying low country, which, when flooded, had driven even the buffalo away. Instead they occupied the higher, better drained, more easily worked sandy soils to the west, which were also close to the wooded Pembina Escarpment. Furthermore, the many small rivulets mentioned by Henry provided an adequate supply of water, both for man and beast, until wells could be dug. Early Mennonite settlers mention the presence of buffalo bones but apparently they were not sufficiently abundant to warrant collecting them for sale.

Subsequent observers, even though they were attached to scientific expeditions, added little to Henry's descriptions of the country. H.Y. Hind's report on the North-West contains some remarks on the West Reserve country.<sup>15</sup> J.A. Dickinson was ordered to investigate the Pembina Mountain country and recorded in October 1858, that:



on the south side [of the La Salle River] there is prairie apparently as level and boundless as the ocean; the grass on it is most beautiful and luxuriant, indicating the richness of the soil. This prairie (between the present sites of Carman and Morden) is of light sandy soil, with clumps of aspens and willows growing here and there; it is intersected by many small valleys, in all of which, with one exception, the creeks that formed them are now dried up.<sup>16</sup> (Figure 2P)

Settlers from Ontario were interested in the flat treeless prairie south of the La Salle River, but they took a great fancy to the land at the foot of the escarpment near Morden, and occupied some of that country about 15 years after Dickinson visited the district, and just before the arrival of the Mennonites.

Captain John Palliser's party explored the Pembina Mountain country in 1857<sup>17</sup> (see Figure 3P). They visited the *Metis* settlement of St. Joseph on July 29, and found: "numerous detached dwellings, which, however, are well arranged on a regular plan with a view to the after construction of streets." Later St. Joseph was re-named Walhalla, and even had a grist mill where the Mennonites brought some of the grain before they established their own mills. Dr. Hector, the geologist on the expedition, correctly interpreted the plain in the Central Lowland as having formerly been "an ancient lake bottom" and that "Pembina Hill, consisting of previously deposited materials, was its [the lake's] western shore." From St. Joseph the party travelled northwestward through townships 1-5, and 2-5. The prairie lands over which they travelled possessed, "numerous fresh and saline marshes, and small lakes abounding in ducks, waders, and other aquatic birds." Reeds from these sloughs were used by the Mennonites for thatching the roofs of their houses.

Palliser described the escarpment quite fully.

This hill [Pembina Mountain] from St. Josephs to...[four miles south of Morden], preserves the same character of a steep slope, scantily clothed with small wood, the summit forming an even sky line, but further on the slope becomes more gentle, and facing the north ceases to be so marked, appearing like a hill seen from the prairie. The woods also become more plentiful, and of much finer growth, being dispersed in very pretty groups upon the long slope into which the escarpment changes.<sup>18</sup>

Later this was regarded as ideal country for farming, and appealed to Ontario farmers and Mennonites alike.

### **Agricultural Possibilities of the Central Lowland**

Neither Hind or Palliser seems to have had any doubt as to the agricultural possibilities of the Central Lowland (Figure 1). Hind wrote:

The character of the soil in Assiniboia within the limits of the ancient lake ridges, cannot be surpassed. I frequently examined the soil some miles distant from the river along my line of route...and I invariably found the prairie portion to exhibit a uniform fertility.<sup>19</sup>

However, the outstanding agricultural problem was not so much the fertility of the soil close to the Red River (Sir George Simpson's testimony before the Select Committee on the Hudson's Bay Company notwithstanding), as the difficulties involved in obtaining and maintaining an adequate drainage system. Palliser made some remarks about this:

Of the prairies along Red River only narrow strips on the top of the banks have been brought under cultivation by the colonist, as there the land is naturally rather higher and better drained than that lying further in the rear, both from its proximity to the river and also from the frequent gullies cut in the soft clay soil by the numerous small creeks that carry off the surface water. These gullies at present reach but a very short distance back from the river, but were they artificially extended so as to serve as main drains, much land at present covered by swamp and marsh would be reclaimed.<sup>20</sup>

G.M. Dawson, who studied the Central Lowland in 1873, is of the same opinion regarding both fertility and the need for drainage.

... of the alluvial prairie of the Red River, much has already been said, and the uniform fertility of its soil cannot be exaggerated. The soil may be said to lie ready for the plough...When the sod has rotted, the soil appears as a light friable mould, easily worked, and most favourable for agriculture.<sup>21</sup>

He believed that the small swamps were the only deterrents to settlement. It is surprising that none of these three investigators regarded the lack of forest cover as a hindrance to settlement. This was quite contrary to the reports submitted by the visiting farmers, delegations of the late 1870's who usually cited that as the main drawback to settlement. Perhaps the treeless Red River plains was more of a psychological than a physical hazard to the Ontario-Canadians. Dawson is the only one who makes specific comments on the wood supply:

Away from the immediate borders of the streams, the prairie, though covered with a luxuriant sod, is absolutely treeless. It is fortunately the case however, that the Red River Valley is bordered on the east by the forests described [in his report], and on the west by the wooded district of Pembina Mountain and its northern extensions.<sup>22</sup>

However, the Ontario farmers reacted differently, as the following quotations from Jeff Gee's reminiscences reveal. Jeff Gee was the pseudonym of Julius F. Galbraith, a pioneer Manitoba journalist who homesteaded in the Pembina Mountain district in 1874, though he did not move to his claim until the next year.

In those days nobody ever looked at land – if the timber suited the land had to. Notwithstanding the apparent absurdity, it is a fact that those who had the whole country to choose from, almost invariably chose the worst farms. They picked for bush and they got it; but along with it they got cold, low-lying prairie – for in this section the two generally go together. I knew men who rejoiced in the possession of claims almost entirely wooded. Four or five years ago, they rejoiced; they don't now. While they are clearing off an acre of bush, their neighbours alongside, can break up twenty or thirty acres of prairie. I know other men, among the very first who visited this section of the Province, who homesteaded fine pieces of bush in the midst of vile, boggy hay marshes.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, it did not take the Canadians long to realize the mistake they had made in ignoring the southwestern fairly well drained part of the Central Lowland. In fact Gee goes on to say:

[the] vast plain...extending from the boundary line to the Boyne, and from the

Pembina Mountains to Red River, comprises some of the best land in the North-West, and is by far the largest section of contiguous good land in the Province.<sup>24</sup>

But the Canadians only realized this after the Mennonites had demonstrated the land's value, because they had certainly by-passed it themselves.

In '75 the few settlers at Pembina Mountain fondly hoped that in the course of 15 or 20 years, this plain would become settled notwithstanding the absence of timber. Before the summer was over, a long line of camp fires, extending for miles and miles, announced to the lonely settlers that six thousand Mennonites had located on 17 townships.<sup>25</sup>

### Surveys

The above accounts serve to give an approximate idea of what was known about the landscape of the East and West Reserves before settlement, but they are not sufficiently detailed to make it possible to construct an accurate map of the pre-settlement vegetation. Also the travellers' maps are not sufficiently precise to make their observations really useful beyond conveying a good impression of the country. If accurate co-ordinates are superimposed on their maps many discrepancies appear – level prairie is indicated where later sources indicate woods, beach ridges are miles out of place and so on. Discretion must be used in employing the first scientific explorers' reports and we can rely only on the description of their actual traverses.

But there is another way of constructing a map of the pre-settlement landscape. The Deputy Land Surveyors who surveyed the West into townships and sections were required to do more than just measure the land. They also had to prepare a crude resource inventory of all the townships they surveyed. In their field-books they recorded everything of interest that they observed in their traverses: swamps, open prairies, woods, burnt-out-areas, rivers, meadows and so on were all recorded. As well as being entered in their field-books this information was recorded on large scale maps, 2" to 1 mile, for each township. Finally they appraised the land, section by section, for its agricultural capabilities, dividing it into three classes for this purpose, and prepared a summary of the physical characteristics of the township. This usually included a description of the soils, the drainage and the timber supply. Thus a very complete picture of the landscape can be obtained by studying the surveyors' field-books. But the quality of the accounts is not uniform. Some surveyors were not as conscientious as others in recording the various features of the terrain, and also, since the surveys took place at various seasons (except in the dead of winter), the observations are often not completely reliable, especially in the descriptions of the drainage. Streams, for example, occasionally stop at township lines. (See Figure 5)

What follows is a description of the landscape of the 25 townships comprising the Mennonite Reserves, derived from the original surveyors' field-books and field maps.<sup>26</sup> (See Figures 3 and 4)

### East Reserve

The townships of the East Reserve were surveyed in 1872. The northern three townships, judging from the surveyors' reports, clearly fall into one landscape unit markedly different from the townships to the south. These townships were relatively free of forest cover. Prairie, consisting of tall weeds, grasses and some wil-

lows and scrub, covered most of the area. Clear prairie, that is low grasses, was mentioned only rarely, but wet spots, usually designated marshes, were fairly common. Only in township 7-6 were woods important. The soil was considered to be uniformly good throughout this area. Vegetation and soils varied little, so that drainage was the important factor in the classification of the land, and the surveyors made much of the fact that the land in the west was good but subject to flooding, and that drainage conditions improved to the east, where there were three squatters at the time of the survey.

In the five townships to the south the land was not nearly so open. All these townships were more or less timbered, poorly drained, and heavily burdened with stones. The surveyors mentioned that poplar and spruce were at hand for building purposes, but this did not overcome the fact that the soils were inferior for agriculture. In township 5-5 for example:

Soil is generally of a sandy, gravelly, stony nature, which must render its successful cultivation a matter of some difficulty. A considerable portion of this township is covered with drift, consisting of large granitic limestone and other boulders.<sup>27</sup>

The wet, marshy conditions which prevailed in varying degree in all the townships were emphasized: "Township [5-6] is a level surface, its soil is totally unfit for farming purposes, alternating from wet and marshy to a coarse sandy and stony soil."<sup>28</sup>

It is interesting to compare the land classification of these surveyors with that of the present Manitoba Soils Survey. Every land surveyor had to divide the township he surveyed into three classes of land, I, II, and III, on the basis of soil, drainage and vegetation. "High" prairie, and well drained woodland free of stone, was usually graded Class I. Poorly drained land and sandy soil was graded Class II, and the marshes and gravelly areas were graded as Class III. These classes would roughly correspond to the three major land divisions represented in the legend of Figure 4, which shows the Soils Survey's scheme. Each quarter section was classified into one of these three categories.

**Table 1**  
**Deputy Land Surveyors' Land Classification East Reserve**

<u>Township</u>	<u>Number of Quarter Sections</u>		
	<u>Class I</u>	<u>Class II</u>	<u>Class III</u>
7-4	63	62	19
7-5	77	35	32
7-6	120	24	0
6-5	33	111	0
6-6	88	56	0
5-5	12	110	22
5-6	0	40	104
4-6	<u>0</u>	<u>128</u>	<u>16</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>193</b>
%	34%	49%	17%

The old and the modern classifications correspond fairly well except in townships 6-5 and 6-6 where the surveyors rated the land far too highly in their classification even if not in their reports. Both townships were surveyed in fall, when the marshes were dry and drainage conditions were deceptive, and hence received a high rating. The three northern townships appear to have been classified fairly enough, the Class III land comprising the poorly drained areas. The rating for the three southern townships were adequate, though 5-5 was ranked higher than it probably deserved.

In conclusion it seems fair to say that the Mennonites were given a Reserve in an area that the surveyors regarded as generally unfit for settlement. Even the woods were considered inadequate for timber. Subsequent agricultural developments in the Reserve have, in the main, followed the pattern foreseen by the surveyors. Construction of drains in the northern townships has resulted in a successful occupancy) of that area. But unsatisfactory agricultural conditions have always prevailed over most of the southern townships, and have even led to land abandonment in many places. The reservation of this poor area for the Mennonites can only be attributed to a cursory examination of the surveyors' reports by Canadian government officials.<sup>29</sup>

### **West Reserve**

The townships in the West Reserve were not all surveyed in one year. Tiers two and three were surveyed in 1872, but tier one, next to the United States Boundary, was not surveyed until the Mennonites were occupying it in 1875.

Surveying these townships was much easier than surveying those of the East Reserve. Because of the marshy conditions and the necessity for cutting lines through the woods it often required a full month to cover a township in the East Reserve. In the West Reserve a township was sometimes surveyed in three days. These figures speak for themselves regarding the difference in terrain.

Most of the townships to the east of the Escarpment were described simply as flat, open prairie. The surveyors indicated that the soils were uniformly good throughout the lowland, and often employed the phrase "rich soil", but they are reluctant to say that the lowland townships were suitable for settlement since they lacked timber for building and both water and meadow for livestock. Furthermore, they were well aware of the fact that the drainage was poor in the northern tier of townships, and that the soils there were definitely heavier than the loams to the south. They were not nearly so noncommittal about praising the land near the Escarpment and in township 1-1E. At the time of the Mennonite migration these areas did offer the best conditions for settlement, because water was available from the gullies, meadows for hay were abundant, and timber for building was not far away. The land above the Escarpment was not considered suitable for settlement because of the many ravines.

Table 2 is a tabulation of the surveyors' classification of the quarter sections in the various townships into three land capability categories. The scheme is similar to that employed in the East Reserve.

Figure 3

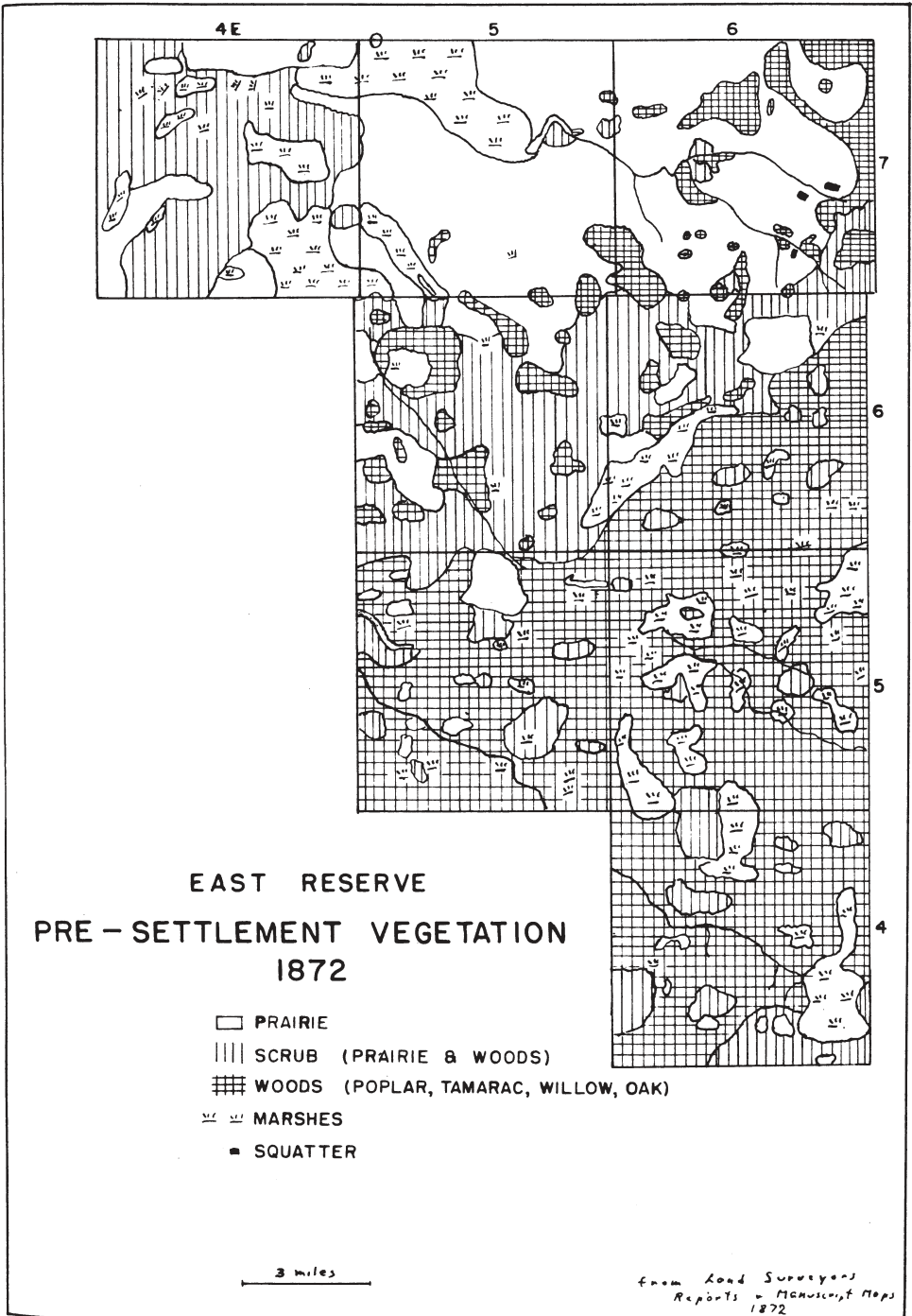


Figure 4

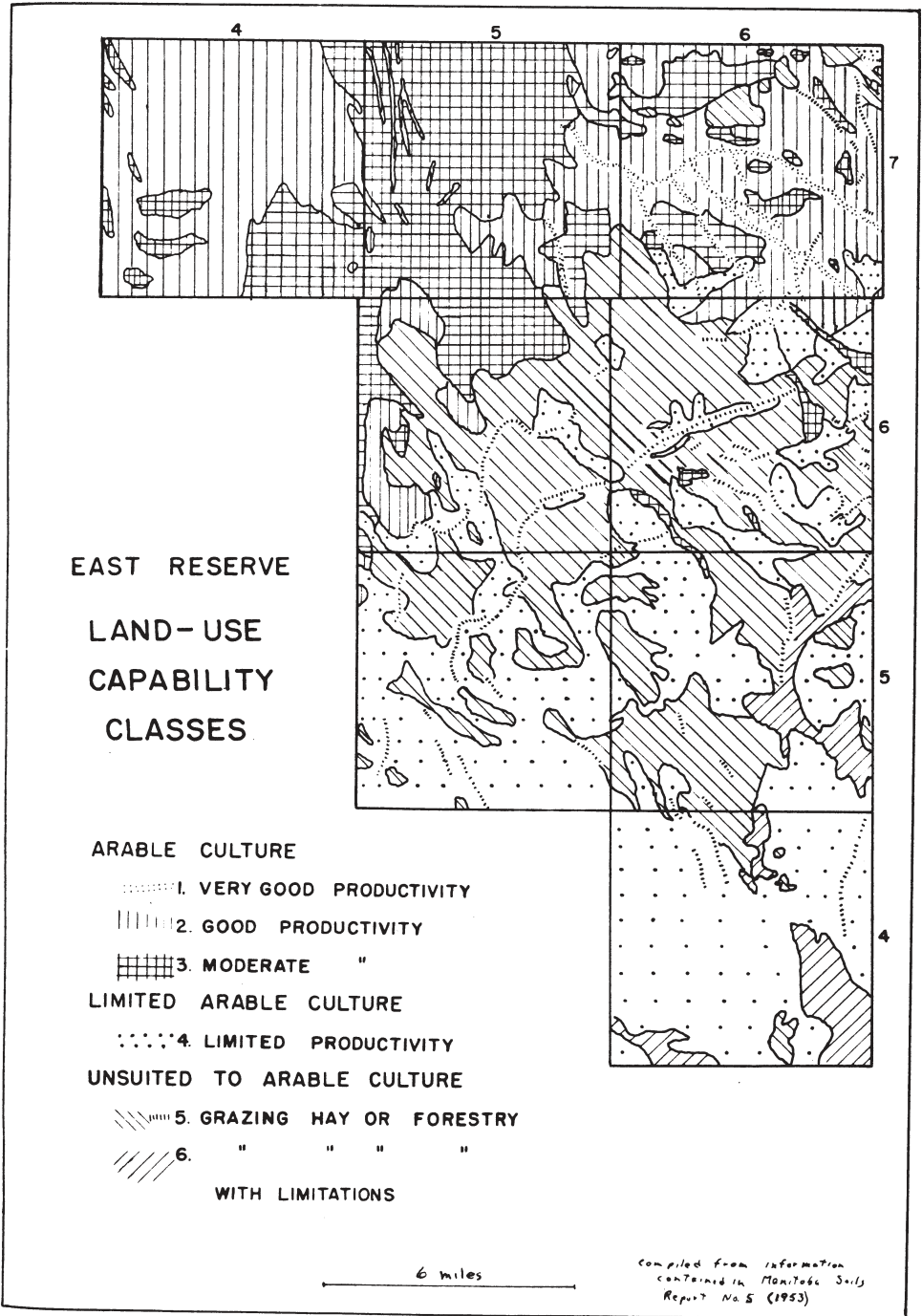




Figure 5

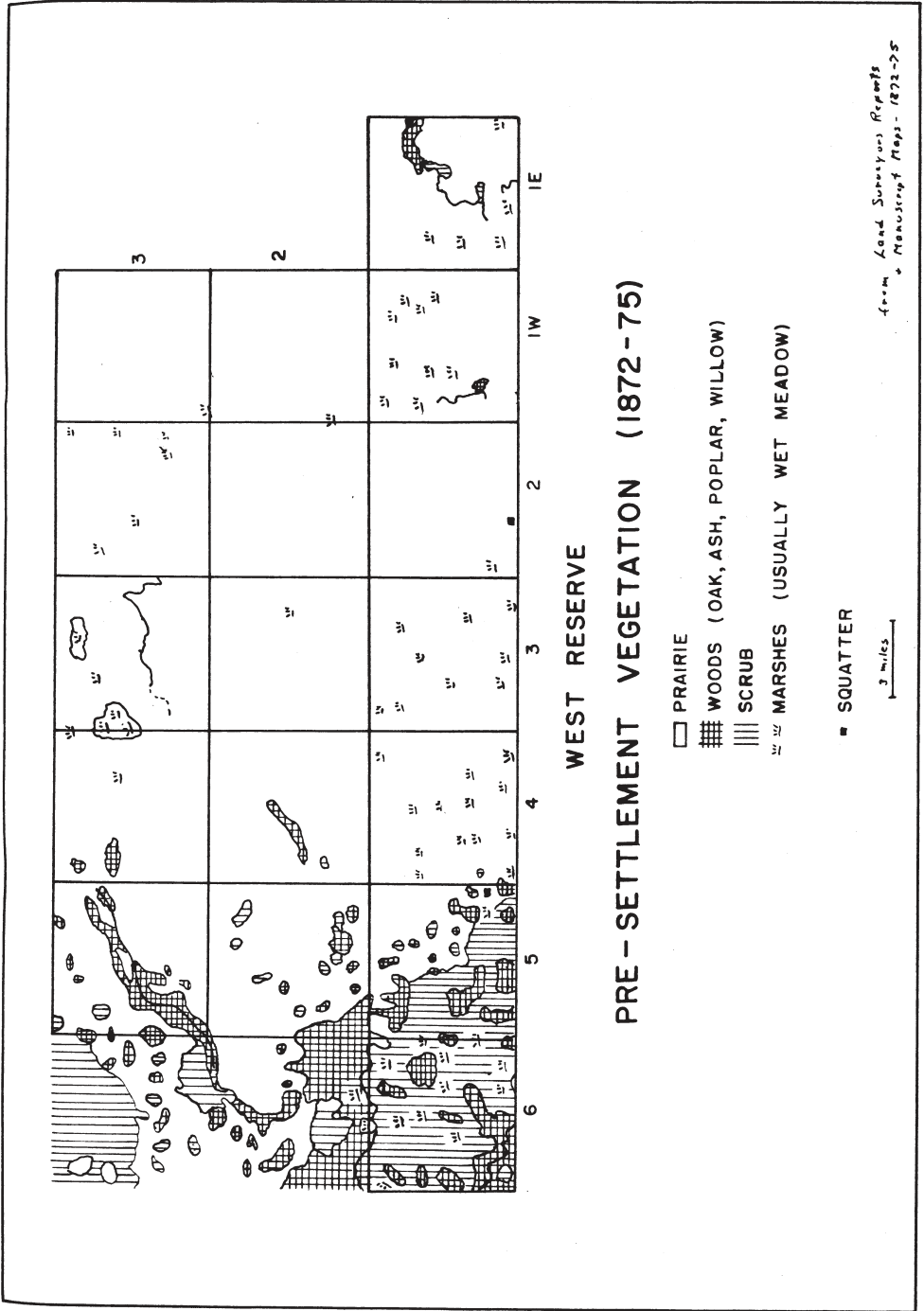
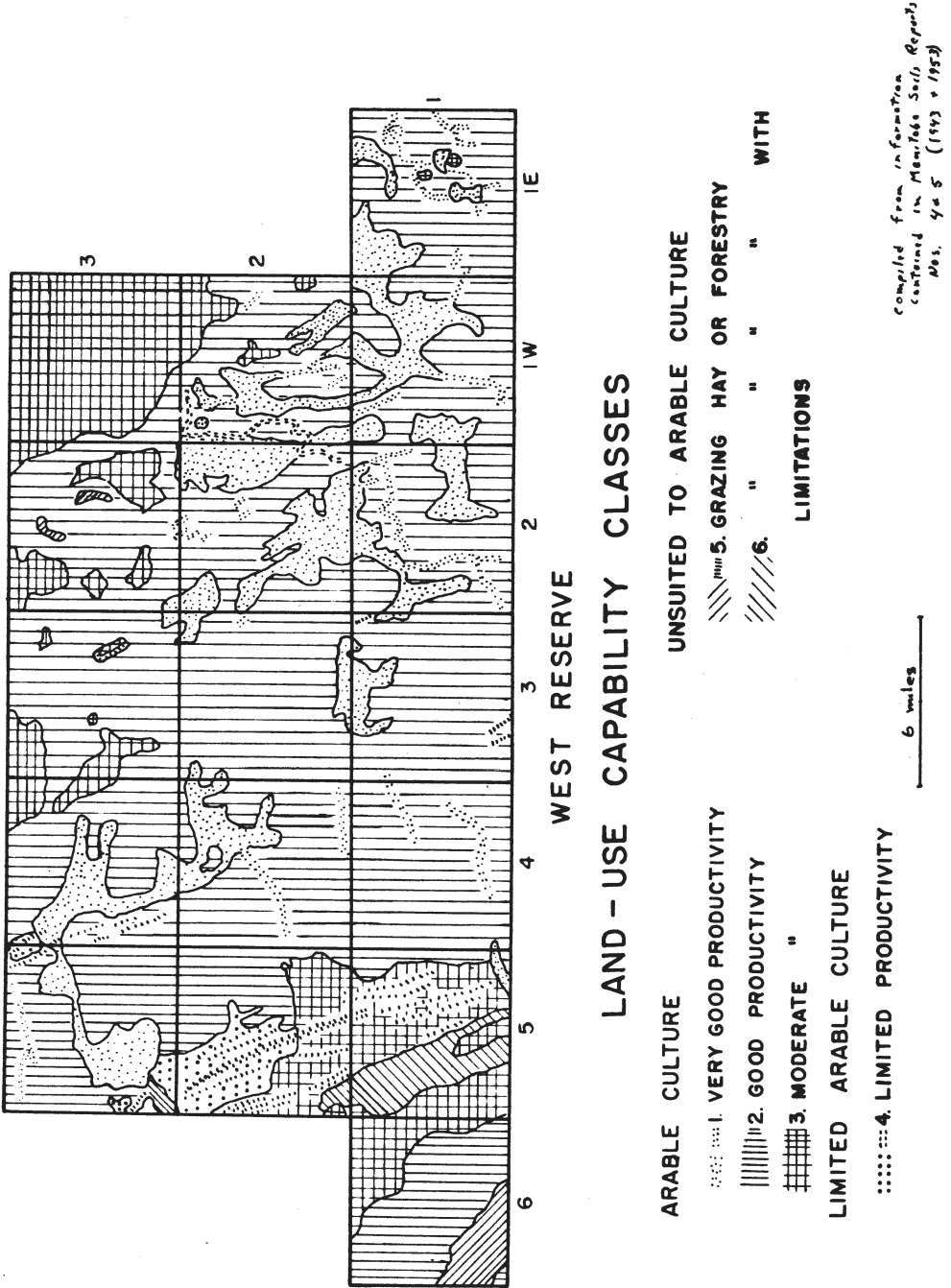




Figure 6



**Table 2**  
**Deputy Land Surveyors' Land Classification West Reserve**

<u>Township</u>	<u>Class I</u>	<u>Class II</u>	<u>Class III</u>
1-1E	140	0	4
1-1W	142	2	0
1-2	144	0	0
1-3	144	0	0
1-4	144	0	0
2-1	144	0	0
2-2	144	0	0
2-3	144	0	0
2-4	144	0	0
2-5	116	26	2
3-1	144	0	0
3-2	142	2	0
3-3	74	66	4
3-4	94	50	0
3-5	140	4	0
1-5	72	64	8
1-6	<u>120</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>4</u>
TOTAL	2192	234	22
%	89 %	10 %	1%

This classification corresponds very well with the Land Use Capability Map shown in figure 6. Some of the ratings are over optimistic, especially in townships 1-5 and 1-6.

An important difference between the East and West Reserve is revealed by comparing the percentage of land in each class. In the East Reserve 34% of the land was rated as Class I, in the West Reserve 89% fell in this class. This estimate is probably somewhat high for the East Reserve but appears to be reasonable for the West Reserve. Forty-nine percent of the East Reserve was rated as Class II land, 10% of the West Reserve, and the figures for Class III land were 17% and 1% respectively. In both Reserves the figures for the Class III land are too low. Surveyors tended to rate even poor forested land as Class II or even Class I, as long as the drainage was adequate.

### Conclusions and Opinions

The various reports referred to above reveal that there are some points of similarity between the two Reserves and also many differences. The Reserves lie on either side of the Red River, each partly in the Manitoba Central Lowland and the remainder in adjacent higher land. The proportions vary: the East Reserve has three out of eight townships in the Lowland, the West Reserve 15 out of 17.

In both Reserves the land becomes lighter and better drained towards the margins of the Lowland. In the West Reserve the drainage was rather poor in some

parts of the southern two tiers of townships, yet generally it was adequate for settlement purposes. Only one township, 7-6, had similar conditions in the East Reserve. The land in the other two East Reserve prairie townships corresponded to the flat, poorly drained, rather heavy clays found in the three northeastern townships of the West Reserve.

Since there was only a limited area of prairie land available in the East Reserve the entire prairie, except the marshes, was occupied by the Mennonites. Because of the drainage problem some of these lands were subsequently abandoned. There was much more prairie land available in the West Reserve, so that there was no necessity to occupy poorly drained lands in the first years of settlement.

Only a relatively small portion of the West Reserve is highland and this part was not occupied by the Mennonites, though the trees found there turned out to be an important source of timber and fuel. The East Reserve is flanked to the east by a gentle, steady rise which provided ideal conditions for the formation of lake terrace features in glacial Lake Agassiz. A very complex terrain resulted in the southern townships, full of depressions, bogs and stony and gravelly areas, with only a very few patches of good soil. Practically all of this area was covered with trees. There were some heavy stands of timber, but usually the trees were scrub poplar and willow. Thus five out of the eight townships in the East Reserve were actually marginal for farming.

However, it is also true that the East Reserve offered some advantages to pioneers: water and wood were abundant. Timber was not usually obtained in the course of clearing, but still it was close at hand. Basically, this was a good place for a poor man to begin life in a new country. But who wants to *remain* on marginal land, satisfied with a very low scale of living? Surprisingly many Mennonites endured great hardship for years, and in some of the southern townships farming still had not been raised above the subsistence level by 1955. The advantages gained during the first year or two of settlement were far outweighed by the 40 years of struggle which the Mennonites spent on land which simply was not suitable for farming. It is far easier in the long run to take a risk on the open prairie for a year or two as the Mennonites did in the West Reserve, and then almost effortlessly, by comparison, get into the full swing of commercial farming.

It must be kept in mind that a prairie region must be settled by persons with some money, rather than by the empty handed. Money is necessary for the assembling of material from a distance, for the construction of buildings, and for digging and curbing wells. Fortunately the West Reserve did not make demands of this nature in an extreme form, and it is doubtful whether any more money was spent in settling the West Reserve than was spent in the East Reserve. Settlement may at first have appeared to be extremely difficult, but many writers have exaggerated the difficulties. The land was good and water was usually available. Only timber had to be teamed in, and rarely from a distance of more than 15 miles.

In summary then, what were the opinions of the various men, who saw these lands before the Mennonites did, of the future agricultural possibilities of the areas we have called the Reserves? Alexander Henry did not even consider the question, he was too absorbed in the fur trade. Hind, Palliser and Dawson seem to have had no doubt about the potentialities for farming in the Red River Valley. The

surveyors on the other hand were influenced by their Ontario background . They never explicitly criticized the open prairie, but only faintly damned it with their contrasting enthusiastic descriptions of some of the park areas – “unrivalled for settlement”, etc.; there is no doubt of their opinions.

But the Mennonites who eventually settled these lands in the 1870's looked at Southern Manitoba through very different eyes. They were well acquainted with grasslands completely devoid of trees because they had lived in the semi-arid lands of Southern Russia since 1788. In the 86 years that they lived in Russia before the first of their group came to Manitoba they developed a distinctive settlement survey pattern, and learned to live under conditions that were very similar to those prevailing in Southern Manitoba. They lived in nucleated settlements, and though they had been sheep raisers at first in Russia, they were confirmed grain growers by the time they wanted to leave Russia for ideological reasons. In appraising the lands of the interior of North America these farmers then were not necessarily looking for park country; they could appreciate the potentialities of a prairie land.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The East Reserve was created by Order-in-Council, March 3, 1873, the West Reserve by Order-in-Council, April 25, 1876.

<sup>2</sup> See G.M. Dawson, *Report on the Geology and Resources of the Region on the Vicinity of the 49th Parallel, from Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains*, Montreal, 1875.

<sup>3</sup> H.Y. Hind, *Papers Relative to the Exploration of the Country Between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement*, London, 1859.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*: 101.

<sup>5</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*: 160.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> E. Coues, ed., *The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson*, (3 vol.), New York, 1897, Vol. 1, *The Red River of the North*: 69.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*: 83.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*: 118.

<sup>13</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*: 420.

<sup>15</sup> H.Y. Hind, *North-West Territory, Report of Progress, Together with a Preliminary and General Report on the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expeditions*, Toronto, 1859.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*: 17.

<sup>17</sup> Captain John Palliser, *The Journals, Detailed Reports, and Observations Relative to the Exploration of that Portion of British North America, which in Latitude Lies Between the British Boundary Line and the Height of Land or Watershed of the Northern or Frozen Ocean Respectively, and in Longitude, Between the Western Shore of Lake Superior and the Pacific Ocean during the Years 1857, 1858, 1859 and 1860*, London, 1863: 40 & 41.

<sup>18</sup> Palliser, *Journals*: 40.

<sup>19</sup> Hind, *Papers*: 56

<sup>20</sup> Palliser, *Journals*: 8.

<sup>21</sup> Dawson, *Report*: 277.

<sup>22</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Jeff Gee, *Both Sides of Manitoba*, Nelsonville 1881: 94.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*: 106.

<sup>25</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> The Surveyors' Field Note Books are available in the Surveys Branch, and the original Township Plans in the Land Office, Department of Mines and Natural Resources, Legislative Buildings, Winnipeg, Man. They are classified by township. For more detailed descriptions of the townships based on Field Books see Appendix A.

<sup>27</sup> Land Office, Winnipeg, Report of William Burke, D.L.S. on township 5-5.

<sup>28</sup> Land Office, Winnipeg, Report of J.B. Richard, D.L.S. on township 5-6.

<sup>29</sup> To this day a few Mennonites believe that the Canadian government purposely placed them on this marginal land. There is no foundation for this interpretation.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix C for an account of the Mennonite developments in Russia.

## Chapter 2

### INSPECTING LAND IN CANADA AND THE MIGRATION

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Mennonites were proudly regarded by the Russian officials as the most successful agriculturists in South Russia, if not in all Russia. And in turn the Mennonites were just as pleased with South Russia, especially because the Russians left them to their own devices. The Mennonites were permitted to administer their own affairs, they spoke German in their settlements and taught it in their schools, and were given full freedom to worship as they pleased. They had no further responsibility to the State than to pay their taxes.

The practically unruffled existence of the Mennonites within the body of the Russian State, that had been disturbed only by internal strife in some of the villages over the distribution of land, was rudely upset in 1871 when it was learned that the government intended to adopt universal military service. The Mennonites immediately protested vigorously, and eventually a form of alternative service was arranged for them after the Russians realized that there was a strong possibility that this valuable group of agriculturists would leave Russia if they were not allowed to keep their special privileges. Nevertheless the most conservative Mennonites decided to migrate.<sup>1</sup>

Both Canada and the United States were anxious to have these proven agriculturists. In the United States the railway companies wanted to settle the vast tracts of land they possessed in the West. In Canada, the Department of Agriculture of the Dominion government was in charge of immigration, and was eager to get the Mennonites to settle in Manitoba. In 1872 when the Canadian government first heard about a proposed emigration from Southern Russia, Manitoba was very sparsely populated, had poor connections with Eastern Canada, and was not even producing sufficient agricultural produce for its own needs. If this small new province was to become an integral, functioning part of Canada, then settlers and better communications were necessary, and the Dominion government endeavoured to secure both to the best of its ability. The famous regular rectangular survey of land, modified after the land survey established by the United States Land Ordinance of 1785, finally got well under way in 1872; immigration agents were engaged to try and induce immigrants to come to Manitoba from Eastern Canada, the United States and Europe; the machinery for bringing immigrants to Manitoba was organized; and work was initiated on a transcontinental railway.

#### Selection of the East Reserve

In 1872, the Canadian Department of Agriculture engaged William Hespeler, a German-Canadian from Ontario who was travelling in Germany at the time, to visit the Mennonites in South Russia and attempt to persuade them to come to Canada. As a result of Hespeler's efforts twelve Mennonite delegates, representing various Mennonite sects, came to Canada in 1873 to inspect the land and negotiate the terms of settlement.<sup>2</sup>

The land comprising the East Reserve had been allotted to the Mennonites even before the delegates arrived in Canada. There is no direct evidence to show why the particular block of land should have been selected for the Mennonites, but the general reasons are quite apparent.<sup>3</sup> The area met the major requirements of an agricultural reserve: it was empty of settlers, except for one or two squatters; it was reasonably close to Winnipeg, the main trading centre in the province; there was prairie for hay in the north, and wood for building in the south; and water was available. In all likelihood the Mennonites were assigned to the East Reserve under the best of intentions. Ontario and French settlers were reluctant to leave the streams and woods, so the officials using the same reasoning gave the Mennonites what they probably considered ideal land. But a closer examination of the surveyors' reports would have shown the Department of Agriculture officials that at least half of the townships were not fit for settlement, and that there was a bog between the Reserve and Winnipeg: something no farmer ever cares to place between his farm and a market.

There were specific reasons for selecting the precise boundaries of the Reserve. The officials obviously wanted to keep the Reserve on a whole township basis. Therefore the western-most township had to be 7-4, because 7-3 abutts against the river lots on the west. There was no suitable land closer to Winnipeg than tier 7 because most of the townships in tier 8 contained extensive swampy tracts. Also the south road to Winnipeg from Ste. Anne, a French settlement, passed through tier 8, and it probably appeared likely that French settlers would occupy the area in the near future (Plate 11-3).

It had originally been proposed that township 7-7 be included in the Reserve, but on the advice of Gilbert McMicken, the Dominion Land Agent in Winnipeg, that township was exempted from the Reserve and 4-6 was substituted.<sup>4</sup> The agent McMicken probably recommended this change because the Seine River passes through township 7-7, and he presumably expected that the French river lot settlement would be extended into that area. Furthermore, this range had not even been surveyed in 1873, so that it could not possibly have been reserved.

South of tier 4, the drainage is so poor that settlement was impossible, and has been to this day. That the Department of Agriculture was aware of this is apparent from the fact noted above that township 4-6 was originally not included in the Reserve.

The townships to the west, on the other hand, have very good soil, but they were probably exempted from the Reserve because squatters were settling there even before 1873. Townships 6-4 and 5-4 were both surveyed in 1872, and in each the surveyors mention a few houses, stables, and some plowing. Most of these were *Metis* "staked" claims on the Rat River.

In summary: the limits of the Reserve which the Mennonites were granted on March 3, 1873, were set in the north and west by the Seine and Rat Rivers on which the French were establishing their river lots, and to the east and south by marginal land.

One change was effected in the boundaries before the Mennonite delegates visited the Reserve. By 1873, eleven Ontario and Scottish farmers had settled in the southeast part of township 7-6 and they petitioned to the government that a por-

tion of the land in their vicinity be taken out of the Reserve. Therefore the S.E. quarter of township 7-6 was withdrawn from the Reserve (See Figure 8), in lieu of which the N.W. quarter of 6-7 was added.<sup>5</sup> This Anglo-Saxon enclave was called the Clearsprings Settlement.

Some of the Mennonite delegates were not only taken to see the East Reserve, but were also shown the land along the Assiniboine River towards Riding Mountain. (See Appendix B for a description of the excursions.) The five delegates representing the most conservative Mennonite congregations made the decision to recommend that their people migrate to Manitoba. They came to this conclusion probably not so much on the basis of the quality of the land, but because they preferred the concessions promised by the Canadian government to those offered by the United States government. Canada was prepared to give them a straight forward exemption from military service, whereas the United States was not.<sup>6</sup> Also on the more isolated Reserve in Canada they probably thought that they would be free to continue their own way of life relatively unmolested. These conclusions are borne out by the fact that they made their decision to select Canada before they had examined the lands in North Dakota and other American areas.

Furthermore, an article in *The Manitoban* says that:

the Mennonites do not propose to seek further – they would like to have taken up a large portion of the country in the White Mud and Riding Mountain direction immediately and would have done so had the Assiniboine been put in a navigable condition. As it is they have determined to take up the eight townships at Pointe du Chenes, where they will form an intermediary settlement, but they propose arranging so that thousands of people whom they expect to follow them will be able to form a larger settlement in the country through which they just passed [along the Assiniboine].<sup>7</sup>

This again would seem to point up the fact that they wanted to come to Canada for the sake of extra privileges, since they were willing to accept land which they knew to be inferior – though they did have hopes of getting a better tract.

In all probability the Canadian government would have given the Mennonites a different reservation if the delegates had absolutely refused to accept the East Reserve. Why would the Mennonites have been taken on the trip to Riding Mountain if the government had not indicated their willingness to grant them land in this area? Apparently the Mennonites themselves may have been somewhat hesitant about settling in that district, because, according to the above quotation from *The Manitoban*, they appear to have been dubious about the ease of communications with Winnipeg along the Assiniboine River. Yet the best time for the Mennonites to have insisted that they wanted other lands was in 1873, because public opinion then was very much in favour of the Mennonite migration. Manitoba needed people badly and there probably would have been no reaction against giving the Mennonites a different reserve. By 1875, when the Mennonites were given the West Reserve, which they had not even inspected, the feeling of Manitobans towards reserves had changed and strong objections were being made against the system. Consequently the Mennonites missed their chance in 1873 to secure the type of land they definitely wanted.



### Selection of the West Reserve

The Mennonite migration to the land reserved for them in 1873 began in 1874 and it was already apparent by the end of that year that if the rate of migration continued, a new reserve would have to be found, and the first application for another reserve was made on December 28, 1874.<sup>8</sup> The question turned not so much about what type of land would be suitable for the Mennonites, but over whether there was a sufficient area of land in Manitoba that was not reserved or alienated in one form or another, and which could be reserved exclusively for the Mennonites.

Not much of Manitoba had been closely settled by 1875, but settlers had penetrated into almost all the upland parts of the province. This immediately ruled out many districts which just two years earlier could easily have been reserved. The Mennonites certainly could not expect to obtain any more land on the east side of the Red River because most of it was unsuitable for agriculture (the East Reserve itself contained large areas of marginal land as we have seen), and the *Metis* and French-Canadians were squatting on the few pockets of good land. But on the west side of the Red there was one area fairly close to Winnipeg that was still empty: the land between the Red River and Pembina Mountain. The park country on either side of the Assiniboine and on towards Riding Mountain, that had taken the fancy of the Mennonite delegates in 1873, was being occupied by Ontario settlers. The similar Pembina Mountain Country (the land at the foot of Pembina Mountain in townships 1 to 5, ranges 4 to 8 west) was being homesteaded in 1873. All the settlers were ignoring the 40 odd miles of open prairie between the Red River and the Escarpment. Therefore, when the Mennonites were in need of a new reserve in 1875, it was not, after all, necessary to look far for an empty area that could be reserved.

Whether this empty prairie was really fit for agriculture was a problem. The Ontario farmers thought that settlement was possible, but they certainly were not going to occupy it until the park areas were filled. Jeff Gee expressed the attitude of the Ontario homesteaders:

In '75 the few settlers at Pembina Mountain fondly hoped that in the course of 15 or 20 years, this plain [from the Boundary line to the Boyne, and from Pembina Mountain to Red River] would become settled, notwithstanding the absence of timber.<sup>9</sup>

This "wait and see" attitude made it possible for the Mennonites to move in ahead of other groups.

The land in the townships that later became the West Reserve was first inspected by Mennonites in the spring of 1875. J.Y. Shantz, accompanied by two Mennonites from the East Reserve, and a land surveyor examined the plain between the Red River and the Escarpment.<sup>10</sup> There was really not much choice, because to the east homesteaders were already settled on the plain to a distance of twelve miles from the Red River, and to the west the Ontario settlers were occupying the land along the tree-lined creeks flowing from the Escarpment. To the south, of course, was the United States Boundary, and to the north a poorly drained area, that was decidedly marshy in places. It was essential that the Mennonites have some timber, so the scouts included some of the land in Pembina Mountain in

their request for a reserve. Hay and water were just as important for livestock, so some of the wet lands in the north were included as well. Apparently the agents of the Department of the Interior looked quite favorably on this selection because they allowed the Mennonites to settle on these lands even before all the land was surveyed.

The reason the Mennonites were insistent upon having this area reserved for them exclusively is revealed in the following telegram:

The 300 Mennonite families now here willing to settle on treeless plain between River and Pembina Mountains if townships are reserved for them so as to prevent other settlers speculating in desirable haylands to their injury woodlots to be supplied from Pembina Mountains and Rousseau River. Recommend that townships one two and three in ranges one east, ranges one, two, three, four and five west be reserved for them. No objections will be raised by Canadian settlers as tracts unfit for settlement by their being destitute of timber. Am confident we shall lose the best of them if this is not done. Old reservation is now practically entirely settled. They are waiting answer of government.<sup>11</sup>

The government granted permission to settle, and by the last week in July, 1875, Mennonite settlers were making entries at the Land Office in Emerson.<sup>12</sup> Many were reluctant to settle on the open prairie, because of the lack of hay land. However, when they found that there was hay land to the north and especially along Buffalo Creek, they were pleased.<sup>13</sup>

The Ontario settlers were not quite as sanguine about the migration as the above telegram implied they would be. They began to complain about the proposed Reserve two weeks before the Mennonites arrived.<sup>14</sup> The settlers in township 3-5 were incensed when they learned that their township was to be reserved for the Mennonites, and they decided to petition the Department of the Interior and asked it to change the boundaries of the reservation. They argued that a considerable portion of this township had already been settled, and it was unjust that these settlers should now be required to live among people of differing language and customs. Moreover this area included some of the best land in the prairie and therefore should not go to the foreign-born. This is only a prelude to the difficulties which were to crop up between the Mennonites and the Ontario-Canadian settlers in the western part of the Reserve in the next few years.

The Reserve was not formally granted until April 25, 1876: "The authority of council for definitely reserving the township was delayed, pending the proof of the bona fides of the applicants."<sup>15</sup> The townships reserved were, 1-1E; and townships 1, 2 and 3, in ranges 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, W; and 1-6W. Thus the Mennonites received at least two townships, which contained some timber (1-5 and 1-6). The Mennonites' guide to Manitoba, J.Y. Shantz, was considerably more optimistic about these lands than the settlers were themselves. Shantz wrote in 1875: "The Mennonites however are confident that they can overcome this one disadvantage [lack of timber] and it will not be surprising if these industrious people set examples, in this respect that will be of incalculable value in the great prairie country."<sup>16</sup>

### Migration

As a result of the investigations conducted in North America in 1873 approximately 18,000 of the estimated 50,000 Mennonites in South Russia migrated to the New World.<sup>17</sup> And of these 18,000 it was the die-hard conservatives who came to Manitoba. Table 3 gives the number of Mennonites who migrated to Canada in these years.

**Table 3**  
**Mennonite Migration to Canada 1874-1880**

1874	-	1532
1875	-	3258
1876	-	1356
1877	-	183
1878	-	323
1879	-	208
1880	-	70
Total	-	6930

Compiled from the Annual Reports  
of the Department of Agriculture  
"Canada: Sessional Papers, 1875-1881."

All the Mennonites who arrived in 1874 settled in the East Reserve, or on the Scratching River (Morris River) on the west side of the Red River just across from the Reserve.<sup>18</sup> By 1875 the West Reserve was being occupied, although it was not officially declared a Reserve until the next year. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many Mennonites went to the East and how many went to the West Reserve in 1875-77. J.E. Tetu, the immigration agent at Dufferin, estimated that there were 2,500 Mennonites (426 families) in the West Reserve in 1877.<sup>19</sup> Enoch Winkler, a Canadian-German businessman, prepared a census of the Mennonite villages in the West Reserve in 1877, and arrived at a figure of 2,567, which confirms Tetu's estimate.<sup>20</sup> Since 6,329 Mennonites had migrated to Manitoba by 1877, this means that approximately 3,650 settled in the East Reserve. (Thirty-two families were in the Scratching River Settlement.) This was the maximum population which the East Reserve had in the early days, because practically all the migrants after 1876 settled in the West Reserve, and their numbers were reinforced after 1878 by Mennonites moving from the East to the West Reserve.<sup>21</sup>

The migration to Manitoba fell off sharply after 1876. Most of the Mennonites who intended to migrate had already done so. Many of the later migrants were Mennonites who had remained in Russia to wind up the affairs of the villages, arrange for auction sales and so on. Also by a Russian law passed May 14, 1875 the Mennonites were relieved of compulsory military duty and given alternative services instead. Thus some of the pressure causing the Mennonite migration was removed, and farmers who might otherwise have migrated remained in Russia. By

1876 too, it was proving increasingly difficult to sell property at a reasonable price, and many Mennonites were deterred from migrating by the material sacrifices they would have to make. Combined with this was the fact that the ruble-dollar rate of exchange was very low; and it was difficult to get sufficient capital to finance the journey, let alone to start anew in Canada. The money problem was particularly serious because usually whole colonies, including the indigents, were included in the move. This required so much capital that many colonies had to give up the attempt.

Migration in large numbers stopped completely after 1880. That was the deadline fixed by the Russians for unrestricted migration from Russia, including the transfer of money and all possessions. By 1881 approximately 18,000 Mennonites had migrated to North America, about 7,000 to Canada and 11,000 to the United States. After that a few families came at intervals until 1900, all of which settled in the West Reserve. Most of these were brought out by relatives.

Most of the Mennonites who came to Manitoba were members of one or another of three conservative sects from different parts of South Russia: the *Kleine Gemeinde*, the *Chortitza-Fürstenland*, and the *Bergthal* groups. The *Kleine Gemeinde*, as the name implies, was only a small group, but it was an off shoot from the *Molotschna* colony,<sup>22</sup> the most progressive agricultural community in South Russia. The *Chortitza-Fürstenland* group was composed of more conservative Mennonites living at Chortitza (the earliest Mennonite colony in South Russia), and Fürstenland, an off shoot of the *Chortitza* colony (Figure 36). The *Bergthal* group was another off shoot of the conservative Chortitza colony, and this group also was named after the place where it was living (Figure 36).

The *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites migrated to the East Reserve and to the Scratching River in 1874, but since they were few in number they established only four settlements in the Reserve. The rest of the settled part of the Reserve was occupied by the *Bergthal* Mennonites. The *Chortitza-Fürstenland* group, the most conservative of all, moved into the western part of the West Reserve in 1875, and later were joined by many of the *Bergthal* sect. In subsequent years there were many schisms within these sects so that many new groups were formed.

A number of geographical changes can be traced to differences among these various groups. These are not found so much in the nature of their land use practices, as in their attitudes to settlement patterns, to education and the outside world. The more conservative groups tended to cling to their accustomed agricultural villages, and these same people tended to resist prairie society so that many even emigrated from Manitoba in the 1920's. Thus some aspects of the settlement geography of the Reserves can be related to the various congregations which came to the province.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix D for more details on the migration to Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Even while Hespeler was negotiating with the Mennonites in South Russia, the Canadian Department of Agriculture was conducting through Manitoba a young Mennonite who had been travelling in North America for pleasure. J.Y. Shantz, a public-spirited and well-to-do Mennonite businessman from Berlin, Ontario, accompanied him and in the years to come he continued to play an important role in Mennonite affairs in Manitoba. The two Mennonites arrived in Winnipeg on November 14, 1872. Shantz was quite favourably impressed with Manitoba, and the Department of Agriculture published his account of the journey as an immigration pamphlet. (See J.Y. Shantz, *Narrative of a Journey to Manitoba*, Ottawa, 1873.) This was one of the first immigration pamphlets on the Canadian West, and pertinent passages were quoted from it in many later publications. The Mennonite from Russia, on the other hand, did not think highly of Manitoba. The government had made a serious mistake in bringing him to Manitoba in winter, because his main impression, repeatedly emphasized in his letters to Russia, was that Manitoba was terribly cold, and not all fit for settlement. (See C. Krahn, "Some letters of Bernhard Warkentin pertaining to the migration of 1873-75," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 24 (1950): 248-63).

<sup>3</sup> The Reserve was created by Order-in-Council, March 3, 1873, and the following townships were reserved for the Mennonites: 7-4, 7-5, 7-6, 6-5, 6-6, 5-5, 5-6, and 4-6.

<sup>4</sup> See Order-in-Council, March 3, 1873.

<sup>5</sup> Order-in-Council, May 23, 1873. This township was never occupied by the Mennonites.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix E for a copy of the agreement stating the concessions that the Canadian government was willing to give to the Mennonites.

<sup>7</sup> *The Manitoban*, July 5, 1873.

<sup>8</sup> P.A.C., Department of Agriculture Correspondence, No. 13142, William Hespeler, Annual Report for 1874, January 6, 1875.

<sup>9</sup> Gee, *Both Sides*: 94.

<sup>10</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, November 8, 1875.

<sup>11</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 3129 (1), Telegram, Donald Codd to J.S. Dennis, July 23, 1875.

<sup>12</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, July 31, 1875.

<sup>13</sup> Loc. cit. Also see *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1877, Appendix 6, Evidence of J.Y. Shantz before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 111.

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence from Pembina Mountain dated August 9, in *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 28, 1875. Most of this paragraph is based on this letter.

<sup>15</sup> Order-in-Council, April 25, 1876.

<sup>16</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 21, 1875.

<sup>17</sup> According to the calculations of J.J. Hildebrand, North Kildonan, Man., a Mennonite historian who has made a thorough investigation of the problem. Estimates of the number of Mennonites in Russia at this time vary from 45,000 to 100,000. E.K. Francis states that 15,000 Mennonites came to the New World at this time. See E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*, Altona, 1955: 28

<sup>18</sup> Thirty Mennonite families were not satisfied with the land in the East Reserve and settled on the prairie near Scratching River in 1874. J.Y. Shantz in the *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 21, 1875. Apparently they had more money than the other Mennonites and therefore did not hesitate to leave the Reserve. See *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, July, 1876

<sup>19</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1878, No. 9, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, Appendix 19: 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix 41: 131.

<sup>21</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 17, 1878.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix C for a description of the Mennonite settlement in South Russia.

## Chapter 3

### SETTLEMENT

#### Measuring Out The Land

Once it had been decided that it was possible to develop Western Canada agriculturally, it was obvious that an accurate and rapid survey of the land was the first thing that had to be undertaken as a preliminary step to colonization. It was desirable to design the survey so that homesteads could be readily located – therefore the regular rectangular survey was adopted. This survey served the purpose of land location admirably, but it also was used for purposes for which it was not expressly designed. Of necessity the rectangular survey also has become a scheme for the development of the land, and since the system does not take any account of topographical features the West has been developed, the farms located, and the roads established without any plan designed to suit varying conditions within the country surveyed.

There have only been a few departures from the sectional survey in Western Canada, and two occur in Southeastern Manitoba. The most widely known is the river lot system of survey. Four examples occur close to the East Reserve among the French Canadians (See Figure 4P). The Parish of Ste. Anne was directly divided into river lots in 1874, but Lorette, Rat River, and Oak Island Parishes were originally surveyed into quarter sections. When the French Canadians in these parishes insisted upon maintaining river lot farms, their land was resurveyed into river lots in the late 1870's and early 1880's.

Another type of survey, though one that was never legally recognized as a method of subdividing land, was adopted by the Mennonites. They transferred the nucleated settlement pattern that they had known in Russia to Manitoba. A description of the Mennonite settlements in South Russia and their land division is given in Appendix C. Only a brief resume is included here. In Russia the Mennonites lived in agricultural villages. These were simple street villages (*Strassendörfer*) with the farmers' house lots placed on each side of a long straight street. The *Strassendörfer* were set in the midst of the land operated by the farmers. The land was divided into a few large fields (arable, meadow and so on), each of which was further apportioned into as many strips for individual use as there were lots in the village. In this way an equitable distribution of land was achieved. This settlement pattern is called a *Gewann* village (*Gewanndorf*), because the large fields are called *Gewanne*. The term *Gewann* was not used by the Mennonites in Russia or Canada, though the word *Gewende* was occasionally employed in Russia.<sup>1</sup> The strips into which the *Gewanne* were divided were known as *Korgl* (written *Kagel*) by the Mennonites in both Russia and Manitoba.<sup>2</sup> In the West Reserve the term *Nümmer* was also used. In Russia the different *Gewanne* belonging to a village were simply designated by the directions they lay from the village, or by some distinctive feature such as the width of the *Kagel*, and this practice was brought to Manitoba. No map of a Mennonite *Gewann* village has survived, but there are many illustrations of this settlement pattern in books on European geography.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that the Mennonite method of dividing the land almost com-

pletely ignored the rectangular survey, and were only made possible because the Mennonites were occupying a reserve, and because all the inhabitants of any one village were willing to accept this type of division, which had, of course, no legal foundation. At first it was illegal to settle in villages and farm on the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* because the homestead regulations required the settler to reside on his quarter section for three years and to make improvements on his *own* land. The Dominion Lands Act was amended in 1876 to enable the Mennonites to settle as they wished:

...in the case of settlements being formed of immigrants, (such for instance as those of Mennonites or Icelanders) the Minister of the Interior may vary or waive, in his discretion, the foregoing requirements as to residence and cultivation on each separate quarter-section entered as a homestead.<sup>4</sup>

The Mennonites had to make a number of adjustments in fitting their *Gewann* villages into the rectangular survey. A group of farmers, generally friends who belonged to the same congregation, would agree to establish a village together. They would then make entries for homesteads (they could enter on both odd and even-numbered sections since they lived in a reserve, but not on the Hudson's Bay and the School lands) in the Land Office in Winnipeg or Emerson, making certain that their homesteads were contiguous. If there were, for example, 20 farmers in a settlement, the area of the village land (*Flur*) would be five sections or roughly 2 x 2 1/2 miles. (The land belonging to a village and divided into *Gewanne* and *Kagel* can be called a *Gewannflur*.)<sup>5</sup> The rectangular survey also determined the outside boundaries of the *Flur*. Thus the rectangular survey affected the Mennonites in only two ways: it controlled the area of the *Flur*, and its outside boundaries.

In the selection of suitable land the Mennonite *Gewannflur* offered both advantages and disadvantages in comparison with the rectangular survey. The sectional survey disregarded the prevailing soil, slope, and drainage conditions, and since the farmers had half mile squares to work with, they had to be very careful in selecting their homesteads to ensure that they had enough water, timber, arable land, or whatever else they considered desirable on their property.

The Mennonites, on the other hand, did attempt to classify the considerably larger area comprising a *Flur* into rough land capability groups by rule of thumb methods at the survey stage. After the *Flur* had been selected the Mennonite farmers divided the land into areas suitable for cultivation, hay land and meadow on the basis of drainage, slope, soil texture, vegetation, and relation to the village site. Hence this system had an advantage over the rectangular survey in that it provided for an equitable distribution of a variety of lands among the farm operators.

The system worked on the good, flat uniform lands of the West Reserve, but it is doubtful whether it proved very useful in the East Reserve. The lands belonging to any village had to be contiguous, and since the land varied so much in the East Reserve, this meant that areas were included that would not have been selected under other circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Often they were agriculturally useless. In the East Reserve this generally outweighed any advantages gained from the equitable distribution of land, because in many instances there just was not enough arable land within a *Flur* for a farmer to make a living from his portion of it. Thus in much of



the East Reserve it was a mistake to try and recreate the *Gewann* villages of South Russia. If the Mennonites had settled in *Waldbufendörfer* instead of in *Gewann* villages they would probably have had more success in farming, because the farmers would have been able to deal more effectively with the poor drainage, and with the problem of clearing the land of trees, than they could in the highly complicated and closely integrated layout of the *Gewannflur*.

Before I discuss the occupation of the land I will briefly describe the system followed in disposing of property on the death of a landowner. The custom of inheritance among the Mennonites did not add complications to the settlement pattern because fragmentation of holdings was not permitted, despite the fact that the estate was generally equally divided between the surviving parent and the children, each of whom received equal parts of their half. I will discuss only the childrens' shares since they ultimately received the entire estate. One of the aims of every Mennonite farmer with sons was to establish them on farms of their own when they married. Usually by the time the father died most of his children were well established elsewhere (the daughters were married to other young farmers), and frequently the home property was taken over by the youngest son who generally was still working at home. If the father had bought land for his older sons then they were considered to have received part of their inheritance, although they received some compensation if the help they had received was less than their full share of the estate when their father died. If the farmer had accumulated much land and money some of his sons and daughters might receive their shares of the estate in the form of outlying properties, but the home would remain intact and be given to the oldest son living on it at the time the farmer died. If the farmer had been poor then the custom was for the son who remained on the farm to pay the share of the inheritance belonging to the other children to them in the form of rent, and thus the son who retained the home property might remain a tenant for many years. Commonly the rent was paid only to the daughters of the family, because the sons usually had received their shares of the estate when they married and left home. Occasionally none of the children would want to take over the farm, in which case the property would be sold and the sum obtained shared among the heirs. Whatever the exact procedure followed, it is clear that the Mennonite method of handling the inheritance would generally prevent the fragmentation of farms; only if there was a great deal of land in the family would any children receive their inheritance in that form.

### Occupation of the Land

#### East Reserve

The Clearsprings settlers, who had entered Manitoba via the Dawson Road, were the only farmers who preceded the Mennonites to the land in the Reserve, but as we have seen the Clearsprings district was withdrawn from the Reserve even before the Mennonites arrived so that there was no clash. No large stream flowed through the Reserve so that no *Metis* had settled within its boundaries, though there was a large *Metis* settlement at Ste. Anne on the Seine River a few miles north of township 7-6, and there were a few squatters on the Rat River to the west of the



Reserve. Thus the Mennonites moved into a tract of land over which there was no dispute and their neighbors continued to respect the reservation.

The first Mennonites arrived in Winnipeg on July 31, 1874. After they had purchased supplies they returned to the boat and steamed back upstream to the mouth of the Rat River (Plate 1-1), the point on the Red River closest to the four immigrant sheds built by J.Y. Shantz to receive them. Shelters had been erected on the banks of the Red River to provide temporary protection for disembarking Mennonites, but the larger sheds, each 20 x 100 feet and divided into 12 rooms, where the mothers and children were to stay while the men were looking over the land, were five miles inland, about two and a half miles south of the present village of Niverville. Shantz received four and a half sections of land from the government for providing this accommodation.<sup>7</sup>

Immediately after the debarkation the new arrivals proceeded to the immigrant sheds. Here difficulties arose. From the time that they had left Russia the Mennonites had been fed by the various transportation companies, but now they had to fend for themselves. One of the first necessities was water. Wells were dug, but without success, and two men almost lost their lives when the sides of one well collapsed. Then dissatisfaction broke out. They did not want to land where there was no water, and accusations were flung thick and fast that the delegates had betrayed them. Some Mennonites even moved back to the banks of the Red River where they could at least obtain water and a few families even moved to the United States. After a couple of days one of the delegates of 1873 arrived, and he reassured the people that the land was better and that water was abundant in the eastern parts of the Reserve. Some of the complaining died away, although not among all of the immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

Dissatisfaction with this country was particularly keen among the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites. Comments like this were common: "On this kind of land we drown; here is no cultivable land; here we first have to clear land of bush; here is no place for building; etc."<sup>9</sup> As a result of this dissatisfaction 30 families moved out of the Reserve, and established two villages on the Scratching River. Most of the Mennonites were poor and could not afford to follow this example, especially since subsistence farming could better be carried on where trees were abundant. A Winnipeg paper said at this time that the Scratching River settlement was established by wealthier Mennonites who did not want to have to help their poorer brethren.<sup>10</sup> This judgment is probably too severe, but there is little doubt that if the first arrivals had the opportunity they would have settled elsewhere than on the land reserved for them.

But affairs were soon organized, and the men shortly made reconnaissance trips through the Reserve, examining the land, selecting village sites, and with the help of William Hespeler and Roger Goulet, making entries for their homesteads. Entries had to be carefully supervised to ensure that the lands belonging to different villages did not overlap. And here the strong central authority of the Mennonite local self-government, with a Reeve (*Oberschulz*) at the head, proved important.

Not all the Mennonites wanted to settle in villages. Some observed with approval the North American system where the farmer lived on his own property and carried out his farm operations independently of his neighbors. Thus, right from

PLATE 1



*1. Junction of the Red and Rat Rivers. The Mennonites disembarked near here from the Red River Steamers in the years 1874-76, and then travelled approximately 6 miles eastward to the immigration sheds prepared for them by J.Y. Shantz.*



*2. Joubert Creek. Hanover Municipality's most attractive stream. 17-5-5E.*



*3. Steep bank at an old meander nip of Joubert Creek. Banks as steep as this one are rarely found in the East Reserve – generally the valley sides have a very gentle slope to the river. River flat is used for pasture; seldom cropped because of danger from flooding. Bank is 15-20 feet high. 2-5-5E.*



*4. Small creek in 7-6E, a mile or two before its channel disappears entirely and the water spreads over the land. Fenced in pasture is the width of the meander belt. This creek is typical of the stream in the northern part of the Reserve. 16-7-6E.*

the beginning a few Mennonites commenced farming on their own homesteads.<sup>11</sup> This was particularly true in township 7-4, where the flat low lying land made it almost impossible to obtain the four or five contiguous sections of arable land required for a *Gewannflur*. Most of this township had a somewhat dispersed settlement pattern, with the buildings placed on the high, dry beach ridges. Even here the farms were not completely dispersed because frequently a group of relatives would build their homes close together on a ridge and farm their respective homesteads from there. This pattern is still visible today, especially in the southwest corner of township 7-4 where most of the buildings are not found along the road allowances, but somewhere in the interior of a section on higher land.

Other forces than the problem of drainage and the example of the Canadians were working against the *Gewannflur*. J.Y. Shantz for example says that when the Mennonites first came out he: "tried to persuade them to abolish the village system, but having got accustomed to it, it was too great a sacrifice for them at that time."<sup>12</sup> Ironically enough, Shantz had two villages named for him, one in each Reserve. Traditions, the authority of the ministers, who realized that they had a closer control over their flock if they lived in villages, and actual agricultural and sociological advantages, especially strong in pioneer times, proved far too powerful, and *Gewann* Villages became the normal form of settlement among the Mennonites of the East Reserve.

Nucleated settlements had many advantages. Since whole villages had migrated *en masse* there were many poor Mennonites in the group who could not afford to buy implements or oxen, and these people could offer their labour to wealthier Mennonites in return for the loan of oxen and provisions. The farmers could assist each other effectively in erecting buildings, fetching logs from the woods, and building roads and drains, and schools and churches were close at hand for everyone. Nor were the farmers put to the expense of building fences or herding their cattle separately. Most important were the social advantages to be gained from the nucleated settlements. This was difficult country to settle and the mutual support which the Mennonites could give each other – especially necessary since they were poor – was greatly facilitated by the fact that they lived in villages. Many farmers were so poor that they could not even afford an axe, but one could always be borrowed from a fellow farmer without too much inconvenience.

No records have been preserved of the date of the establishment of the villages, or of the number of farmers in them. It is, however, possible to trace the settlers' progress in occupying the land by using the dates when homestead entries were made.<sup>13</sup> Since the location of villages is known, it is possible to establish when a particular village was founded. Caution must be used in employing this method because the homestead entries were not always made when the land was first homesteaded, and also great care must be taken to make certain that each quarter section is assigned to the correct village. Figure 7 shows the locations of the villages and the dates they were established.

In 1874, the first year of settlement, 21 villages were founded in the Reserve. A few of these were villages in name only, because in the pioneer years some villages were comprised of only three or four settlers who hoped that friends would join them in the following years. But often the expected arrivals never came to North

America or passed on to the more attractive West Reserve. Thus a number of villages never developed into fully functioning settlement units, and eventually consisted of nothing more than a few farmers living in close proximity to each other. In other places, especially in township 7-4, the village name was just a convenience for designating certain localities, though even then they had a certain municipal standing because taxes were collected on that basis.

By 1878 a total of 42 villages had been established (at least the sites had been selected), all founded by immigrants directly arrived from Russia.<sup>14</sup> In succeeding years another seventeen villages developed, most of them offshoots of already established villages, so that a total of 59 villages of one form or another existed in the East Reserve through the years.<sup>15</sup> At the same time as some villages were established, others were abandoned, especially after 1878 when there was a regular migration from the poorly drained lands to the more satisfactory land of the West Reserve. Consequently there probably were never more than about 45 villages in existence in the Reserve at any one time, and many of these did not deserve the name of a village.

The location of the villages shows a fairly close correlation with the pre-settlement vegetation and the land capability of the East Reserve. (Compare Figure 7 with Figures 3 and 4). Township 7-4 was largely avoided because of poor drainage and the difficulty of obtaining wood and water. The same is true for parts of township 7-5, but 7-6 was quite fully occupied, the southeastern corner had no villages because it was occupied by the Clearsprings settlers. The southern townships were occupied somewhat later, but the proximity of wood, the light soils that were easy to break, and the suitable village sites on Lake Agassiz beaches, drew settlers into this marginal area. Fortunately the worst districts were avoided.

### **West Reserve**

During the fur trading era (over half a century before the Mennonites' settlement) a post had been maintained at Pembina, just south of the International Boundary on the Red River, but this post had no lasting significance as an agricultural settlement. When the Boundary Commission came to Manitoba in 1872 they set up headquarters at Dufferin, a few miles north of the boundary on the west bank of the Red. This was the first settlement in the area on the Canadian side of the boundary. In 1874 the North West Mounted Police assembled at Fort Dufferin for their famous march to the west. The next year the barracks they had lived in at Fort Dufferin were used as temporary immigration sheds for the Mennonites. In 1874, a town site called Emerson was laid out on the east side of the Red River, right at the boundary. Emerson became the supply centre of southwestern Manitoba, and grew rapidly. Dufferin (as Fort Dufferin had come to be called), was soon completely eclipsed by Emerson and had to be abandoned. In 1879 the Hudson's Bay Company decided to obtain some money from the sale of town lots, and laid out the town site of West Lynne right across the river from Emerson, and from then on Emerson and West Lynne shared the trade with the west.

Farmers did not spread out from Emerson in a continuous settled belt. Most people leap-frogged the Lake Agassiz plain and moved directly to the lands near the Pembina and Turtle Mountains. But in 1872 and 1873, eight settlers did take up

land immediately west of Fort Dufferin.<sup>16</sup> The families homesteaded just within the eastern boundary of township 1-1E, a township which later became part of the West Reserve. There were no settlers further west on the Red River plain before the Mennonites came in 1875.

The other early settlement was in the Pembina Mountain Country. The men engaged on the International Boundary Commission Survey in the early 1870's were impressed with the beauty of the country and brought word of this area back to Winnipeg. "The rolling prairie of varied soil, the stream embowered in rugged oaks and rustling poplar and for a background the melting stretch of low hills that constitute the face of the western plateau, formed an ideal landscape."<sup>17</sup> Accounts of the survey were also carried all the way back to Ontario by the Deputy Land Surveyors. Many claims were taken up in 1874, but only a very small increase in population resulted. Jeff Gee went out to look at his claim in 1874 and remarked: "if the homesteader went out and looked at his claim, that was considered sufficient improvement for a year or two, if he was lazy he might engage someone else to look at it for him; or as a last resort, he could *talk* of going out to look at it."<sup>18</sup> In the spring of 1874 there were settlers in this area, all north of Dead Horse Creek, and that year another 20 or so arrived.<sup>19</sup> These early settlers chose their location with a main view to the timber, and looked upon the bare prairie as impracticable for immediate settlement. But the Ontario pioneers had no opportunity to determine whether the prairies could be settled, because the problem was summarily taken out of their hands in 1875, when the Mennonites moved in.

The Mennonites had very little direct contact with the Ontario and French Canadians to their east, except in so far as Emerson was until 1883 their main trading centre. They were, however, in continuous and unfriendly contact with the Pembina Mountain settlers, in the early days. To the north there were no settlers, but to the south there were a few *Metis* in the shelter of the Pembina Mountains at Walhalla. Otherwise the Mennonite occupation preceded settlement along the United States side of the boundary.

Over 300 Mennonite families settled in the Reserve in 1875 and 1876, and established 18 villages<sup>20</sup> (Figure 8). These people from the *Chortitza* and *Fürstenland* colonies in South Russia were even more conservative and strict than the *Bergthal* and *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites who were settling the East Reserve. The first settlements were in the western part of the Reserve, still on the prairie but as close to the wooded districts as possible. The soil is light and easily worked, the land well drained, yet with many depressions suitable for hay meadows, and the numerous intermittent creeks provide admirable sites for villages (Plate 19), so there was adequate reason for settling a distance of 30 miles from the Red River. Ontario squatters were occupying land in range 5, so the Mennonites avoided that area.

In the following years the line of settlement worked back towards the Red River, and the heavier clay soils were taken up. Even then the poorly drained soils were avoided in townships 1-2 and 1-3, and in the northern part of the Reserve. After 1876 *Bergthal* Mennonites began to settle in the Reserve, and a generalized dividing line between the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* and the *Bergthal* groups is shown in Figure 8, though there were a few *Bergthal* villages in the west as well, and in some villages members of both groups were to be found. The *Bergthal* farmers

PLATE 2



*1. View of the low land from the escarpment – 5-1-5W, on the road to Haskett. Trees in the background are all planted; either farm shelter belts, or trees lining village streets.*



*2. 1 mile east of the opposite picture, along the same road at the first abrupt rise of the escarpment.*



*3. Pembina Valley in 7-1-6W; 2 miles across, about 250-300' deep.*



*4. Gently rolling terrain, 26-1-6W. Most of the land is cleared and used for grain farming.*



from the East Reserve entered after 1878 and settled in ranges 1E and 1W. Many of these moved directly on the homesteads and did not attempt to establish villages. By 1881 most of the villages of the West Reserve were founded, but perhaps only 50 out of the 70 that were started became fully functioning agricultural villages.<sup>21</sup>

In 1877 a serious quarrel developed between the Mennonites and the Ontario Canadian squatters over the land in range 5. This became known as the Menno-Canuck dispute in the Winnipeg papers, and feelings ran so high for a time that it appeared bloodshed might occur.

As Figure 9 shows, the squatters had occupied the few homesteads in range 5 that possessed trees. This was a very serious matter for the Mennonites, because, aside from the Pembina River woods in the United States, the western townships contained their only source of firewood and building timber. Consequently the Mennonites were not going to give up these townships easily, and the squatters were no more tractable. Force was used on both sides, and even fire arms were brandished.<sup>22</sup>

William Hespeler and W.L. Pearce, a District Land Surveyor, were sent to the Pembina Country to investigate the situation in 1877, and after considerable difficulty they managed to effect a compromise.<sup>23</sup> Part of range 5 was taken out of the Reserve (see Figure 9) and the squatters permitted to keep their land, and townships 1-7 and 1-8 were added to the Reserve in lieu of the land withdrawn.<sup>24</sup> The Mennonites, however, received no benefit from these townships because some of the official land maps did not show them as reserved, so that squatters moved into them.<sup>25</sup> They were therefore to be withdrawn from the Reserve in 1880, since it was argued that the Mennonites had not occupied even half of the land originally reserved for them.<sup>26</sup> This, of course, ignored the fact that the Mennonites needed the townships for timber, not farm land.

The dispute was finally ended with the compromise boundary (shown in Figure 9), but trouble continued to occur during the next few years. The following news item of 1881 is just one instance of what was happening:

A fracas occurred in tp. 1 R5, between the settlers and Mennonites. The Mennonites came to dispossess the settlers upon the Reserve, and the settlers turned out en masse and beat them with sticks and took some guns from them, which they possessed, and the Mennonites were glad to return home.<sup>27</sup>

The relations between the Mennonites and their Anglo-Saxon neighbors were not nearly as good in the West Reserve as in the East. David Currie, a Montreal newspaperman, was one of the few men who visited both Reserves at this time, and he remarked on this difference: "there seems to be a strange and unaccountable antipathy held by many Canadians here [Pembina Mountain]."<sup>28</sup> J.F. Galbraith, who was a neighbor of the Mennonites for many years, attributes the Anglo-Saxon prejudices to the "closeness" of the Mennonite community, their deliberate isolation, foreign tongue, communal system, and the curiousness of their abutting house and barn.<sup>29</sup>

These unfortunate relations in the first few years of settlement drove the Mennonites inwards upon themselves, and made them more isolated than ever. An attitude of distrust towards Anglo-Saxons ("Britains" as they are called) is still evident among the older Mennonites of today, who were growing up in the years in

which this attitude was most prevalent.

The settlement of the West Reserve was complicated by the migration of about 400 families from the East Reserve to the eastern townships of the West Reserve from 1878 to 1882. We will discuss the reasons for this migration later; the important thing to note here is that the Mennonites who moved into the West Reserve from the East Reserve encountered some special problems in obtaining new land. There were difficulties in entering for a second homestead, obtaining a 160 acre homestead, and in accommodating their settlements to the railway lands.

Until 1880 there was no serious difficulty in making the transfer. A settler who relinquished his claim to a homestead, though he lost his right to that land, was permitted to make another entry.<sup>30</sup> But in 1880 the clause in the Dominion Lands Act permitting a settler to make a second entry was repealed.<sup>31</sup> The Mennonites got around this by squatting on the land they had chosen, and in 1883 their problem was solved, because another change in the Land Act not only made a second entry permissible after a previous claim was abandoned, but also made it permissible for any person who had obtained a homestead patent to apply for another homestead.<sup>32</sup>

Another difficulty, and one that had permanent effects, was engendered by the 80 acre homestead of 1879. By Order-in-Council, June 28, 1879 the size of the homestead was reduced to 80 acres, and not until over three months later, on October 9, 1879, was it changed back to 160 acres again by another Order-in-Council. As a result 54 homesteads in the Reserve were allotted on an 80 acre basis.<sup>33</sup> The Mennonites involved had hopes of obtaining an extra 80 acres,<sup>34</sup> and delayed establishing villages until they received their full grant. But the additional land was not forthcoming until 1882,<sup>35</sup> by which time many settlers has dispersed, and abandoned the idea of founding a village.

The worst disruption in the Mennonite settlement pattern was caused by a dispute between the Department of the Interior and the C.P.R. over the question of the railway lands in the Reserve. By the Land Regulation of June 28, 1879, the C.P.R. was granted all the odd numbered sections for 110 miles on each side of the railway,<sup>36</sup> and naturally the C.P.R.'s contention was that this included the lands in the West Reserve which fell within the 110 mile limit. Eventually the Department of the Interior established that the C.P.R. could not have the odd sections in the Reserve because they had already been reserved for the Mennonites.<sup>37</sup> But much damage had been done because the C.P.R. sold 8,640 acres in 1879 alone, without officially instructing the Department of the Interior.<sup>38</sup> The land was sold to Mennonites and non-Mennonites alike, and obviously these alienated odd sections made it impossible to establish new Mennonite villages, as Donald Codd, the Land Agent in Winnipeg, complained to J.S. Dennis in Ottawa.<sup>39</sup> The sales were cancelled in 1880,<sup>40</sup> but disruptions had resulted which, along with the 80 acre homestead, made it difficult to establish villages in the eastern townships.

*Bergthal* Mennonites were moving onto their homesteads for other reasons as well. The *Bergthal* church leaders did not excommunicate a member if he moved onto the farm, whereas the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* leaders did. Many Mennonites did become convinced that it was more efficient to operate a farm on a homestead than from a village, and as early as 1879 J.E. Tetu reported: "...many of them are



dissatisfied with the [village] system, and would by far prefer to live and would live on large tracts, if they were not afraid of incurring the blame of the community."<sup>41</sup>

### Getting Established

The Mennonites' first task after their arrival in Manitoba was to obtain supplies. The first group had not been able to bring along much besides their personal effects, but wealthier later arrivals even brought wagons and implements. Sometimes they carried Russian seed grain packed in the boxes containing their dismantled implements.<sup>42</sup> But most of the settlers bought their outfits in North America.

A few Mennonites bought supplies at Moorhead in Minnesota where they boarded the steamer for Winnipeg. Even livestock was purchased there and driven overland to the Reserve. Winnipeg merchants naturally did not take kindly to this American competition, as they took for granted that they had exclusive rights to the Mennonite trade: "Moorhead lied \$10,000 out of the Mennonites",<sup>43</sup> and "Moorhead people feel riled because Mr. Shantz advised the Mennonites under his charge not to purchase supplies and implements at Moorhead – Shantz knows what he is about."<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless by far the greater portion of the trade went to Winnipeg. The arrival of the first Mennonites made quite an impression on the town:

Returned to town [Winnipeg], we noticed the place illuminated in honour of the arrival of five hundred Mennonites, who had spread broadcast among the leading merchants and mechanics some \$15,000 in gold for stock, provisions, and agricultural implements. One successful merchant sold 50 or 60 wagons at \$100 each, which he had purchased at from \$72 to \$75 delivered, quite unsuitable in my opinion for the wants of the emigrants.<sup>45</sup>

This business was quite a novel experience for Winnipeg merchants because this was the first large group of immigrants that had entered Manitoba. It was estimated that the Mennonites spent not less than \$50,000 in Winnipeg in the summer of 1874,<sup>46</sup> a very welcome introduction of capital into the town,

A varied array of supplies was purchased: hay forks, scythes, coffee mills, frying pans, groceries, tin ware, stoves, wooden ware, potatoes, flour, axes, breaking plows, even mowers. The Mennonites had to re-equip themselves entirely to start life in the Reserve. Much livestock, including cows, oxen, and some horses, was purchased in Winnipeg; the Mennonites made such a rapid raid upon the market that prices for animals were forced up sharply.<sup>47</sup>

Since the Mennonites did not move into their villages until the autumn of 1874, there was no chance to prepare the land for cultivation. The one essential was shelter for the winter. The Mennonites had no experience in erecting log houses in southern Russia, and consequently only the occasional individual followed the usual practice of the Canadian settlers, even though all of them must have seen log buildings such as the one shown in Plate 16-1. Instead, the Mennonites built either sod huts (*Semlins*) such as those they had first lived in when they moved to Russia, or *Sarais*.<sup>48</sup>

A *Semlin* was made by digging a pit about two feet deep, and building a wall of sod about three feet high around this excavation. Poles were extended across the walls and covered with sod to make the roof. A *Semlin* of average size was about 15

feet wide and 35 feet long; of this about 20 feet were used for the family and 15 feet for the stock. The part to be used by the family was usually lined on the inside with ship-lap boards brought from Winnipeg, which could later be used in building a more permanent structure. The *Semlin* was quite warm, even if not comfortable, and some families lived in them for more than one year.

A *Sarai* consisted essentially of a steeply pitched thatched roof, whose lower end rested directly on the ground. This roof, measuring about 25 feet square, was set up on poles so that the upper end was about 18 feet above the ground. The spaces between the supporting poles were filled in a number of ways. If the family had sufficient money, ship-lap was used to line the part to be occupied by the family, but if they could not afford this, the lower part was filled-in with logs, and the upper part with thatch. As in the *Semlin*, part of the *Sarai* was used for sheltering stock. The *Sarai* was much colder than the *Semlin*, especially in the parts reserved for stock, and considerable hardship was endured by the unfortunate few who built this type of shelter.

Three prosperous Mennonites in Blumenort, purchased lumber in Winnipeg, and built frame houses during the first autumn, but none were built elsewhere.<sup>49</sup> Only one or two settlers built log houses in the first year, and these houses had saddle and lap corners. It was not until 1876 that some of the Clearsprings' settlers taught the Mennonites how to use an axe to build more substantial log houses.

The first winter was hard. Food was scarce, potatoes and bread were the main fare, and both were of poor quality. Women and children stayed at home through the winter, while the men went to the woods and brought back timber for building houses for the next year. A number of ministers travelled regularly through the Reserve holding church services, seeing that each family was getting some food at least, and trying to keep the settlement together. Twenty thousand dollars had been borrowed from the Mennonites of Ontario and with this money essential supplies, particularly food, were bought and distributed to the poorer immigrants. Everyone who received this assistance had to repay it in later years. Considerable stock was lost because the shelters were not adequate, and also because much of the hay which had been prepared was frozen and of very little value.<sup>50</sup>

In the spring of 1875 operations on the land began at last. Wheat, oats, barley and potatoes were planted, from seed obtained in Manitoba. Although the first crop sprouted nicely it was all to no avail, because an onslaught of grasshoppers destroyed everything but the potatoes. The Mennonites battled the grasshoppers by attempting to drive them into boxes mounted on carts which were wheeled up and down the fields, but as the *Free Press* said, "The Mennonite Settlement has, despite the efforts at fighting the grasshoppers been about entirely wiped out."<sup>51</sup> Only the Scratching River settlement escaped without extensive damage. At this time the progress of the Mennonite settlements was followed very carefully by visitors to Manitoba, to find how they fared with the grasshoppers, for prospective immigrants were more apprehensive about the grasshopper hazard, than anything else. Settlers were even attempting to draw some comfort from the arrival of these immigrants from Russia.

The Mennonites coming from a land where this pest is not unknown to settle here, should convince us that it is not to be too much dreaded. No settlers can be found more

shrewd and capable of selecting a good home and forming opinions as to agricultural matters than they.<sup>52</sup>

Fortunately the grasshoppers did not return the next year, but conditions were again serious in the Reserve. For the second successive year the Mennonites had no harvest, and to add to this many new immigrants arrived in 1875 and had to be cared for. The first winter's experience had proved instructive, and the preparations for the cold season pressed forward. Hay was the only important crop left, and this year it was efficiently gathered. Most of the farmers used scythes but in a few villages the farmers pooled their resources and bought a mower and horse rake. After the grass was cut it was raked into a couple of hundred small stacks, four or five making one load. Each stack was then assigned a number and each farmer then got his allotment of hay stacks by the drawing of lots.<sup>53</sup> This method was used only as long as there was a shortage of mowing machines. Later each farmer prepared his own hay. Work continued in the fields throughout the summer, bush was cleared and land was broken so that a total of about 3,000 acres of land was ready for seeding in the spring of 1876.<sup>54</sup>

Many of the new arrivals came to villages founded in the previous year, others founded new villages, but all were given both advice and direct help so that they could get off to a good start. Food was still scarce during the second winter and use was made of the Ontario Mennonite's loan, and also of a \$100,000 loan from the Canadian government.<sup>55</sup> Again most of the money was used for food: flour was obtained from St. Paul through a Winnipeg firm.

The Mennonites were still subject to privations, and a considerable number wanted to abandon the East Reserve. Common complaints were that the winters were too cold, that there was a persistent danger from grasshoppers, and that clearing bush was unnecessarily laborious. But the Mennonites had staked everything they possessed to come to Manitoba, and though a few families left for the United States, most had to remain because they could not afford to leave. Despite their rather inauspicious beginning, they simply had to struggle along, and see if it was not possible to make a living in this country. All that they had accomplished by 1876 in the East Reserve was to establish about 35 villages of varying size, to make a start in measuring out *Gewanne*, to incur a sizable debt, and to gain a good deal of disappointing experience. It was their will power more than anything else that made them carry on under these discouraging circumstances in this Reserve.<sup>56</sup>

When the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites settled in the West Reserve in 1875 they could draw upon the experience of the East Reserve settlers to guide them, and their settlements were efficiently established. Considerable stock, especially oxen, had been purchased (or arrangements made for purchase), when the Mennonites passed through Minnesota on their way to Manitoba. Additional stock, including horses, was bought from the *Metis* at Walhalla. Food was obtained from Winnipeg or Emerson, and the logs for temporary shelters were procured from woods on the Escarpment and along the Pembina River. All the shelters were of sod, lined with logs on the inside, and with poles laid across the wall and covered with sod to serve as a roof. This, of course, was the *Semlin* of the East Reserve. The *Sarai* was used only to shelter animals, and the log house was not used at all.

During the first winter (1875-76) the men fetched timber for more permanent

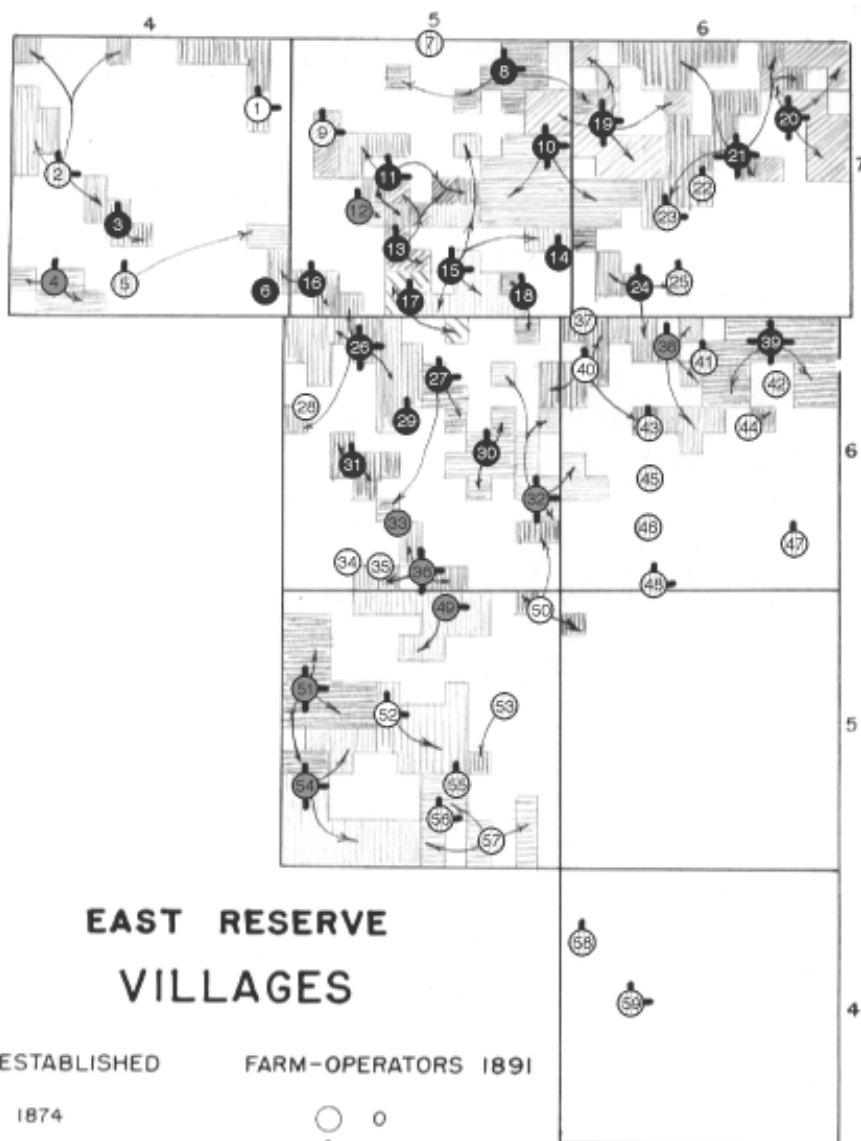
houses from the same places from where they had obtained their logs in summer. They worried little about who owned the land, or whether they crossed the International Boundary. The Mennonites followed the practice of everyone else in the West, and logs and firewood were hauled in winter from "section 37", that mythical timber limit that supplied all Southern Manitoba. Any sawn timber (for doors and window frames and the like) had to be hauled from Emerson, a journey of 20 to 35 miles.

There is very little information available on the Mennonites' first few years in the West Reserve, but these settlers did not have the same problems that confronted the Mennonites in the East Reserve. It is true that the Mennonites were initially dubious about occupying the West Reserve, yet they were spared the worst hardships that confronted the settlers in the Reserve east of the river. This does not mean that their first years were not difficult. Yet these farmers did not have to watch grasshoppers destroying their first crop, and because they had been warned, they were better prepared for the winters. On the prairie, a type of country with which the Mennonites were familiar, a closely-knit group could organize an efficient settlement, whereas the East Reserve, theoretically well-suited for the self-sufficing pioneer, presented far longer lasting difficulties, and did not lend itself so well to group occupation.

**Legend**  
**Villages-East Reserve**

- |                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Osterwick     | 30. Schoenfeld     |
| 2. Schanzenberg  | 31. Blumstein      |
| 3. Pastwa        | 32. Rosengart      |
| 4. Strassberg    | 33. Steinreich     |
| 5. Altona        | 34. Friedrichsthal |
| 6. Grossweide    | 35. Gnadenort      |
| 7. Halbstadt     | 36. Hochstadt      |
| 8. Blumengart    | 37. Vollwerk       |
| 9. Kronsthal     | 38. Eigenfeld      |
| 10. Bergthal     | 39. Steinbach      |
| 11. Schoenthal   | 40. Reichenbach    |
| 12. Reinfeld     | 41. Lichtenau      |
| 13. Schoenwiese  | 42. Fischau        |
| 14. Rosenthal    | 43. Neuendorf      |
| 15. Chortitz     | 44. Felsenton      |
| 16. Heuboden     | 45. Neuenberg      |
| 17. Tannenau     | 46. Hamberg        |
| 18. Eigenhof     | 47. Friedensfeld   |
| 19. Hochfeld     | 48. Burwalde       |
| 20. Blumenhof    | 49. Schoensee      |
| 21. Blumenort    | 50. Schoenberg     |
| 22. Friedenshoff | 51. Gnadenfeld     |
| 23. Neuanlage    | 52. Gruenthal      |
| 24. Ebenfeld     | 53. Schoenhorst    |
| 25. Kleefeld     | 54. Bergfeld       |
| 26. Gruenfeld    | 55. Hoffnungsfeld  |
| 27. Rosenfeld    | 56. Neuhoffnung    |
| 28. Schoenau     | 57. Kronsgart      |
| 29. Blumenfeld   | 58. Landskron      |
|                  | 59. Neubergfeld    |

Figure 7



**EAST RESERVE  
VILLAGES**

YEAR ESTABLISHED

- 1874
- ◐ 1875
- 1876
- ⊗ 1877
- ▨ 1878
- ▩ 1879 +

FARM-OPERATORS 1891

- 0
- 1 - 5
- 6 - 10
- 11 - 15
- 16 +

Village lands 1880-81

*Data from: W.H. Pearce, Dept  
of Agric. and Forest, Newspapers,  
Municipal Records,  
Interprovincial Land Office, Montreal*

NAMES OF VILLAGES ON OPPOSITE PAGE

**Legend**  
**Villages-West Reserve**

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Schoenfeld     | 36. Schoenau    |
| 2. Burwalde       | 37. Hochstadt   |
| 3. Rosenbach      | 38. Schoenthal  |
| 4. Greenfarm      | 39. Eigengrund  |
| 5. Grossweide     | 40. Altona      |
| 6. Landenau       | 41. Einlage     |
| 7. Hamburg        | 42. Osterwick   |
| 8. Rosenheim      | 43. Hochfeld    |
| 9. Schoendorf     | 44. Eichenfeld  |
| 10. Waldheim      | 45. Blumenfeld  |
| 11. Reinfeld      | 46. Reinland    |
| 12. Hoffnungsfeld | 47. Kronsfield  |
| 13. Blumenstein   | 48. Gruenfeld   |
| 14. Chortitz      | 49. Neuendorf   |
| 15. Schanzenfeld  | 50. Rosenort    |
| 16. Friedensruh   | 51. Kronthal    |
| 17. Rosenthal     | 52. Schoenwiese |
| 18. Neuenberg     | 53. Rosengart   |
| 19. Kleefeld      | 54. Neuhorst    |
| 20. Rosenhof      | 55. Eigenhof    |
| 21. Blumengart    | 56. Blumenhof   |
| 22. Heuboden      | 57. Blumenort   |
| 23. Ebenfeld      | 58. Gnadenfeld  |
| 24. Gnadenthal    | 59. Neubergthal |
| 25. Kronsgart     | 60. Gruenthal   |
| 26. Weidenfeld    | 61. Silberfeld  |
| 27. Reinthal      | 62. Schoenhorst |
| 28. Gruenweide    | 63. Neuanlage   |
| 29. Bergfeld      | 64. Edenburg    |
| 30. Rudnerweide   | 65. Blumenthal  |
| 31. Neuhoffnung   | 66. Sommerfeld  |
| 32. Lichtfeld     | 67. Edenthal    |
| 33. Altbergthal   | 68. Halbstadt   |
| 34. Rosenfeld     | 69. Strassberg  |
| 35. Kleinstadt    | 70. Neustadt    |

Figure 8

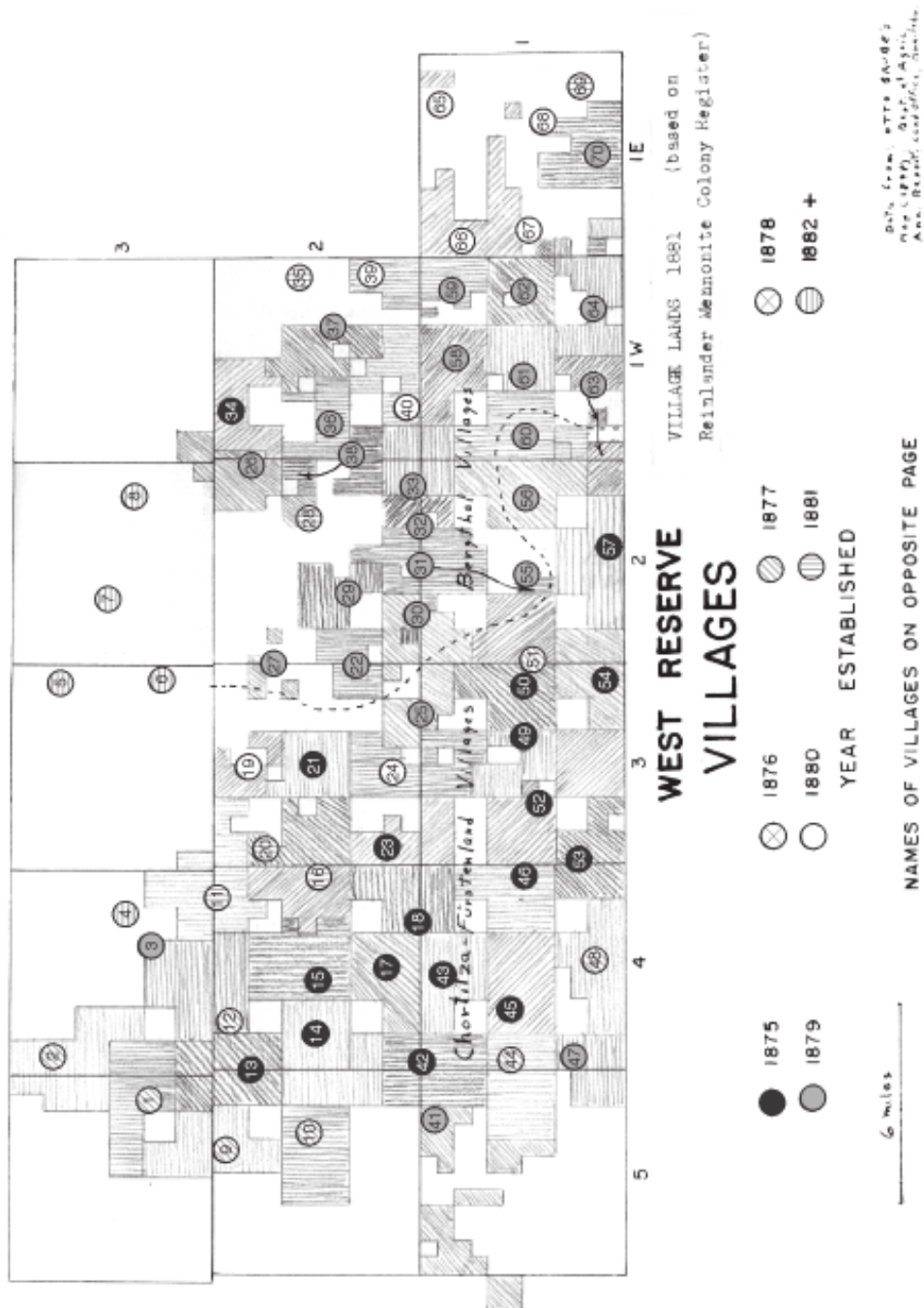
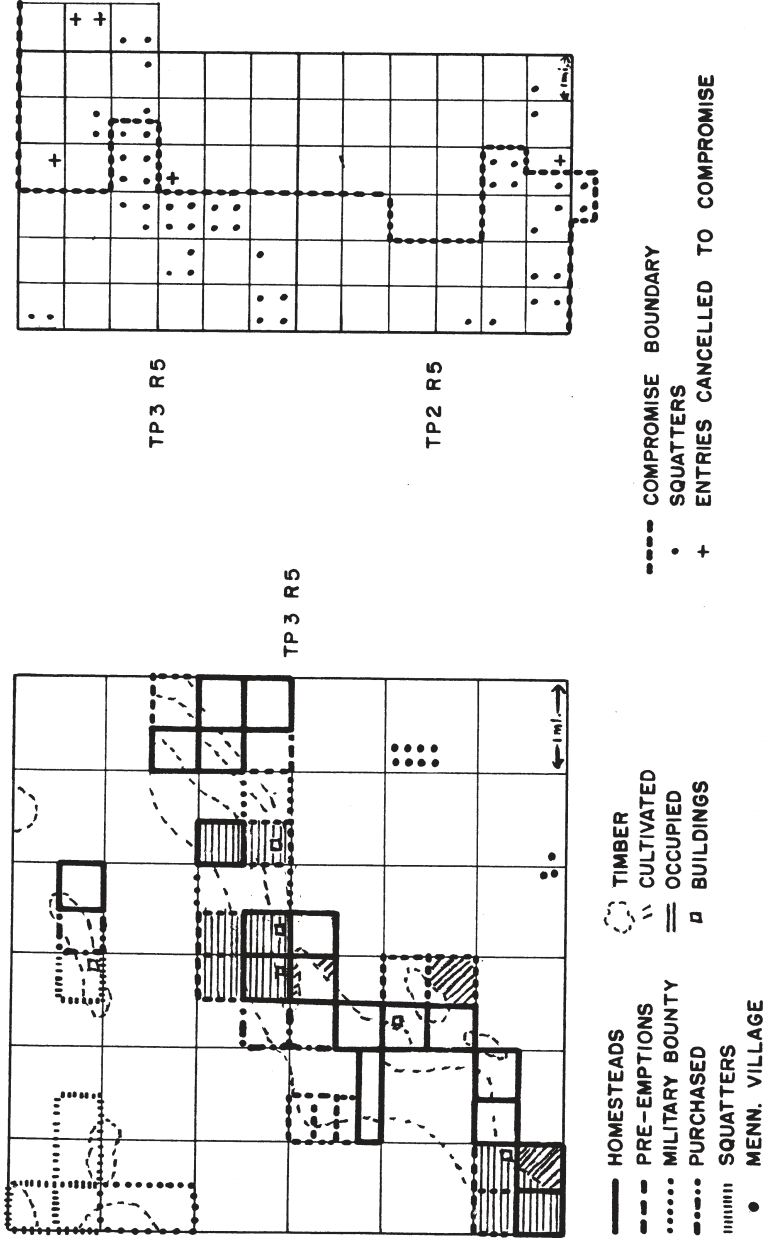




Figure 9

"MENNO - CANUCK" DIFFICULTY



from Manuscript Map by U.L. Pearce  
File 3129 (U) #1300, Dept of Int.  
May 3, 1878

from Manuscript Map by W.L. Pearce  
File 3129 (U) Dept. of Interior  
Nov. 22, 1877

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Mr. J.J. Hildebrand, Mennonite historian from North Kildonan, Man., September, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> The word *Kagel* does not appear in German dictionaries, but it is the equivalent of the term *Kaveln* (or *Kabeln*), from which it presumably is derived. Mr. J.J. Hildebrand, Professor H.B. Johnson of the Department of Geography, Malcalaster College, and Professor S.D. Stirk of the Department of German, University of Manitoba, kindly helped me trace the term.

<sup>3</sup> For examples of various European settlement patterns see: R.E. Dickinson, *Germany: A General and Regional Geography*, London, 1951: 123-155 and Gottfried Pfeifer, "The Quality of Peasant Living in Central Europe", in W.L. Thomas, editor, *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, Chicago, 1956: 240-277.

<sup>4</sup> *Statutes of Canada*, 39 Vict. c. 19.

<sup>5</sup> See Pfeifer, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> It was an inherent weakness of the *Gewann* villages within Canada's inflexible homestead system that no adjustment could be made in the amount of land allocated to farmers in areas where arable land was only found in widely scattered pockets. This nullified one of the main theoretical advantages of the *Gewannflur*. In Russia there was no problem because sufficient land was always included in every *Gewannflur* to ensure that a farmer would receive enough *arable* land to enable him to make a living. (Interview with J.J. Hildebrand, June, 1958.)

<sup>7</sup> Order-in-Council, May 19, 1874.

<sup>8</sup> An account of these events is found in; Klass Peters, *Die Bergtbaler Mennoniten und deren Auswanderung aus Russland und Einwanderung in Manitoba*. Hillsboro, Kansas, n.d.: 31-32.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in a letter written in August 12, 1874, by Peter Dueck of Gruenfeld, Man., to friends in Russia. The letter printed in *Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada abgehalten am 8. Juli 1949 in Steinbach, Manitoba*, North Kildonan, Man., 1949: 36.

<sup>10</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, July 22, 1876.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Mr. J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955. Mr. Toews was a boy of 9 when he migrated to Manitoba in 1874. Records in the Manitoba Land Office, and my study of old maps and air photographs confirm Mr. Toews' statement. J.Y. Shantz also confirms this in his evidence before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: "There is one township of perhaps twenty-five families that was not started in villages. They started on their land in the first place. One reason was because there was a good deal of low land and they picked out the best" *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1886, Appendix 6: 27 Probably the township referred to was township 7-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

<sup>13</sup> The data was obtained from the Land Office, Department of Mines and Natural Resources, Winnipeg.

<sup>14</sup> Based on a map of South-Central Manitoba, dated 1878, in Hanover Municipal Office, Steinbach, Man.

<sup>15</sup> There is some indefinite evidence, obtained in interviews, that there may have been at least one more village, but it probably existed in name only, because there was no mention of it in the municipal records.

<sup>16</sup> *History of Emerson, Featuring Historical Sketches of Surrounding Districts*, Emerson, n.d.: 77.

<sup>17</sup> "A Sketch of the Morden District", *Morden Chronicle*, March 11, 1897.

<sup>18</sup> Gee, *Both Sides*: 66.

<sup>19</sup> *Morden Chronicle*, March 11, 1897.

<sup>20</sup> Report by J.Y. Shantz in *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 21, 1875.

<sup>21</sup> In 1883 George Newcombe, land agent for the Department of the Interior reported that 54 villages had been founded. See *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1883, No. 23, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, Part 1, George Newcombe, Report on the Dufferin Mennonite Reserve: 13.

<sup>22</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 3129 (1), No. 10225, Memorandum by W.L. Pearce, November 29, 1877.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 10879, Report by W.L. Pearce and W. Hespeler.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 13600, Memorandum by G. Newcombe, Land Agent at Emerson, April 30, 1878. These changes were not effected through Order-in-Council, but were on-the-spot compromises administered through the local Land Offices.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, L. Russell to J.S. Dennis, May 31, 1881.

<sup>26</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, June 14, 1881.

<sup>28</sup> David Currie, *Letters of Rusticus, Investigations in Manitoba and the North West*, Montreal, 1880: 67.

<sup>29</sup> Julius F. Galbraith, *The Mennonites in Manitoba*, Morden, 1900: 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Statutes of Canada*, 39 Vict. ch. 19 (1876); 42 Vict. ch. 31, cl. 14, s. 34. (1879).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 43 Vict. ch. 26, s. 5 (1880).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 46 Vict. ch. 17 (1883).

<sup>33</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 3129 (2A), R. Rauscher to L. Russell, October 22, 1881.

<sup>34</sup> P.A.C. Department of the Interior, File 3129 (2), No. 35094, Isaac Miller to the Minister of the Interior, May 27, 1881.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 49890, W.L. Pearce to L. Russell, September 1, 1882.

<sup>36</sup> Order-in-Council, June 28, 1879.

<sup>37</sup> For a lengthy correspondence on this matter see P.A.C. Department of the Interior, File 67992.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, R. Rauscher to L. Russell, October 22, 1881.

<sup>39</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 3129 (2A), No. 23420, D. Codd to J.S. Dennis, April 2, 1880.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Telegram, J.S. Dennis to W. Hespeler, February 20, 1880.

<sup>41</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1880, no. 10, Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Appendix 10: 68.

<sup>42</sup> *The Winnipeg Standard*, August 28, 1875.

<sup>43</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 29, 1875.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, July 24, 1875.

<sup>45</sup> James Trow, *A Trip to Manitoba*, Quebec, 1875: 67.

<sup>46</sup> *The Manitoban*, September 5, 1874.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, August 15, 1874.

<sup>48</sup> Both words, *Semlin* and *Sarai*, were brought from Russia. Apparently they represent Mennonite adaptations of Russian terms. Interview with J.J. Hildebrand, North Kildonan, Man., July, 1958.

<sup>49</sup> This paragraph is based on information obtained in an interview with J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Man., 1955.

<sup>50</sup> For accounts of the early years in Manitoba see: *Das 60-jährige Jubiläum der Mennonitischen Ost-Reserve*, Steinbach, 1935: 14-39.

<sup>51</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, July 10, 1875.

<sup>52</sup> J.C. Hamilton, *The Prairie Province*, Toronto, 1876: 168.

<sup>53</sup> *60-jährige Jubiläum*: 20.

<sup>54</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 21, 1875.

<sup>55</sup> Ernest Correll, "The Mennonite Loan in the Canadian Parliament, 1875", *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 20 (1946): 3-23.

<sup>56</sup> An account of some of these problems is contained in *60-jährige Jubiläum*: 27.

## Chapter 4

### THE AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE

#### Local Government

When the Mennonites came to Manitoba they were conducted to their Reserves and left to their own devices; hence there were no obstacles to the establishment of their nucleated settlements. Furthermore since there was no municipal government in the province the Mennonites continued their accustomed form of self government. Hence these 7,000 people started off in completely independent fashion, with a *Schulz* (mayor) in charge of each village's affairs, an *Oberschulz* (reeve) in charge of the Reserve, and ministers and elders helping where necessary. Location of villages, disputes over land, erection of churches and schools, improvement of trails and so on, were all capably handled by the Mennonites themselves.

The Manitoba Legislature finally provided for some form of municipal government in 1880. Control of local affairs was left in local hands, with only supervisory control from the outside. The change in administration was made without difficulty in the East Reserve. It is impossible to say whether this is because the situation of the Reserve in the forgotten corner of Manitoba made it appear to be safe from outside influence, or because the leaders thought that municipal government would in any case make no infringements on the Mennonite way of life. Probably it was a combination of both.

The boundaries of the new municipality of Hespeler, established in 1880, were the same as those of the Reserve (Figure 10-1b).<sup>1</sup> The municipal office was located wherever the home of the secretary-treasurer of the municipality happened to be. Early legislation was almost entirely concerned with enacting the local improvement laws which were prepared in Winnipeg. These provided for herd laws, animal pounds, drains and so on.

The villages in the East Reserve were not affected by municipal government. Most of them continued to elect their own *Schulz*, because the Reserve was so poor that there was little thought of undertaking local improvements beyond what each community could do for itself. No outside pressure was ever brought to bear on the villages, and their eventual breakup was entirely caused by internal developments in each village.

Two municipalities, Hespeler and Hanover, were fashioned out of Hespeler in 1881, separating the grassland area from the woodland area (Figure 10-2b). In practice they functioned as one, even having the same Reeve and Council, but for statistical purposes their boundaries were always respected. The boundary of Hanover Municipality as it is today (including the Clearsprings Settlement) was finally established in 1890. Thus Hanover Municipality has at present the same boundaries as the Reserve of March 3, 1873.

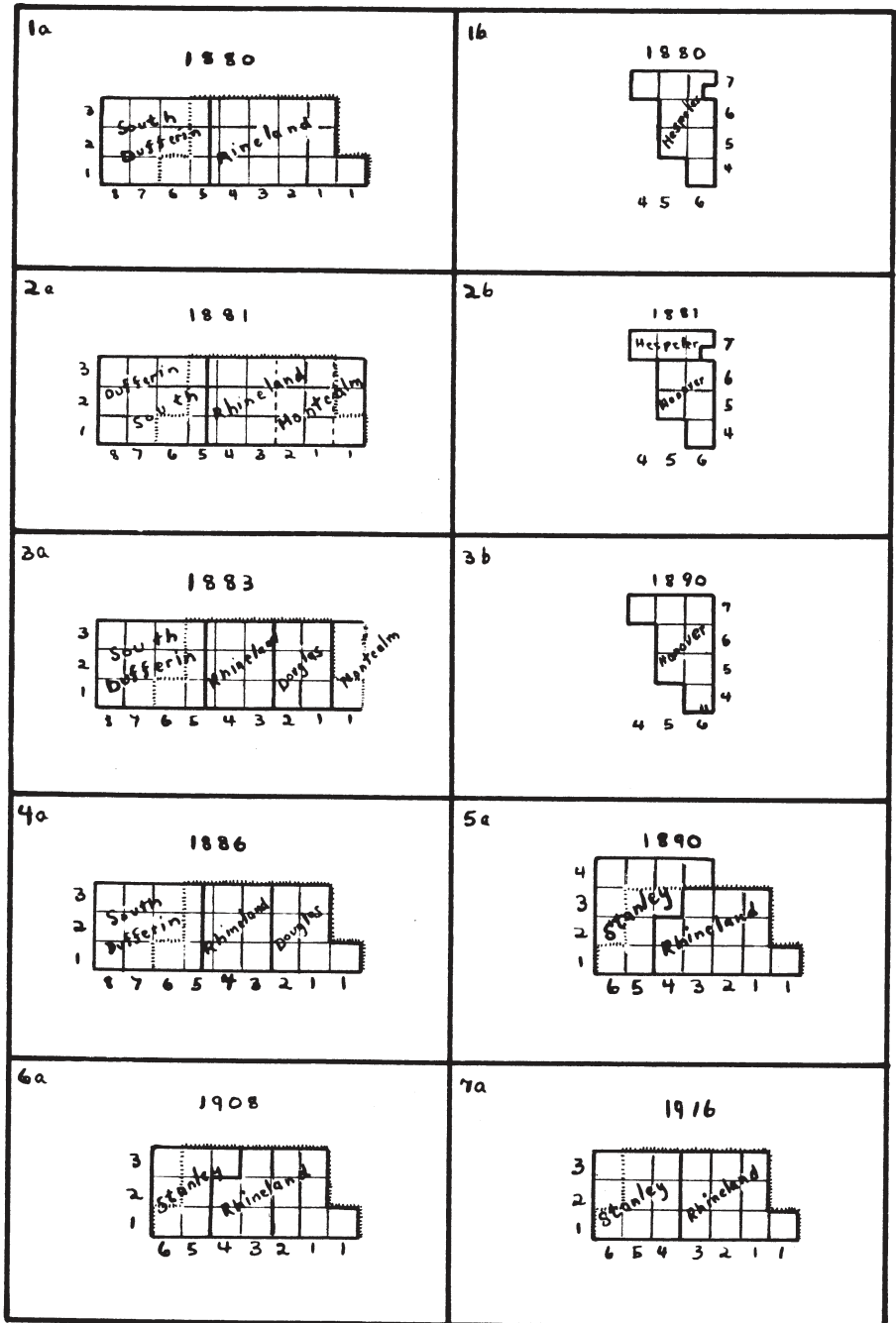
Municipal government was not accepted nearly as readily in the West Reserve, where many Mennonites did not understand that they would still be able to run their local affairs practically without interference. The reluctance of some of the Mennonites in this Reserve to accept municipal government marks the first oppo-

sition by the Mennonites to Canadian ways, aside from the unfortunate Menno-Canuck dispute. The conservative *Chortitza-Fürstenland* group was especially against accepting municipal government. Under the misconception that through the new municipal government they would be subjected to interference by outsiders, the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites refused to co-operate with the provincial authorities. This tended to weaken Mennonite solidarity because the more enterprising Mennonite farmers, were quite willing to assume the responsibility of running the new municipalities. In the process of organizing municipal government a rift between the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites and the *Bergthaler* Mennonites began to develop. The *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites could not hope to withstand the new form of government, and therefore they just withdrew into themselves, and ignored municipal affairs as much as possible.

In 1880 all the Mennonites settled in the West Reserve were grouped into one municipality called Rineland (*sic*). (See Figure 10 for the territorial development of the municipalities.) At this time the conservative Mennonites were still strong enough to prevent any co-operation with the provincial authorities and nothing was done to organize the municipality. Next year the municipal boundaries were revised, and through some mistake both Rhineland (now spelled correctly) and Montcalm Municipalities were given jurisdiction over ranges one and two west. As it turned out this did not really matter because no organization was still forthcoming from the Mennonites. Then in 1883 a further revision of boundaries was undertaken and this time at the insistence of the authorities the municipality was organized. A well informed contemporary explains that the previous single municipality (encompassing all the Mennonites) was divided into Rhineland and Douglas Municipalities, and the boundaries drawn so that each contained some Anglo-Saxon settlers on the extremities to help with the organization work.<sup>2</sup> (As a result in both municipalities, the first reeves were non-Mennonites, a man from Ontario in Rhineland, and a German Lutheran in Douglas.) It is quite possible that the government considered this a means to hasten the assimilation of the Mennonites. That there was considerable concern at this time about the failure of the Mennonites to adopt Canadian ways is shown by the fact that the privilege of settling in villages in the West Reserve was abolished by Order-in-Council, May 6, 1885. Government officials even stated privately that it would be desirable to remove the villages altogether,<sup>3</sup> though nothing was ever done to disturb them.

The municipal councils did not have much difficulty in carrying out their limited programs. Roads seem to have aroused the only serious disagreements. There were many quarrels over statute labour, and in a few places some men blocked the road builders, as the Rhineland minutes put it, because of "selfishness and sections".<sup>4</sup> But municipal affairs soon functioned with little difficulty. Besides roads and bridges the other main interest of the municipal government seems to have been weed control. The minutes always contain warnings about the problem, often so worded that it is evident the Mennonites were afraid that the provincial authorities might interfere if fields were not kept clean. There are even motions ordering whole villages to summerfallow their land; if this is not done the pathmaster (man in charge of road building) would be ordered to come out and force the farmers to do it.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, with means such as these, it did not take the

Figure 10



Municipal Boundary Changes 1880 - 1916

West Reserve

councils long to exert their authority over most Mennonites. By 1890 the church leaders were in control of the religious sphere only; roads, weed control, and other matters of that kind were out of their jurisdiction. The councils were even taking over some of the church duties – work for which they have generally not been credited. Many Mennonites boast that until the 1930's no Mennonites ever received municipal relief, insisting that the church always took care of indigents. Yet the municipal minutes record quite a few charity cases in both Rhineland and Douglas Municipalities before 1900.

Figure 10 shows that the boundaries of the West Reserve municipalities were enlarged three more times after 1883. In 1886 the Mennonite township 1-1E was added to Douglas after repeated petitions from the people living there asking to be included in Douglas. In 1908 there was a general revision of the boundaries, and the Mennonites were again included within one municipality instead of in two. The final boundary adjustment took place in 1916, partly as a result of World War I. Many Anglo-Saxons in Stanley municipality were apparently extremely annoyed at the fact that the pacifistic Mennonite municipality of Rhineland was almost twice as large as Stanley, and so an adjustment was made by transferring two townships to Stanley.<sup>6</sup> These boundary adjustments did not affect the people, but Figure 10 should be examined whenever municipal statistics are quoted so that it is clear to which areas the statistics apply.

The West Reserve, as an area exclusively open to Mennonite settlement, survived the creation of the municipalities.<sup>7</sup> In the 1880's there were approximately 6,500 Mennonites in the West Reserve.<sup>8</sup> In 1891 there were 3,917 (total population 3,964) in Rhineland Municipality, 2,487 (2,681) in Douglas, 135 (2,535) in South Dufferin, and 236 (1,544) in Montcalm.<sup>9</sup> Rhineland and Douglas were still almost purely Mennonite, despite the fact that there has been some agitation to "open" the Reserves.

In 1879 there was already a suggestion that the West Reserve be thrown open for general settlement or a "public grievance would result".<sup>10</sup> By 1879 land was beginning to command a good price in Manitoba. The Manitoba boom of 1881 and 1882 was still a few years away, but many of the incoming settlers and speculators were no longer complacent about the Reserve. By 1881 the boom was in full swing and considerable pressure was brought to bear upon the government to open up the Reserve. Many letters were received by the Department of the Interior from Ontario farmers concerning the sale of land in the area.<sup>11</sup> As a result a number of Orders-in-Council were issued in 1881, ordering that the vacant lands be put up for sale at \$2.00 per acre (later \$3.00 per acre).<sup>12</sup> The Mennonites were very disturbed over this; and as a result of their protests the government changed its policy and the opening was postponed for many more years. Outsiders were not interested at this time in obtaining land in the East Reserve so that no question over continuing the Reserve arose in that area.

## The Village Settlements in the Nineteenth Century

### East Reserve

The Mennonites were very careful in selecting the sites for their villages. One of their first concerns was always to find a good, dry location close to a creek. There was some variation in the distances of the villages from the water. In the poorly drained areas of townships 7-4 and 7-5, the village was placed on higher land; some villages were up to one and a quarter miles from a creek in order to be safe from flooding in spring. These higher elevations were generally beaches or off shore bars of Lake Agassiz and proved to be admirable sites. Trails were usually built on top of them, connecting one village to another.

In other areas where the stream channels were better defined, the villages were built closer to the creeks. The street usually paralleled the creek, and since the natural drainage in the Reserve is to the northwest, most of the villages were oriented in a southeast-northwest line; Steinbach is an example (Figure 8P). In the southern townships factors other than water had to be taken into consideration. Gruenfeld was oriented parallel with the bush that fringed the western edge of the *Flur*. A number of villages, including Grunthal and Rosengart, were built on the ancient beach ridge which later became the famous "Ridge Road", leading south-west from Steinbach to the settlements in township 5-5 (Figure 4P).

Most of the villages were laid out with houses on only one side of the street (there were two exceptions). These were always on the side of the street nearest to the creek, so that all farm yards were next to the creek, a real convenience in watering the stock. The distance from the street to the creek, which was the length of the lot, was generally about 300 to 500 feet. The average lot was about 200 feet wide. Each lot was bounded by a rail fence along the street and along each side. In some villages the fences along the sides of the lots were of boards, since wood was plentiful in the Reserve. There was ample room on the lot for a garden, generally filled with flowers and trees, between the house and the street. Behind the house and the barn was the farm yard, a large vegetable garden, and perhaps a small pasture. The land on the opposite side of the street also belonged to the lot. Usually it was cultivated, but if the village grew, the settlers who didn't own any farm land, (often farmers' sons), lived there. If the village really developed, stores and flour mills were erected on that side. Only two of the villages in the East Reserve, Blumenort and Bergfeld, had farm houses on both sides of the street right from the start. None of the villages had a well developed cross street, although Rosengart is supposed to have had a rudimentary one with a couple of buildings on it, and a cross street developed in Steinbach after a number of years – leading to the cemetery and to a small flour mill.

A typical village of about 15 farmers was about one half to three quarters of a mile long. Few of the houses were painted, and the cumulative effect of these weatherbeaten structures gave a tired, gray, drab appearance to the entire village. Many villages, especially in the south, were cut out of the bush, so that they had absolutely no setting against which they could be seen. (Others appeared to be no more than a line of straggling buildings.) In a few northern villages trees were planted along the streets, improving their appearances greatly. Whether or not



trees were planted appears to be a difference derived from the settlers' background in Russia; the settlers from the Molotschna (*Kleine Gemeinde*) planted trees, whereas the *Bergthal* Mennonites didn't.

The streets varied considerably from village to village. In a few villages the street was a gravel beach and looked like pavement. In others the street remained covered with bush for some years, and was really only a trail meandering through the village. In the villages of the northern townships located on the Black Earth soils, the condition of the street usually depended upon the weather. Naturally the sod had disappeared, so that on wet days the street was a morass and practically impassable and in dry weather became an incredibly rough and dusty pavement.

Farm life in the village was in many essentials similar to that of a farm operator on his homestead except that when the work was done neighbours were close on either side for gossip. Not many of the villages had churches or stores but most of them had some provisions for educating the children, even if instruction had to be given by a local farmer in his home.

Cows were herded by the village herdsman, who was provided with a hut at the end of the village (Plate 3-4). In winter he often was the school teacher. Even though each village had a herdsman, some of the fields were fenced along the outside boundaries of the *Flur*. All the early fences were of wood; it was cheap, available, and wire fencing had not yet been introduced. Mennonites never built snake fences, although the French Canadians in Ste. Anne had built some about their river lots before the Mennonites arrived in Manitoba. The Mennonites drove a pair of posts into the ground, about every 16 feet. Five poles were then placed in between these posts, two along the bottom and three higher up. They were kept in place by boring holes through both posts and poles inserting sticks as dowels. These fences proved very susceptible to fire because the bottom logs tended to ignite from the merest grass blaze. Hence, after seven or eight years the style was changed. Single posts were placed about the same distance apart and two or three poles nailed to them, a fence similar to those erected along the village streets. It was not until 1885 that wire fencing was used.

Gardens provided the Mennonites with most of their food: cabbages, carrots, potatoes, beets, were the main garden vegetables. Fruit trees were also planted. J.Y. Shantz sent about 300 Ontario trees to the Mennonites in 1877.<sup>13</sup> Most of these did not prove successful, but the Mennonites planted some native Manitoba species in their yards and these produced well. A Dominion government agent described two Steinbach gardens in 1889. They contained plum, cherry, and apple trees, which bore abundant fruit every year. "These two farmers also had many maples and other shade trees planted around their farm stead."<sup>14</sup>

The few outsiders who visited the Mennonite settlements were impressed with the rapidity with which the villages had been established and with the industry of the people. A considerable portion of the early industry of the Mennonites was directed towards building the villages. Mr. John Lowe, Secretary in the Department of Agriculture, visited the Reserve in 1877 and remarked that the secret of the Mennonite's success was that:

Every man, woman and child on the settlement is a producer. Women were ploughing in the fields, thatching roofs, and girls were plastering houses. They would go and work before the morning was gray and continue until dark in the evening.<sup>15</sup>

This was no exaggeration; at first the Mennonite Settlements seemed to spurt ahead of those of the Ontario Canadians, where the individual farmer had to build a house, break land, cultivate it, and go to market as well. Meanwhile his wife was kept busy with the children and the livestock. The agricultural villages made possible a certain amount of division of labour, both among the men and the women. Lowe was asked by the Select Committee on Immigration and Colonization whether this kind of work (in the field and so on) improved the condition of the women or tended to their refinement. Lowe replied that this must be judged relatively, because their social ideas were different, "they think that hard work is considered to be of highest good to the women."<sup>16</sup> This is true to the present day, and among many of the Mennonite farming communities much more work is taken for granted on the part of the farm wife, than any Anglo-Saxon farmer would ever dare demand from his spouse.

Though the Mennonites objected to having any non-Mennonite come into the East Reserve to settle they got along very well with their neighbours on the outskirts of the Reserve. The relationship rarely became close, however. In coming to Canada the Mennonites hoped to retain their isolation, and factors such as their language, their nucleated settlements, their religion, their sober dress, and their insular society fostered this. When an individual homesteader from Eastern Canada came to Manitoba he sought advice, help and companionship from his fellow pioneers. The Mennonites on the other hand did not have to turn to others, because they had transferred an entire functioning society from South Russia to Manitoba. In Anglo-Saxon settlements young blood predominated, and a rambunctious, easy going, hard working, friendly pioneer society developed. Dances, horse races, excursions home to Ontario to get a wife, and other diversions were common. The Mennonites on the other hand had a complete society with nearly as many women as men. They did not take part in any of the frontier high jinks, but settled down immediately to their life of hard work.

It is too much to say that they remained completely unaffected by their new homeland. By 1876 a Mennonite had established a small store, a departure which was probably the first important result of the influence of Canadian society on the group. Courteous relations existed between the Mennonites and the French and the Anglo-Saxons, though with the French the intercourse never went beyond trading. Mennonites shopped at the Hudson's Bay Store in Ste. Anne, and the French patronized a Mennonite flour mill after it was built in 1878. The relations with the Clearsprings settlers were of necessity much closer, and though no feeling of community developed, the Mennonites and the Anglo-Saxons got on well. The Clearsprings settlers regarded the Mennonites with their unique villages and architecture as amiable neighbours, but of a completely different world.

No doubt the friendly relations between the Mennonites and the Clearsprings settlers arose in part from the fact that the two groups were in close contact during the pioneer years. During those years they seem to have unconsciously stimulated each other. An interesting and informative account of the Clearsprings settlement

is contained in a report written in 1880 by David Currie, a Montreal reporter. After touring the settled portions of Manitoba in that year he reported that Clearsprings was the most prosperous settlement he had seen in the North West. According to him the farmers were all young married men with considerable means, living on favourable well drained land, crisscrossed with coulees. He attributes part of their prosperity to the Mennonites.

I believe that the presence of the Mennonites has a good deal to do with the present progressive condition of their English speaking neighbours as the Scotch Pride of the latter will not suffer them to lag behind the quiet, plodding Mennonites in their culture of the soil.<sup>17</sup>

But there were more direct relations. Clearsprings farmers had showed the Mennonites how to provide adequate shelter for their livestock, and helped them with their log buildings, made shingles for them, and so on. The Mennonites in turn provided an early market for the Clearsprings produce, and later established blacksmith shops and stores which the settlers patronized, thus eliminating the long trip to Winnipeg.

There was also some co-operation in agricultural matters. One of the early threshing machines was owned by a Mennonite and a Clearsprings farmer in partnership, but co-operative threshing was a rare thing until the 1900's. On the whole each group remained to itself as much as possible. It was really only when a special skill was required, that the ethnic lines would be crossed. Thus there were exceptional cases of Anglo-Saxons living with the Mennonites for a month or so to help out in this way. Rarely was there any social intercourse between the two groups.

It is unfortunate that no plan showing the subdivision of a *Flur* has survived. However, after much painstaking work, Mr. John C. Reimer of Steinbach has managed to reconstruct the original field plan of Steinbach. A copy of Mr. Reimer's map is shown in Figure 11. This is not a typical field plan. Most were much simpler, but the fact that this is so complicated makes it all the more valuable because it probably includes all the features that it was possible to have in a *Gewann* village.<sup>18</sup>

Steinbach was founded in September 1874 by 18 *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites. They homesteaded in township 6-6 on sections 25, 27, 34, 35, and 36, and soon acquired the Hudson's Bay Company lands in section 26. The agreements made among the farm operators on how they would operate the village has not been preserved for Steinbach, but the document for Blumenort, another *Kleine Gemeinde* village, is still extant.<sup>19</sup> Probably the Steinbach document was very similar, so we will mention a few pertinent clauses. The first clause stated that the undersigned (all the heads of households) desired to establish a village community such as they had been accustomed to, and utilize the individually deeded land for the common good, so that everyone would benefit equally from the wooded land, the arable land and the meadows. Other clauses outlined the responsibility of the farmers with regard to taxes, maintenance of the school, and so on. The fifth clause stated that a farmer could not sell his farm to anyone that the village assembly did not approve of. There were a total of eight clauses in the agreement. The remainder dealt with the election of the *Schulz*, the appointment of a herdsman, and so on. Village affairs were conducted under a very simple agreement.

PLATE 3



*1. Steinbach Creek – along which Steinbach’s village street was oriented. In 1945 the creek was still running unmolested – the driveways and new homes are a development of 1953-55. Compare to the creek at Bergfeld.*



*2. Bergfeld – small creek along which the village was built.*



*3. “P.K. 1877” Oldest tombstone at Bergfeld – and the oldest in either Reserve. Few Mennonites spent money on tombstones until the 1900’s. Graves went either unmarked, or had wooden markers or field stones. In a few cemeteries planted trees marked the graves.*



*4. Herdman’s house in Bergfeld; built in 1885. Located on outskirts of village. Note that the log walls slant inwards toward the bottom to keep rain from washing away the clay. House is now used for poultry.*

## PLATE 4



1. Bergfeld's village street – abandoned since 1922. Present owner has gradually demolished the buildings which formerly lined the street until only two are left – neither is shown on this picture.



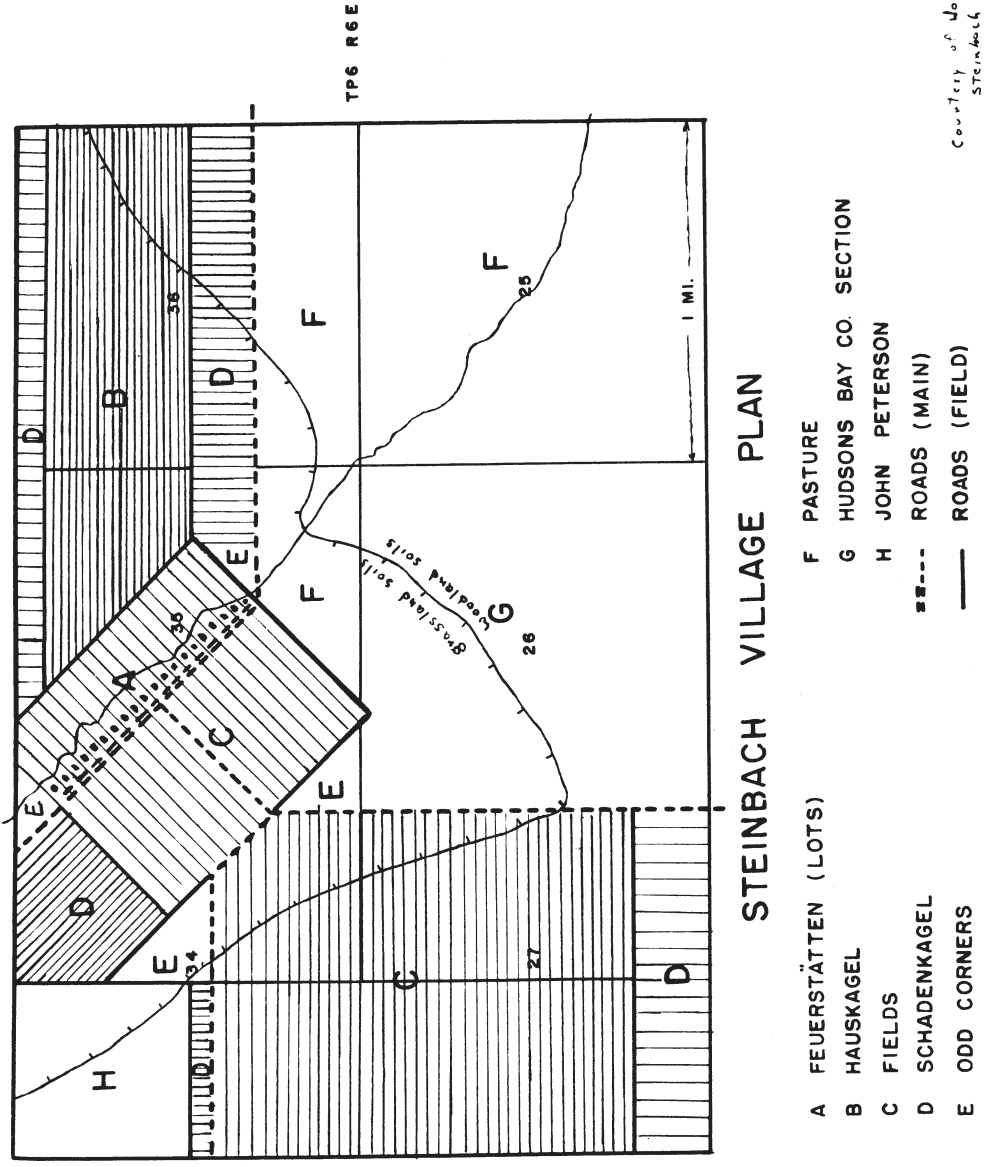
2. Steinbach – Main street on a Saturday morning in 1955. Looking west.



3. Steinbach-looking east.

*Note the simple bow-like, frame buildings, and the fences lining the street. Mill and tannery in right background. From McIntyre, The Canadian West, 1904.*

Figure 11



Courtesy of John C. Reimer  
Steinbach, Manitoba.



The boundary between the grassland and the woodland soils is indicated in Figure 11. The former are fairly well drained soils suited for all regional crops; the latter are a fine sandy loam, more suited to livestock than cropping, especially since sections 25 and 26 are rather stony. These were not subdivided but left as meadow. In the southwest there are sandy deposits over till, which are very easily worked, and were used as arable land, although agriculturists nowadays consider them more suitable for dairying and livestock production. It will be seen from the plan that the Steinbach farmers prepared a fairly good land capability classification, leaving the poorer soils for hay, and using the better more easily cultivated soils for crops.

The village street was laid out parallel to the creek (Figure 11 and Plate 3-1). The farm houses and buildings were on the numbered lots, called *Feurstätten*, to the northwest of the street. Each lot was about 220 feet wide and comprised six acres. The lots across the street belonged to the same farmer; they were ten acres in size and were used as arable land at first, but as Steinbach grew they were turned over to labourers, storekeepers, and other businessmen. Behind the *Feurstätten* were the *Hauskagel*, each about 24 acres in area and about one and one half miles long. Many of these were not farmed.

On the outer sides of the arable *Gewanne* the Steinbach farmers introduced an interesting refinement into their *Flur*. In order to ensure that no single farmer would be allotted the entire outside *Kagel* in a *Gewann* (where he would have to bear the brunt of the damage if a prairie fire should approach the village or if stray cattle from a neighbouring settlement should wander into the fields), the outside belt of land was divided into many small *Kagel*, called *Schadenkagel*, with their ends fronting the boundary of the *Flur*. This was carried out where necessary around the *Flur*, thus ensuring that any damage coming from outside the village would be distributed more or less equally among all the farmers. These buffer *Kagel* were laid out in only one other village besides Steinbach, and then not in such complete fashion. Steinbach may have adopted them because the Clearsprings settlement was close by where the cattle were always permitted to roam freely (in the Mennonite villages there was always a herdsman to take care of the cattle). This conjecture is supported by two facts: first, the other village (Blumenort) which had these protective *Kagel*, only had them on the side of the *Flur* facing the Clearsprings settlement; and second, only these two villages in the entire Reserve were close to non-Mennonite settlements. Short *Kagel* similar to those found in Steinbach were also common in the Mennonite settlements in South Russia, but there they were not laid out for protective purposes, but were just left over parcels of land distributed in such a way that each farmer in the village would possess an equal amount of land.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, some of the *Kagel* in Steinbach, especially those to the northwest of the village, served the same purpose.

The *Kagel* in each *Gewann* were allocated so that each farmer had the same average distance to travel from his home to get his lands. For instance, the farmer at the end of the village nearest a particular *Gewann* would have the *Kagel* farthest from the village, whereas the farmer at the far end of the village would have the *Kagel* right next to the village. The pattern of distribution had to be varied from one *Gewann* to another in order to compensate for which end of the village the

farmer lived on and other special factors. In the end the subdivision turned out to be quite complicated, despite the fact that rectangular *Gewanne* and *Kagel* were always employed.

Most of the arable land was in the fields marked C, to the southeast of the village but even here not all the land was utilized. The extreme narrowness of the *Kagel* made farming difficult; after a time many farmers traded *Kagel* among themselves so as to get two, three, or even four adjacent *Kagel*, and thus have one fair sized field.<sup>21</sup> Much arable land was needlessly wasted in the *Gewanne* through sheer careless farming. The ground marking the boundary between two *Kagel*, a *Rain*, was supposed to be one plough share wide, and kept clean, but farmers would pile stones there or not plough too closely to the *Rain*, so that after a time the *Raine* became as much as ten feet wide. Dust accumulated on the *Raine* and eventually ridges were formed that narrowed the *Kagel* down still more.

About six quarter sections were not broken, but were left for pasture. Section 26 was purchased privately and homesteaded by some of the farmers from the village. The northwest part of section 34 could not be broken because 40 acres of it belonged to a Clearsprings settler, who had homesteaded in township 7-6, but had been given these extra acres to make up a deficiency in his homestead. The patches marked E were left over parcels of land, and were given to farmers to equalize the land distribution.

Each farmer in Steinbach had about fifty acres of arable land allotted to him. The rest was pasture. No allowances were made for hay land, nor were any strips reserved for woodland, because both hay and wood could easily be obtained outside the *Flur*. Any farmers requiring more hay land bought additional land south of Steinbach, where the land was poor and inexpensive.

Not all the *Kagel* were cultivated, nor was all the land even cleared, by 1910 when the open field system of farming broke up in Steinbach. There is hardly any evidence of this field pattern left in Steinbach, – only a few rocks from a *Rain* here and there, or a depression representing a ditch where a road used to run.

The map shows the roads leading through the village, and those leading to the fields. Note that each farmer had individual access to all his *Kagel*. The road between lots 10 and 11, leading to the C strips, ultimately developed into Steinbach's main cross street.

A similar outline could be given for only a small number of other villages, because very few continued the open field system as long and developed it as fully as Steinbach did. Blumenort had some features which are perhaps more typical of the villages in this Reserve. Its *Gewannflur* comprised 29 quarter sections, extending three miles from north to south, and about two miles from east to west. The southern part of the *Flur* consisted of excellent Black Earth soils. This land was divided into *Kagel* in 1874 and used as arable land. To the north more than a section of forest situated on till deposits was reserved as woodland and left un-cleared. Farther north again there were some poorly drained Black Earths which were used as hay land. When first settled not all the arable was divided into *Kagel*, but only as much as could be broken and farmed in the early years. Then, as the settlement developed more land was subdivided into *Kagel* and brought under cultivation; subdivision into *Kagel* continued as late as 1882.<sup>22</sup> Ambitious farmers



who wanted to use more land than their allotted share, could obtain land beyond the area divided into *Kagel*, but still remain in the *Flur*. They had only to pay a nominal rent to the village council. Later, in the early 1890's, when the younger farmers got impatient with the open field system, and wanted to go on homesteads like their Clearsprings neighbours to the east, their elders gave them the low lying land in the extreme north of the *Flur*. When the elders saw how successful their sons were on the compact holdings they eventually gave up their strips too, in 1904.<sup>23</sup>

The open field system worked tolerably well in Steinbach and Blumenort, but where there was too much variation in land the system seems to have been inadequate. However, it is dangerous to over-generalize, because in the extreme south of the Reserve, where the farmers were relatively isolated and unexposed to Anglo-Saxons neighbours, the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* were used until the 1920's, on lands which were very much poorer than those in township 7-6. Where the farmers wanted to, they could make the open field system work.

### West Reserve

There was a great deal less difficulty in selecting suitable sites for villages in the West Reserve than in the East Reserve, because the terrain and soil were much more uniform and better suited to *Gewann* villages. In the East Reserve the Mennonites were confronted with an unfamiliar environment for their *Gewannfluren*, but here they could be laid out just as expeditiously as in South Russia, and they functioned just as well. Most of the land in the Reserve, even taking into account that in the *Bergthal* settlements, were laid out in *Gewanne*.

The average size of the villages was larger than in the East Reserve; in 1877 there were about 20 families per village. The smallest, Ebenfeld, had eight families, and Chortitz, the largest, had 32 families.<sup>24</sup> Another difference between the East and West Reserve villages was that in the latter all except one had houses on both sides of the street.<sup>25</sup> (The exception was Bergthal. Schanzenfeld even had a cross street.) The orientation with respect to the drainage channels was also different in this Reserve. Of those villages lying on creeks well over half had their streets running cross ways to the creek. Consequently they were usually oriented north-south because the creeks flow eastwards. One reason for this orientation may have been that the villages were built up on both sides of the street, so that it would have been difficult to prepare an equitable distribution of lots if one side of the village had a stream behind it and the other didn't. In the eastern part of the Reserve few villages were close to creeks, and this consideration did not generally enter into the planning of the villages. One further point to notice is that the Reserve was being surveyed while the Mennonites were moving in, so that the surveyors' lines were right before the settlers, and perhaps that is why most of the villages were oriented according to the section lines, even though the village streets usually were not placed on the road allowances themselves.

Only two creeks had considerable belts of woodland along their banks (Figure 5). Accordingly, the Mennonites started planting trees right after their arrival. Cottonwood cuttings from the Pembina River were planted in Blumenort in 1877, and other village plantings were begun in 1876.<sup>26</sup> Cuttings, wild trees from the

woods, and seeds blown in from the United States were planted. These included wild plums, wild cherries, gooseberries, poplars, ash and maple. Cotton-woods were the most commonly planted trees of all, and many of them are still standing.

It was relatively simple to lay out the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* in the southern part of the Reserve, because little land was rendered useless in each *Flur* by poor drainage, bogs, gravel beaches and poor soil. Neuhorst has a typical *Flur* (Figure 12). Note that the *Kagel* were distributed so as to ensure that each farmer had the same average distance to travel to get to his land. Section 11, a School Section, was squatted on in 1881 by William Brown, an Englishman, much to the disgust of the Mennonites. He established a famous stopping place on his farm (Plate 5-2), right on the colonization trail which passed through his property (Figure 16).

Blumenfeld's *Flur* was considerably more complicated,<sup>27</sup> (Figure 13 and Plate 2P). The village was first laid out in section 16 in 1875, but after considerable flooding on that site during the spring of 1876 the settlers decided to move the village to its present location in section 20, where it lies on well drained land near a creek. As a result of the move the short plots in section 16, which were the original house lots, were left over, and some more had to be surveyed in section 15 to even the land distribution. In this *Flur* there was no prescribed arable or hay land, but in practice the lands in section 15 and 16 were used as hay land because they were poorly drained.

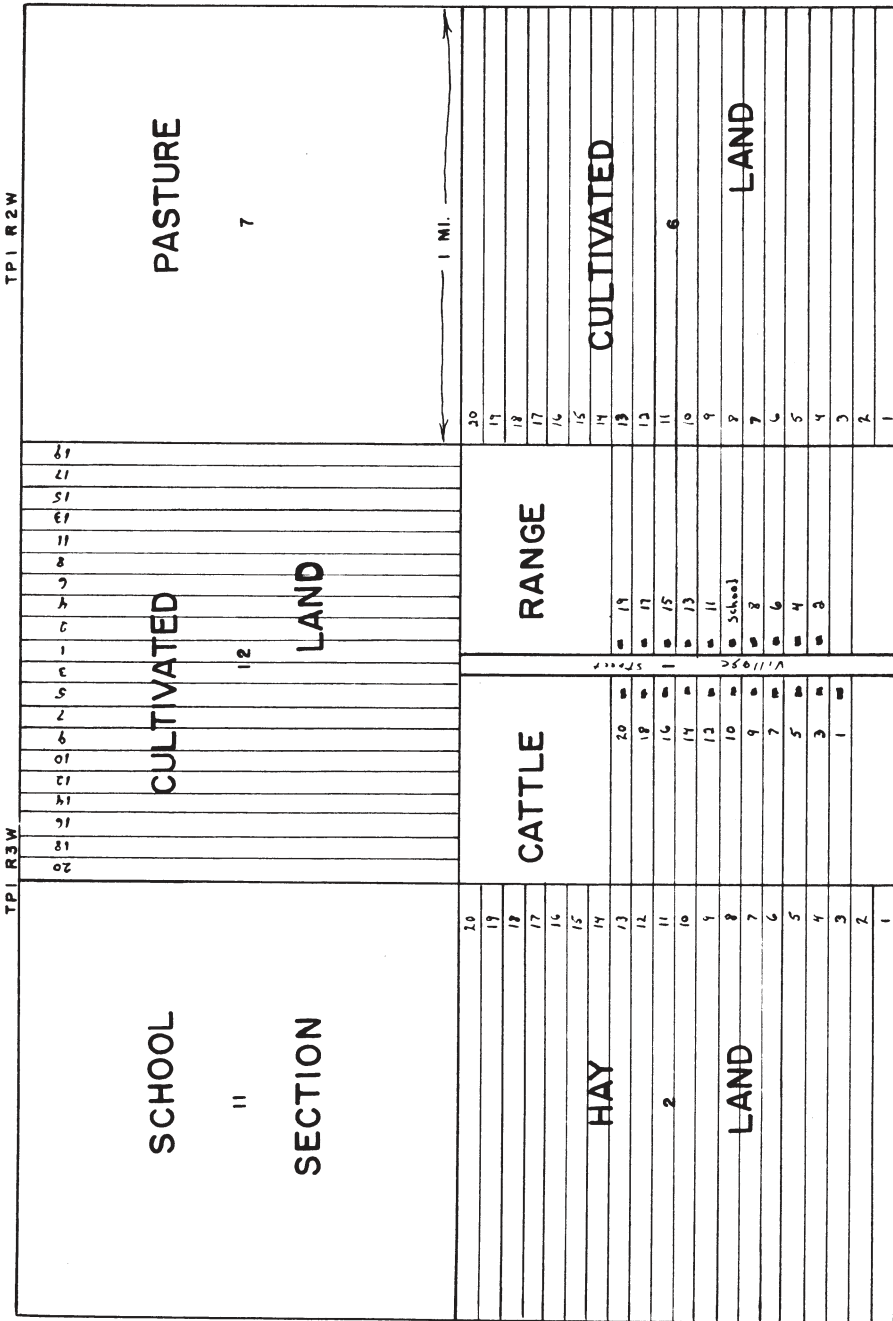
Blumenfeld was designed for 24 families. It was located on land which was admirably suited for a *Gewannflur*, because there is just enough variation here to make all the desirable types of land available. Section 22, a light loam, is the best arable land. Farther west in section 21, the land is lighter, even somewhat sandy, and not as good as in section 22. Section 20 was laid out in *Kagel* despite the fact that the creek meanders through it. In Section 17 the soil is very variable because it lies close to alluvial deposits brought from the Escarpment to the west. It has many micro-depressions which sometimes delay work in spring and also make tillage difficult. Reeds grow in the depressions, and in the early days, they were used for thatching roofs. This section was wisely used as the community pasture. The two sections to the east of it were not considered to have desirable land, at the time of settlement, because they were somewhat wet in spring. Drainage was commenced in 1897, and now these lands are considered among the best in the former *Gewannflur*.

In 1877 J.Y. Shantz described another kind of village pattern to the Select Committee on Immigration and Colonization:

The land is divided into strips a mile through – a mile long and one quarter of a mile broad; and of course the settler generally build their homes on the front of their lots, on both sides of the roads. Thus four sections would enable sixteen families, and six sections, twenty-four families to live in a village.<sup>28</sup>

This description does not correspond to any known village lay-out of the early days, nor was it recognized by any pioneer I interviewed. It is the kind of pattern which developed in later years when villages split up and farmers wanted to work on more manageable fields, yet still remain fairly close together. Also when some of the Mennonites began to move into the third tier of townships in the 1890's they adopted a plan that was similar to the one described by Shantz.

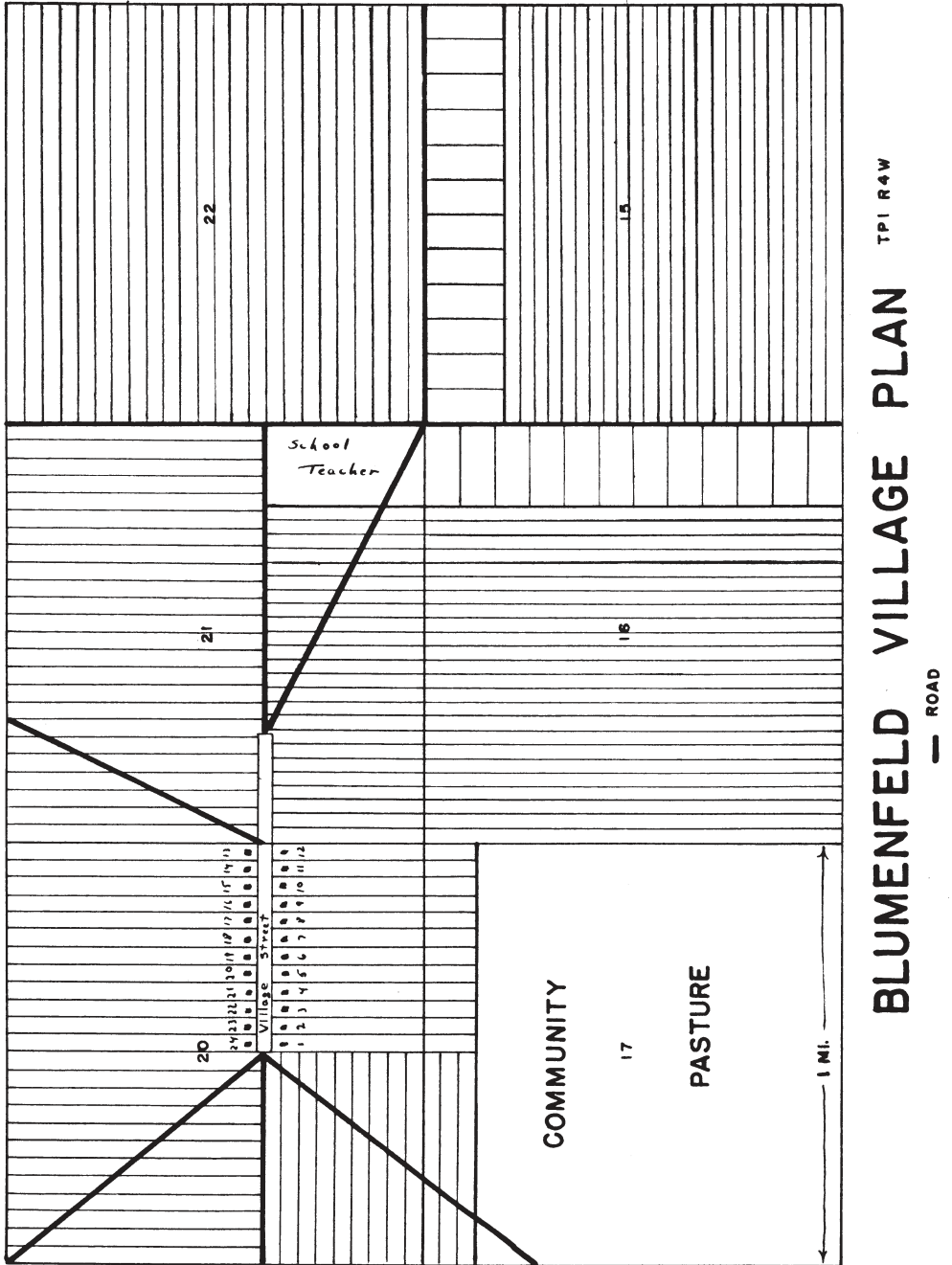
Figure 12



from Manitoba Dept. of Agriculture  
 R. Rauscher's Report, Oct 25, 1881  
 File 3127 (2A) # 38001 O.S.T  
 of J. A. ... (Canada Archives)

NEUHORST VILLAGE PLAN

Figure 13



### Buildings

In both Reserves the first shelter for most of the settlers was either a *Semlin* or a *Sarai*. In the East Reserve less than half a dozen Mennonites could afford frame houses in the first few years, and those were of simple balloon frame construction,<sup>29</sup> about 20 x 40 feet in size and with four foot studding. The walls were lined with tarred paper and then covered with ship-lap siding. Roofs were made of poplar poles and then thatched with reeds. Lumber was being produced in 1876 by a saw mill in Steinbach, but not in great quantity.<sup>30</sup> In the West Reserve as well a few houses were built of sawn lumber. A saw mill was operating in Nelsonville in 1878, and in that year the Pembina Mountain settlers began replacing their log houses with frame structures, but the mill could not even meet the demands of the Ontario settlers.<sup>31</sup> A mill was also working in the village of Blumenort in 1878, enabling the Mennonites to start erecting frame buildings, but this mill could not meet the demand for lumber.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of the shortage of lumber and its high cost Mennonites in both Reserves had to resort to log construction along with the other pioneers of the West. But they built their houses and barns in the styles that they had known in Russia; house and barn were joined together in a lengthy structure under one ridge pole. In Russia, where there was a shortage of timber, houses were built of brick and the Mennonites had hoped to do the same here. As it turned out, they built their first permanent homes of logs, and switched later to frame buildings. They never achieved the brick buildings they intended to erect.

Since the Mennonites were not experienced in building with logs they adopted the methods followed by their neighbours, and this resulted in a different method of construction in the two Reserves. In the West Reserve log houses were built from 1875 until about 1885. Some of these houses are still standing and are good examples of log construction (Plate 5-1). Despite the fact that the Mennonites had no experience in building log houses the workmanship is excellent. There is no evidence available as to where the Mennonites learned the technique of building log structures, but the advice and example of the neighbouring Ontario settlers is apparent in the dove-tailed corners. On Ontario Canadian farms in the Pembina Mountain Country similar work can still be seen on old buildings. No West Reserve log buildings were built in the Red River style which is described below. Very few of the log structures are left in the West Reserve, because they were replaced in the 1880's and 1890's by frame buildings as farmers became prosperous and lumber became available from the U.S. and British Columbia.

It is generally agreed among the pioneer Mennonites of the East Reserve that the first settlers adopted their building methods from those of the *Metis* and the Clearsprings settlers.<sup>33</sup> Some of the Clearsprings' farmers helped them build their homes, showing them how to prepare logs, how to cut notches and so forth. But the buildings were built differently than in the West Reserve. The Mennonites required large, substantial, structures that would not have to be replaced in half a decade or so; in this poorer area log buildings were erected at least until 1900. The usual pioneer log cabin of lap and saddle construction, or even the more careful dove-tailed construction used in many *Metis* and Ontario Canadian buildings was not adequate for their needs. The Mennonites built some of their smaller

buildings by the latter method but for most of their structures they used the Red River version of the log building.

There were quite a number of Red River log houses in Winnipeg, and the Hudson's Bay Store in Ste. Anne, with which the Mennonites were familiar was built in the same style, so they had plenty of examples from which to work. J.Y. Shantz in his *Narrative* describes the Red River style.

...for a house 16 feet by 24 feet the sills are laid, six posts are hewn square, one for each corner and one in the middle lengthwise, grooves of two inches are cut in the posts in which plates are placed to hold the posts – then timbers are cut to the proper lengths and a two inch tenon made at either end to fit the groove in the posts – these timbers so prepared are slipped in between the posts in the grooves, one on top of the other, until the spaces are filled up to the plates, which are from 8 feet to 10 feet above the sill – thus forming the sides and ends of the building; the cracks and openings are all plastered over on the inside and outside and then whitewashed....buildings thus constructed afford a warm house, and I would recommend settlers with limited means to adopt this plan for their houses, where the timber is so small that they cannot make them in the old Canadian style.<sup>34</sup>

Although the general method of construction was the same as in Shantz's description, the Mennonites excavated a basement, about 10 x 20 feet and three feet deep, and lined it with boulders which were kept in place by a dab of mortar here and there (Plate 6-4). The foundation was made of fieldstones on which the sills were laid. Uprights were then set up, about three feet apart (Plate 7). These were 6 x 6 inches and 7 feet high. Plates were securely fastened to the uprights by a 2 x 6 inch mortise, right through the centre of the plates. These joints were then made permanent by driving two wooden pegs, six to ten inches long and one inch thick, through the holes bored in the joints. Nails were available but they were not strong enough to hold these thick, heavy timbers. The corners of the frame were very carefully fitted with braces (mortised) to ensure that they would be solid. Instead of cutting a slot in the uprights, as was done in the true Red River style, the Mennonites just jammed the logs between the uprights, blocking up the walls in that fashion. The logs were about four inches in diameter, and just the top and bottom edges, which had to be fit snugly against each other, were smoothed. There were enough uprights, one on each side of a window or door, and one under each rafter (which were about four feet apart), that only short logs were required to block up the walls.

In a house built at Bergfeld in 1883 and still standing in 1960 (Plate 6-4) the logs were kept in place by wedging them in between the uprights as just described, but in later houses nails were used to hold them in place. The joints were made much more carefully in the earlier houses, where mortises were made through the centres of plates, not just sunk into the sides of the plates as was done in the latter houses.

The windows in these houses were generally small; window frames about 31 x 21 inches seem to have been the average. They were usually placed directly under the plates, and at most not more than 12 inches below them (Plate 7-4).

In the 1883 Bergfeld house all the timbers were hand hewn. In another house at Bergfeld, built in 1894, this was still the case, except for the rafters. The Mennonites did not stint on the rafters. Some were 8 x 8 inches and immensely

## PLATE 5



1. Log House, 3 1/2 miles west of Chortitz. Built in 1876, in village of Waldheim 1/2 mile to the east, but moved here the next year when some of the villagers decided to move on their quarter sections. Big logs were hauled from Pembina Mountain, field stones for foundations obtained locally. Beautiful dove-tailed construction, especially for the Mennonites, who had only been here for one year and had no previous experience in building log houses. There were no Red River style houses in the West Reserve. Note the steep pitch for straw roofs.



4. Farmstead on a Lake Agassiz beach, about 4 miles west of Osterwick. Simple but large old frame house is surrounded by trees, as is usual on the well established farms in this district. Barn is a relic from the horse power days – little stock is kept now. Gravel pit to the left.



2. Old Barn – 1881, built by Brown of the Central Stopping Place on the Post Road in 11-1-3W. Barn still in excellent condition. Timbers sawed by Mennonite saw mill in Blumenort, siding hauled from Emerson.



3. Abandoned, 60 year old Ontario settler's home; south of Darlingford. These rather austere frame farm houses, which antedate the ginger bread period of the early 1900's, were characteristic of the Ontario settlers. Mennonites at that time were still building their houses and barns together.



PLATE 6



1. One of the two remaining old Mennonite houses in Steinbach (built in 1883). Intersection of Piney Highway (also Steinbach's Main Street) and P.T.H. #12 in the foreground. Diagonally across the intersection is Steinbach's largest and most lurid used car lot. Picture opposite.



2. Steinbach – one of the modern car lots.



3. House of semi-Mennonite-Russian design on Steinbach's Main Street. The wide front and the bevelled gable ends were particularly characteristic of Mennonite institutions in Russia. Steinbach's first private school had a similar design. This is the only house of this style now left. It dates from about 1900 – note stone and mortar foundation.



4. Bergfeld. House and barn built in 1883. Windows are small and square and right under the eaves giving an older appearance to this structure than is usual in the Mennonite houses that are still standing.



## PLATE 7



1. Abandoned farm house and barn in Bergfeld. Empty since 1922. Probably built in the 1890's. Oriented parallel to the village street, which is unusual. Note large barn door through which a hay rack could be driven. Row of small windows was characteristic of Mennonite barns in Russia. Vertical boards on house have been nailed over plaster. The few windows are an eccentricity of the owner, who nailed on the boards – covering the windows. Characteristic gables, steep pitch of the roof, and the field stone foundation are well shown.



2. Interior of house shown opposite. Most of timbers sawn, but construction still Mennonite adaptation of Red River style. Some of plaster still on wall – always painted a light blue in all homes. Door on left leads directly into the stable; door on right, outside.



4. Bergfeld. Mennonite house construction in the East Reserve. Not entirely typical of earliest houses because uprights are sawn, though plates are not. All the joints are pegged; nails could not possibly hold these timbers. Note that window frames are not square.



3. Interior of barn, photographed through doorway connecting house and barn. Impression of height given by the contrast of low ceiling rafters with the high gable.

Nearer 2/3 of the barn was used as a stable, the far end for housing equipment and storing hay. Lean-to at the right; here it seems to have been used as a pig-pen.

Note that barns were not built in the same solid fashion (of logs) as the houses.

strong. They were simply laid on the plates, and though there were no pillars to hold the rafters in the middle, interior walls helped support them. These rafters were built so strongly so that the grain could be stored in the attic. This practice was brought along from Russia where the Mennonites had been afraid of robbers, and had kept their produce near at hand where it could not be stolen.

In contrast to the massive frame of timbers which formed the body of the house, the roof was just a light mantle fitted over the top to keep out the rain and snow. This was true of log houses in both Reserves. Poplar spars about four feet apart, and long enough to give a steep pitch to the roof, formed the framework. Lathes were nailed across the spars about ten inches apart, and hay in bundles three feet long and 2 1/2 inches thick was tied to them forming the thatch. These thatched roofs lasted for 25 years, if they had been well made. Thatched roofs were common in both Reserves until about 1900, and were used on both log and frame houses. As soon as farmers could afford it thatch was replaced by shingles.

Both the inside and the outside of the houses were lined with a mixture of clay and chaff, the chaff acting as a binder. In some houses lathes were nailed on the logs and then plastered with the mixture. This was then white-washed with lime, prepared in local kilns from limestone erratics. The interiors of the houses were occasionally lined with air-dried brick blocks, 4 x 4 x 8 inches, made of the mixture of the clay and chaff. As saw mills became more common the sides of the Mennonite houses were covered with clapboard siding.

In both Reserves the barns were constructed in a similar fashion to the houses, but were not as carefully built, and the timbers were not as heavy. The rafters were not nearly as heavy as in the house, nor placed as close together, because only hay, if anything, was kept above them. On the side of the barn away from the entrance the roof was generally extended below the plates until it was about three or four feet from the ground. In this additional space between the wall of the barn and the extension of the roof, small animals such as pigs could be kept. Even more commonly it was used for storing hay, or fuel for the house.

Though the method of construction was in both Reserves learned in Manitoba – and this applies to frame as well as log buildings – the plans for these buildings were derived from Europe. The house and barn were usually joined together, and in the East Reserve they were always end to end. But this was not the practice of all Mennonites for even from the start a few farmers in some of the villages constructed their home and barn and outbuildings apart. But there were advantages in perpetuating the old European style in Canada. Most important was the convenience in winter. The farmer could tend his stock without venturing across a cold, snow filled farm yard, and any men who formerly lived in such buildings still wistfully recall the ease with which the chores could be done. Another important factor in the early years was the fact that it was cheaper to build house and barn together, and the Mennonites were poor. Among the disadvantages were the fire hazard and the poor hygiene. Indeed, in the matter of hygiene, most Mennonites were very careful. In many places the barn was cleaned regularly throughout the day. No manure at all was allowed to accumulate. A few farmers even went to the extent of tacking paper on the stable walls back of the animals. Apparently most houses were reasonably free of any odor, though one reads of exceptions in some travellers' accounts. The real danger was that the well, which supplied all the water for the use of the household, was located in the barn. Strangely enough the

Mennonites seem to have escaped unscathed from any diseases, although there was one bad epidemic of typhoid fever in one village in the East Reserve at the turn of the century which can probably be attributed to this highly unsanitary location of the well.<sup>35</sup>

That the plan of the Mennonite house was transferred practically unchanged from Russia to Manitoba is demonstrated in Figure 16 which shows the plan of a Mennonite house in Russia, and the plan of a Mennonite home in the East Reserve. (West Reserve homes had identical features). The latter plan was prepared by Messrs. C.L. Toews and J.C. Reimer of Steinbach, Manitoba.<sup>36</sup> It is absolutely complete, combining many features found in different houses so that it shows the highest development of the Mennonite house.

To a person approaching from the street the main entrance was always on the right hand side of the house. The barn door was also always on this side. The house was divided into two main parts, the *Vorderbaus* at the front, and the *Hinterbaus* at the rear. The *Vorderbaus* contained the living room, which also served as the parents' bedroom, and the bedroom(s) for the girls and smaller children. In the *Hinterbaus* there were two main rooms, the kitchen and the dining room combined, and a large utility room which also served as the boys' bedroom (*Sommerstube*). Further refinements of course could be made to suit the individual, as far as his pocket book permitted.

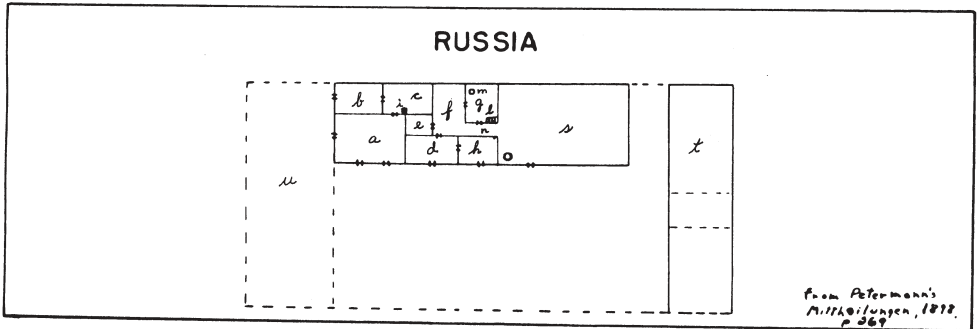
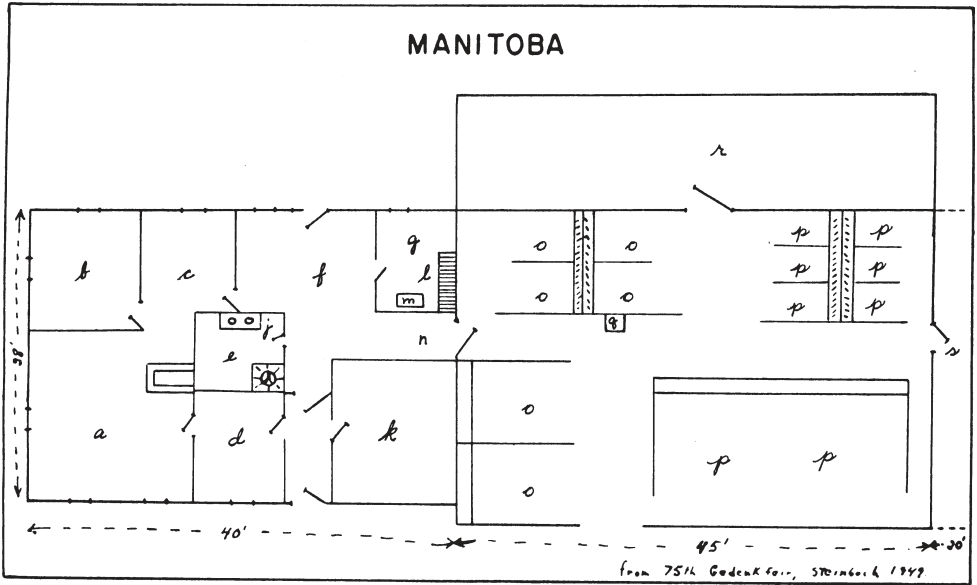
The big brick stove in the middle of the house merits special mention (Plate 8). Even non-Mennonite farmers were interested in their construction, in the hope that if they adopted them, they could utilize coarse prairie hay, reeds and rushes for fuel.<sup>37</sup> Some Dominion cabinet ministers, touring the East Reserve in 1877, thought that this was the greatest contribution that the Mennonites had made to the settlement of the West.<sup>38</sup> As it turned out, these stoves were never adopted outside the Mennonite community, but at least these reports are one of the few indications that Manitoba farmers showed any appreciation for Mennonite devices.<sup>39</sup>

There was never any problem in obtaining wood for fuel for these stoves in the East Reserve, but this stove proved of great importance in the virtually treeless West Reserve. There the fuel was a mixture of straw and manure. In spring the manure and straw were spread out on the ground and kept moist, and horses were walked over it until the mixture was fairly compact. This mass was then cut into blocks six inches square with spades, and exposed to the air until dry. This provided a fuel with high heat content, and yet was clean, producing no unwholesome odor.

A considerable number of these stoves were in use in the West Reserve until the end of World War I, but now there are hardly any left. Naturally this was just direct conduction heating, and only those rooms were heated which contained a portion of the stove. Since there was no proper circulating system the rest of the house was usually cool, so that the windows were kept closed, and the common travellers' comment about the Mennonite house was that it was extremely stuffy inside.

The entrance to the barn was often a narrow passage way, with a door at each end to separate house and barn as much as possible. Arrangements in the barn varied considerably. Some farmers tried to keep their feed in the part of the barn close to the house so as to separate the two – others didn't bother. The main axis of the barn was at right angles to its length and all the early barns had very large

Figure 14



MENNONITE HOUSE PLANS

- |   |              |   |                 |
|---|--------------|---|-----------------|
| a | LARGE ROOM   | l | STAIRS          |
| b | CORNER "     | m | TRAP DOOR       |
| c | SMALL "      | n | PASSAGE TO BARN |
| d | FRONT "      | o | HORSES          |
| e | KITCHEN      | p | CATTLE          |
| f | BACK ROOM    | q | WELL            |
| g | PANTRY       | r | LEAN-TO         |
| h | SUMMER ROOM  | s | BARN            |
| i | BRICK OVEN   | x | MACHINE SHED    |
| j | HEARTH       | u | GARDEN          |
| k | LARGE KETTLE |   |                 |

doors so that the hay racks could be driven right in for unloading. Later when hay hoists were introduced, farmers were able to reduce the size of these doors.

Until the 1890's there was little difference in the appearance of the larger villages of the East and West Reserves. In the East Reserve many of the buildings were of log construction, but the logs were eventually covered by siding obtained from local saw mills which operated in the woods to the east of the Reserve. Saw milling in the West Reserve never attained the importance that it had in the East Reserve, and early saw mills associated with flour mills disappeared within the first decade of settlement as the limited available timber was depleted. But in this commercial farming area money was soon available for purchasing imported lumber. The Mennonites in the eastern part of the Reserve had a windfall when the town of Emerson went downhill after 1883 after its trading hinterland was reduced by a new railway; the abandoned houses and barns provided a cheap source of lumber.<sup>40</sup> In other districts lumber was obtained from the yards in the trading centres which developed after the railway was completed through the Reserve in 1883. Most of the buildings were of balloon framed construction, although many farmers seem to have doubted the strength of that method of building, and houses built in the 1890's still exist which have walls that are six inches thick, constructed of 2''x 6''s one on top of the other. They were also covered with siding the same as the log houses of the East Reserve. I have found no explanation for this type of construction. In both Reserves the houses were rarely painted, except for the shutters which were usually painted blue. In the summer the drab, weatherbeaten houses served as a back drop for the brightly coloured flower gardens growing in every front yard, but in the other seasons the villages looked rather bleak and uninviting, because as yet they had not even trees to shelter them. At all times, however, each village was an architectural unit (even blue shutters would all be the same shade), unlike a prairie trading centre which was usually a hodge-podge of unrelated false-fronted stores, warehouses, residences and barns.

House designs were practically the same wherever one went in both Mennonite settlements until the late 1890's, when changes began to appear in the West Reserve. A new design in which the long axis of the house was placed at right angles to the barn, with only a narrow passage in between, was adopted in a few villages for hygienic reasons (Plate 14 and Figures 15 and 20). In the *Bergthal* village of Sommerfeld all the buildings were constructed in this way. There were no log houses of this design, so that it is very likely that it was a Manitoba innovation devised by the Mennonites as an alternative to the intimate gable to gable construction of the house and barn on the one hand and the complete separation of the house and barn on the other.<sup>41</sup> Very few of these houses were built by the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites, and none at all in the East Reserve where there was little new building because of the poverty of the area.

The Mennonites in both Reserves who moved on the farms almost invariably built their homes according to the simple stark lines of the other homesteaders in the province, with house and barn apart. One reason given by oldtimers for preferring house and barn apart is that the long structure resulting from building the house and barn together often caused snow to pile up into huge unmanageable drifts. But more likely it was just a matter of copying other Manitobans for hygienic and stylish reasons.<sup>42</sup> Once away from the village, the Mennonite could be completely independent.

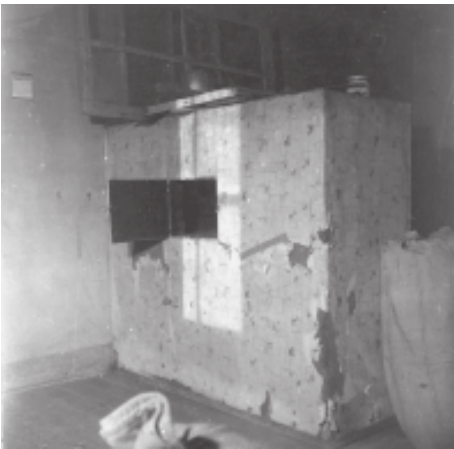
PLATE 8



*1. Abandoned Mennonite private school in the village of Rudnerweide, west of Altona. Teacher lived on one side, the classroom was on the other. Contains the stove shown in the following photographs.*

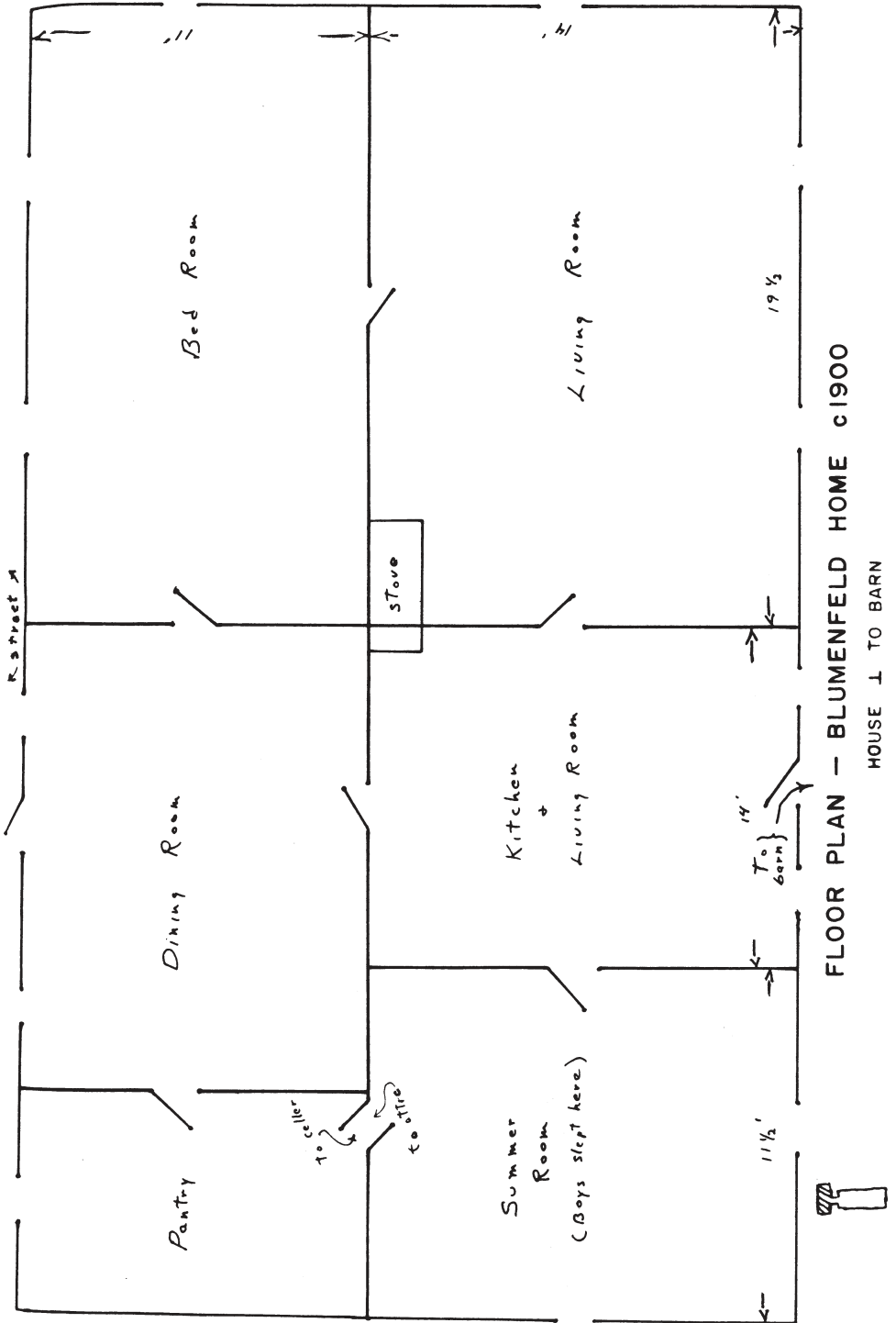


*2. Front of the old Mennonite stove. This stove was actually built in the 1920's, but it is the same design as the stoves built in the 1870's and 1880's. The stove was fired through the door shown with straw, or dried and pressed manure, or wood when available.*



*3. Other end of the stove in the next room, showing the large brick bulk of the stove, and the bake oven. Once it was hot it kept the house warm for hours. Usually an interior wall extended from the stove to the opposite wall of the house, so that each side of the stove would keep one room warm.*

Figure 15



FLOOR PLAN - BLUMENFELD HOME c1900  
HOUSE 1 TO BARN



<sup>1</sup> Information on the boundaries of the Municipalities was obtained from the *Statutes of Manitoba, 1880-1916*.

<sup>2</sup> Galbraith, *Menmonites*: 13.

<sup>3</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 27630 (2), A.M. Burgess to H.H. Smith, August 3, 1889.

<sup>4</sup> *Rhineland Municipality Minutes*, May 25, 1886.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, June 3, 1891.

<sup>6</sup> This is the commonly accepted explanation in the Reserve. It is also the opinion held by the municipal officials of that time; interview with H.H. Hamm (former secretary of Rhineland Municipality), Altona, August, 1955.

<sup>7</sup> Excluding, of course, the western portion of the original Reserve.

<sup>8</sup> Estimate based on immigration statistics.

<sup>9</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1891.

<sup>10</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 3129 (1), No. 10765, Memorandum by C. Allen. September 27, 1879.

<sup>11</sup> See P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 3129.

<sup>12</sup> Orders-in-Council, March 24, July 29, and September 3, 1881.

<sup>13</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1877, Appendix 6, Evidence of J.Y. Shantz before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 113. Shantz did not state to which Reserve he had sent the trees, but since we know that the Mennonites of the East Reserve had fruit trees a few years later, it is likely that he sent some trees to the East Reserve.

<sup>14</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 179925, No. 163535, H.C. Jacobsen, Report to the Commissioner of Dominion Lands, September 7, 1889.

<sup>15</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1878, Appendix 2: Evidence of J. Lowe before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*: 16.

<sup>17</sup> Currie, *Letter of Rusticus*: 21.

<sup>18</sup> This valuable plan was prepared and copyrighted by Mr. J.C. Reimer, and lent by him. It is reproduced in *Gedenksfeier, 1949*: 154. I am heavily indebted to this booklet for much of my information on Steinbach. See pp. 37 ff. for a detailed description of the *Gewannflur*.

<sup>19</sup> It is printed in *Gedenksfeier, 1949*: 120.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with J.J. Hildebrand, East Kildonan, September, 1955. Mr. Hildebrand has farmed in both South Russia and Manitoba.

<sup>21</sup> This practice did not exist in the Mennonite settlements in Russia. Interview with J.J. Toews, Steinbach, September, 1955.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1878 No. 9. Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Appendix 41: 131.

<sup>25</sup> In the Mennonite villages of South Russia both sides of the street always had house lots, so this difference had no precedent there. Possibly the answer lies in the fact that the East Reserve does not have the continuous stretches of arable land of the West Reserve, so that the smaller villages that resulted had buildings on only one side of the street.

<sup>26</sup> *Farm Forestry and Tree Culture Projects for the Non-Forested Region of Manitoba, Winnipeg 1945*: 110.

<sup>27</sup> The field plan of Blumenfeld was prepared with the help of Mr. Peter Klassen of that village in August, 1955. The widths of the *Kagel* are only approximate, but the boundaries of the *Gewanne* are accurately drawn. Mr. Klassen also supplied much of the information on which the discussion of Blumenfeld is based.



<sup>28</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1877, Appendix 6, Evidence of J.Y. Shantz before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 107.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955.

<sup>30</sup> K.J.B. Reimer, article in *Steinbach Post*, April 4, 1952.

<sup>31</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, February 28, 1878.

<sup>32</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, January 31, 1878.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955.

<sup>34</sup> Shantz, *Narrative*: 15.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with John C. Reimer, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955.

<sup>36</sup> The plan is reproduced in *Gedenkfeier, 1949*: 158.

<sup>37</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, March 14, 1878.

<sup>38</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, September 29, 1877.

<sup>39</sup> See Appendix F for a description of the Mennonite stoves.

<sup>40</sup> *Emerson Southern Manitoba Times*, March 17, 1887.

<sup>41</sup> There was a sufficient variety in the Mennonite houses of South Russia that this form probably also appeared there, but it was not common. Interview with J.J. Hildebrand, North Kildonan, Man., October, 1955.

<sup>42</sup> In the opinion of some elderly Mennonites the desire to be stylish was a very important factor in following the prevailing custom.

## Chapter 5

### EARLY AGRICULTURE 1875 TO 1883

Breaking of the virgin land began in 1875 in the East Reserve, and a year later in the West Reserve. In both places the Mennonites revealed their inexperience in occupying new lands by breaking the land at the wrong time of the year and by ploughing too deeply. Contemporary comments reveal this: "They [the Mennonites] do not seem to know anything about June breaking";<sup>1</sup> and "I found that I had made a serious mistake in ploughing deep the first season. The sod did not rot properly, and it was three years before it would harrow up good."<sup>2</sup> Mennonite farmers generally appear to have broken the land early in spring and planted oats and potatoes that same year. A more accepted way of breaking land among the Canadian settlers was to break the sod during the four weeks from the middle of June to the middle of July, turning over a 12-14" wide strip as shallow as possible, so that the sod could rot in the hot summer sun. In the fall it was backset, that is ploughed in the same direction but a little deeper, say up to three inches, mixing the rotted sod well, and also bringing up some new soil in the process. The Mennonites did not adopt this method for some time, and suffered for it.

Breaking land was a very difficult task. A twelve inch plough pulled by two oxen was generally used. In light soils such as those in the western part of the West Reserve the work was relatively simple, but in areas of heavier soil the sod was so tough that more than two oxen were frequently required. In the East Reserve very few settlers managed to break more than six acres in the first year on the land.

The 3,000 acres of land which had been broken in 1875 in the East Reserve were backset and seeded to wheat in the spring of 1876. An additional 1,000 acres were broken that spring and seeded to oats. The farmers in the West Reserve managed to break 1,500 acres and put 1,475 acres into crop in 1876 although the land did not produce well because it was inadequately prepared.<sup>3</sup>

Sowing was all done by hand, and the seed worked into the soil by wooded-toothed harrows. Most of the seed was purchased with money borrowed from the Ontario Mennonites and the Canadian government. Seed was difficult to obtain in Manitoba in these early days, and was extremely expensive, hence the need for cash. Seed brought from Russia was used to a limited extent, and Mennonite wheat grown from Russian seed caused some excitement on the Montreal Corn Exchange in 1879 because the kernels were hard and full, and the grain weighed 65 lbs. to the bushel.<sup>4</sup> Apparently the Russian seed did well in the first few years, but it was two weeks later in ripening than Red Fyfe and was caught by frost one year, so that it was soon largely abandoned, though some farmers were still sowing it as late as 1886.<sup>5</sup>

Oats, barley, rye and potatoes were other important crops in the early years. Seed for these crops was obtained locally or brought in from Ontario.<sup>6</sup> For a time it appeared that flax would be grown in the East Reserve but the sponsoring company from Eastern Canada transferred its interest to the West Reserve, so that the crop was never widely grown east of the Red River. In the West Reserve however it was a valuable crop, especially as a "catch" crop on the first breaking. A German-Canadian seed oil manufacturing firm in Baden, Ontario (Livingstone & Co.) in-

duced the farmers to grow it for seed. By 1878 the Mennonites were shipping out considerable quantities; seven car loads of flax were shipped from Emerson in one week that year.<sup>7</sup> In the West Reserve commerce was certainly following the railways, which had entered the province that year!

One of the main problems facing the pioneer Manitoba settlers was the protection of their crops from stock before barbed wire was introduced. Before a Herd Law was enacted in Manitoba all livestock was permitted to graze freely, and it was up to each farmer to build enclosures around his fields for his own protection. This was very difficult where there were few trees, so fencing was an added inducement for the pioneer to settle near wooded areas. Wire fencing was introduced into Manitoba as early as 1877, when a German farmer in the Pembina Mountain Country ordered some from Germany.<sup>8</sup> By 1880 barbed wire was coming into the province by the car-load.<sup>9</sup> It arrived just in time, because a Herd Law was passed in Manitoba in 1880, requiring that animals be so guarded that they would not do injury to fields on which crops were grown.<sup>10</sup> Since they lived in villages and had a herdsman to look after their animals the problem of enclosing livestock did not at first affect the Mennonites. However, the introduction of the barbed fence made it possible for a Mennonite farmer to break away from the village and still control his animals efficiently on his own farmstead.

Mennonites didn't specialize in stock, but it played an important part in their economy, especially in the years before commercial grain farming became fully developed. Each farmer had three to four cows and some hogs, but this number did not increase through the years. In the West Reserve income from farm stock became proportionally less important as the revenue from grain steadily mounted. Nor were the Mennonites in either Reserve particularly concerned about improving the quality of the livestock. Until 1876 livestock was very expensive in Manitoba and a farmer had to accept what he could get. After that it became cheaper and Mennonites bought some better quality animals, but they never seriously attempted to improve their breeds – at least not through efforts of their own. An Englishman stock fancier homesteaded in township 1-5 in the early 1880's. He became quite friendly with the Mennonites, so that his breeding stock was sometimes used to improve the Mennonite herds.<sup>11</sup>

Oxen were more important than horses in these years. In many ways they were much more useful draught animals for pioneer farmers than horses, and most immigration pamphlets suggest that a new immigrant should start with them rather than horses. In the first place they were cheaper. In 1877 an ox cost \$60, a native horse \$100, and an imported horse at least \$200.<sup>12</sup> Oxen fared much better than horses in the Manitoban winter, and didn't have to be so well sheltered. They could also forage for themselves, and did not require the oats that horses did. Oxen were also less susceptible to disease; many horses from Ontario died in Manitoba. It was easier to break land with oxen because they were stronger. One yoke of oxen could break an acre a day in June, although when the ground was hard it required two yoke. Oxen also had the advantage that they could walk on the land earlier in spring because of their wider hooves. Of course the oxen had disadvantages; after one or two rounds in the fields they needed water, which was a nuisance. Also they were stubborn animals and hard to manage, and could not be

made to back up properly. Finally, and this was their main disadvantage, they were slow, and as the size of the fields increased farmers turned more and more to horses because it was essential that farm operations over vast acreages be completed quickly and at more or less the same time. Nor did oxen have the spirited quality of horses; farming with them was dull! Oxen were especially out of place on the *Gewannfluren* because of the travelling involved in going to the *Kagel* from the villages. Horses were also desirable for trips to Winnipeg and to trading centres. The Pembina settlers had changed to horses by 1879, well ahead of the West Reserve Mennonites, who couldn't afford them for a considerable time after that. There was an even greater lag in the East Reserve.

It is a revealing fact that until about 1900 a hardware store in either Reserve was to all intents and purposes also an implement shop. Implements, of course, were few and simple. The essential ones, which every farmer owned, were a plough and a harrow. The rest of the farm machinery could usually be borrowed in exchange for labour. Often, expensive machinery was owned by a syndicate of farmers.

Riding ploughs were not generally used in Manitoba in the 1880's, though there were a few in the Portage la Prairie district in 1879. A few Mennonites bought one-share riding ploughs in the early 1880's, and the use of riding ploughs became more general after the two-share ploughs were introduced a few years later.<sup>13</sup> Little fall ploughing was done by the Mennonites during the first decade in Manitoba; the land was usually prepared for seeding in spring. Spring ploughing often took so long that seeding was delayed, and the crop was caught by frost in the fall. Even then spring ploughing was essential in some of the clay areas in both Reserves because the land was so hard that spring rains were required before the plough would bite into the soil. For working the land the Mennonites at first used special harrows with three edged wooden teeth, sharp enough to cut the sod, but shortly harrows with iron teeth were generally employed. Since the seed was worked into the soil with harrows, pioneers relate that farm work seemed to be an endless round of harrowing.<sup>14</sup>

In the early years hay and grain were cut with scythes in both Reserves.<sup>15</sup> In cutting grain with a scythe, three acres was considered a good, but not exceptional day's work for one man working from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. In the East Reserve the Mennonites had mowers in 1875, in the West Reserve one year later. Some of the Mennonites in the East Reserve attempted to convert their mowers into reapers but this proved unsuccessful. However, in 1878 reapers were introduced into both Reserves and soon were in general use. The reapers were followed shortly by binders equipped with wire tying devices. These never proved popular, because the pieces of wire got into the straw after threshing and were dangerous to the livestock. By 1882 the first twine binders were available and the problem of cutting grain was solved.

Flails were used for threshing in the early days, and another threshing device that was briefly adopted in both Reserves was the "threshing block", which was pulled over the sheaves of grain by horses or oxen (Plate 9-1 shows a stone threshing block). In the East Reserve it was displaced in 1876, the year of the first sizable crop, by threshers. The first threshing machine and portable horse-drawn steam engine (Plate 9-2) were brought into the Reserve by Josiah Cohoe, a Clearsprings

farmer, in 1876. This was the second portable steam engine brought into Manitoba for farm use; the first, shipped into the province on the same barge, had been purchased by a Mennonite from the West Reserve.<sup>16</sup> The same year A.S. Friesen, a Mennonite from Steinbach, and John Carleton, of Clearsprings, jointly bought a horse-driven threshing machine. In the following years the majority of the villages in the East Reserve acquired threshing machines, most of them steam-driven. The first horse and steam-powered threshing machines were introduced into the West Reserve in 1877. In 1878 there were seven of the former and four of the latter, and by 1879, twelve steamer outfits were working in the Reserve. But the threshing block was still sometimes used:

A pretty sight to view from off the mountain the Mennonite villages with the streams of smoke and steam floating across the horizon. If not employed with the steam threshing machine you will probably find Mr. Mennonite and his frau with a Russian machine which resembles a roller about 6 feet long with pieces of scantling spiked on it at short intervals lengthwise. Madam places the sheaves in a circle and Mr. Mennonite drives around on the top with this wonderful piece of machinery. This is only used for barley, oats, flax, and sometimes millet. It takes no gold out of Mr. Mennonite's pocket to thresh this way.<sup>17</sup>

Soon these threshing blocks were used only for flax, which was difficult to thresh in the early power machines. And then in turn horse-powered threshing machines were replaced by steam driven machines. By the middle of the 1880's practically every village in the Reserve had two machines – enough to handle their entire crop.

In both Reserves the threshing was done from the stack in the early years. Sheaves were brought into the village, stacked, and then eventually threshed. Because of the few threshing machines available weeks often passed between the cutting and the threshing of the grain. Sheaves had to be carefully stacked to keep them from deteriorating, and once the acreages of grain increased the stacks were a familiar sight in the autumn landscape. Sheaves sometimes had to be brought three miles to the stack in the individual proprietor's back yard (where the threshing was done), so that each farmer could have his own convenient straw pile. In the 1880's the machines were brought to the fields in some villages because the occasional farmer was already threshing from the stook by then. But as late as World War I this was not looked upon as the best practice, although it was considered superior to poor stacking. Once threshing machines were widely available stacking was largely abandoned.<sup>18</sup>

In the early years there was little difference between the two Reserves as far as implements or farming techniques was concerned. Nor was there much difference in the ease with which money could be earned outside the Reserve. Unlike many subsequent migrants the Mennonites could not easily earn money outside their settlements by working for railway construction crews or as hired men, so that the early years were financially difficult in both Reserves. Farmers lived on savings brought from Russia, and were also helped by the loans already mentioned; by 1878 some cash income was being obtained from the sale of grain. In the East Reserve this was supplemented by the sale of butter and eggs in Winnipeg. But

PLATE 9



*1. Threshing stone used in the West Reserve in the 1870's and early 1880's. Now owned by a Steinbach farmer interested in establishing a museum. Apparently they never used threshing stones in the East Reserve – only the version constructed of wood.*



*2. Outdoor Ukrainian oven, 1 mile south of Pansy. This one is still in use. Mennonites had similar ovens.*



*3. First farm steam engine used in Manitoba. Imported by J. Coboe of Clearsprings in 1876 from Ontario. Note the upright boiler. (Copy of an earlier photograph.)*



dairying was impossible for the farmers of the West Reserve, since they were 80 miles from Winnipeg, the only adequate market. Therefore the West Reserve farmers tried to make money in various other ways. In 1877 some Mennonites were planting poplar trees for a Pembina Mountain farmer at 1/2¢ a tree.<sup>19</sup> They also broke land for Ontario Canadians, charging only \$2.50 per acre against the \$4.00 which was the normal cost.<sup>20</sup> These were exceptional instances, and on the whole the Mennonites had very little success in obtaining outside work. Girls sometimes worked as domestics, but the young men had little chance to get work as hired men. After trading centres developed in the West Reserve the Mennonites made some money peddling produce but that was not possible until the later 1880's, and even then the possibilities did not match those of the Winnipeg market, which was being supplied by the East Reserve farmers.

Some attempt was made in both Reserves to grow plants other than cereals for commercial purposes. Fruit trees from Ontario were planted in 1877, but they did not produce satisfactorily.<sup>21</sup> This must have been one of the first attempts to grow fruit commercially in Manitoba. The Mennonites planted tobacco but it was very strong and bitter and could not be sold. It seemed that wheat was the only solution to their economic problems.

As we have seen, there was little difference between the two Reserves in the speed at which the land was broken in the first year or two, and also in regard to implements and techniques used. But differences in the economic geography of the two Reserves were rapidly revealed as agricultural development continued.

The first successful crop in the East Reserve was harvested in 1876, though it was somewhat damaged by frost.<sup>22</sup> But there still was not sufficient wheat grown to satisfy the needs of the Mennonites and flour had to be obtained in Winnipeg. It is interesting to note that John Carleton of Clearsprings supplied 86 1/2 bushels of the first shipment of wheat exported from Manitoba, which was shipped that year. No Mennonite-grown wheat was in that shipment.

The acreage of land broken increased rapidly in the following years in the East Reserve. By the end of 1876, 5,000 acres, by 1877, 7,200 acres and by 1878, more than 9,200 acres were ready for seeding – approximately 10 to 11 acres per farmer in 1878.<sup>23</sup> In 1877 the crop was somewhat better prepared. In their urgency to get the crop in the ground during the first two years in Canada, the Mennonites had often planted crops on sod which had not properly rotted, due to faulty breaking, and hence the harvests were poor. Repeated ploughing and harrowing had made the soil adequately friable by 1877, and a crop just sufficient to supply the needs of the settlers was harvested. Fortunate farmers sold their surplus to others less fortunate.

Though the East Reserve Mennonites were growing enough grain by 1878 to supply their own food, the returns actually were not satisfactory. Starting in 1876, the precipitation was above normal in Manitoba for four consecutive years. The average annual precipitation for Winnipeg is about 20", yet the precipitation for 1875 was 18.62"; 1876, 24.10"; 1877, 31.91"; 1878, 28.75; and remained above 22" for the next three years. As a result the low lying lands in the East Reserve were covered for weeks on end in spring by extensive sheets of water so that seeding

was impossible. Drainage ditches were dug and canals constructed, but all to no avail; the flooding could not be coped with because the land was too flat.

The Mennonites did not really want to move again, yet it became obvious that they could not remain on the flat, easily flooded lands in townships 7-4 and 7-5. They were also dissatisfied with the gravelly lands to the south. "The flat land, the many stones, the bush and woods, the excessive rainfall and the water on the land, began to provide some food for thought, and people began to look about for another place [to move to]."<sup>24</sup> The settlers were particularly dissatisfied because they wanted to go in for grain farming, but this was impossible on the flooded land and on the variable soils. No farmers appear to have attempted to start specialized livestock raising at this time, possibly because of lack of funds. Consequently, in 1878 they began to move to the eastern part of the West Reserve, which was still empty.<sup>25</sup> The migration was accelerated in 1879 and continued for another three years. By 1880 about 300 out of the 700 families in the Reserve had gone to live across the Red River.<sup>26</sup>

The head of the family went in advance, scouted out the land, and selected a new homestead. Moving was quite a task. Since there were limited stands of trees in the eastern part of the West Reserve, most families dismantled their houses, transported the timber to the new site, and re-erected them.

It is impossible to ascertain the exact areas from which the Mennonites moved, but in the main they left the low areas of townships 7-4 and 7-5, and the stony lands in townships 6-5 and 5-5. Very little evidence of their settlement facilities was left on the landscape. Some farmers had had five successive crop failures, and had broken little land. Whole villages were dismantled, and since land could not be occupied until large scale drainage projects were introduced, it soon reverted to its pre-settlement condition.

Table 4 shows that the agricultural development of the East Reserve was definitely related to the land capability of the different townships (See Figure 4). The decrease from 9,214 to 8,645 acres cultivated in the three years after 1878 can only be the result of the migration to the West Reserve. The acreage cultivated within each township varied with the nature of the terrain, the age of the settlements and the capital available. Size of family was sometimes a factor, but some of the largest cultivated fields were owned by farmers with few children, whereas a few large families had very little acreage under cultivation.<sup>27</sup> Capital was probably the most important consideration because oxen or horses were required to break the sod, and many farmers had to wait for an opportunity to borrow animals before they could break their land. Though the more prosperous Mennonites could hire labourers to clear and break their land quickly, very few farmers had more than 60 acres under cultivation in 1881.

The West Reserve suffered none of the vicissitudes of the East Reserve at this time and agriculture moved ahead quickly. By 1877 the farmers in this Reserve had more land improved than those of the East Reserve. There are no municipal records available to permit a detailed analysis at this time, but Table 5 shows how rapidly agriculture developed in the West Reserve in the years before the railway was built.



**Table 4**  
**Agricultural Statistics East Reserve 1881**

<u>Township</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Farm Owners</u>	Percentage of		<u>Acres</u> <u>Cultivated</u>	Percentage of	<u>acres/farm</u>	Average Size
			<u>Acres</u> <u>Occupied</u>	<u>Township</u> <u>Occupied</u>				
7-4	207	39	6880	30	901	13	23	180
7-5	666	114	19520	83	2406	12	21	140
7-6*	377	73	13120	76	1735	13	24	180
6-5	370	70	12800	55	1375	11	20	180
6-6	228	45	7680	33	923	12	20	170
5-5	514	96	15680	67	1305	8	14	160
5-6								
4-6								
Total	2362	437	75680		8645	11		175

\*Does not include the Clearsprings Settlement (Hanover Assessment Roll)

**Table 5**  
**Selected Agricultural Statistics West Reserve 1876-1883**

	Improved Land acres.	Improved Land/farm acres.	Wheat Produced bu.	Number of Horses	Oxen	Cows
1876	1500					
1877	8306	17	35058	128	1067	622
1878	10470	22	125509	362	866	732
1879	14336	20	127207	718	939	1012
1883			211743	2500	4500	

Data obtained from the Annual Reports of  
the Minister of Agriculture, *Canada:*  
*Sessional Papers, 1877-1884.*

By 1879 some of the well established villages of the southwest averaged close to 50 acres of improved land per farm, and a few farmers had over 100 acres under cultivation.<sup>28</sup> Eastwards the acreage tilled fell off considerably, but it was obviously only a matter of time before those farmers would catch up. In the north, development was somewhat sporadic because new villages were just being established in the heavier soils.

By 1883 the Mennonites of the West Reserve were producing a good surplus of grain. They used much of their crop themselves, gristing it in their mills and feeding it to their horses and other animals, but the surplus was hauled to market at Emerson. They had arrived at a stage where a railway was essential for further development.

The Mennonites left in the East Reserve after the migrations to the West Reserve, numbering about 2,300 in the early 1880's,<sup>29</sup> had to work out their agricultural salvation on land which had been rejected by an almost equal number of their fellows. It proved difficult. This was not the terrain that they had known in Russia. Further, the *Gewannflur* was both a source of strength and of weakness in pioneer areas, and here its weaknesses began to show up after the first few years. It is far more difficult to attempt innovations in a *Gewannflur* than on a homestead. It didn't take an experienced farmer to see that most of the land in the East Reserve could never be used for growing wheat on a commercial scale in a competitive market, and therefore, the land use should have changed but the *Gewann* village made this difficult. More often than not the farmers became inured to their pioneer conditions, regarded them as unavoidable, and reverted to a subsistence agriculture. (There were exceptions, however: cheese factories flourished for two decades after 1890, and a commercial grain economy developed in the northern townships after drains were constructed in the twentieth century.) Not all succumbed to the country but no Contentius or Cornies<sup>30</sup> appeared to drive them on, so that agriculture in much of the Reserve remained stagnant and backward until the 1940's.

Therefore within the first decade of settlement the two Reserves started along separate agricultural ways, and, as we shall see, the railways and the development of trading centres increased the differences between the two.

<sup>1</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, July 29, 1876.

<sup>2</sup> Gee, *Both Sides*: 129.

<sup>3</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1877, No. 8, Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Appendix 19, Report by J.W. Down on "Colonization in Manitoba", August 3, 1876: 68.

<sup>4</sup> Acton Burrows, *North Western Canada*, Winnipeg, 1880: 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1886, Appendix 6, Evidence of J.Y. Shantz before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1877, Appendix 6, Evidence of J.Y. Shantz before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 118 and 119.

<sup>7</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, December 21, 1878.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: May 19, 1877.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: October 22, 1880.

<sup>10</sup> *Statutes of Manitoba*, 43 Vict., ch. 16 (Assented to February 14, 1880.)

<sup>11</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, February 11, 1881.

<sup>12</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1877, Appendix 6, Evidence of Thomas Spence before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 87.

<sup>13</sup> This paragraph is largely based on information obtained from Messrs. P. Klassen and W. Giesbrecht, Blumenfeld, Man., in August, 1955, and from K.J.B. Reimer, Steinbach, Man., in September, 1955. Mr. Klassen's father, a blacksmith, kept a diary of sorts which contains some useful information on early implements.

<sup>14</sup> In the 1870's the Mennonites in South Russia were using seeder ploughs (*Quersaer*), but by 1880 drill ploughs were introduced for seeding. (Interview with J.J. Hildebrand, North Kildonan, Man., July, 1958.)

<sup>15</sup> Many of the pioneers' accounts in the *60-jabrig Jubiläum* contain information on early implements used in the East Reserve, and the following account is based partly on their remarks. The information on the West Reserve in this paragraph has been obtained from *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1877 to 1800, Annual Reports of the Minister of Agriculture.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with William Cohoe, Giroux, Man., September, 1955.

<sup>17</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, October 16, 1880.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix G for some early threshing records of the East Reserve.

<sup>19</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, May 19, 1877.

<sup>20</sup> *Reports of Tenant Farmers' Delegates on the Dominion of Canada as a Field for Settlement*, 1884: 76.

<sup>21</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1877, Appendix 6, Evidence of J.Y. Shantz before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 113.

<sup>22</sup> Based on pioneers' accounts in *60-jährige Jubiläum*.

<sup>23</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1876-1879, Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture.

<sup>24</sup> P.P. Epp, "Aus Meinem Erinnerungen", *Steinbach Post*, August 1, 1934.

<sup>25</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, August 17, 1878.

<sup>26</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1881, No. 12, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, Appendix 10: 57. No precise figures are available on how many Mennonites migrated but it is unlikely that more than 400 families were involved.

<sup>27</sup> Based on a study of the 1881 *Hespeler and Hanover Municipal Assessment Roll*.

<sup>28</sup> Based on a study of the *Reinlander Colony Land Register*, 1879, now in Waldheilig, Mexico.

<sup>29</sup> Estimate based on a study of the early Assessment Rolls of Hespeler and Hanover Municipalities.

<sup>30</sup> See Appendix C.



## Chapter 6

### CENTRAL PLACES TO 1892

#### Significance of the Trading Centre

In South Russia the Mennonites had no trading centres in their settlements, and therefore it was relatively easy for them to maintain an insular way of life. Urban centres are the means through which one region is linked to another, and one way of life revealed to another. Their absence in South Russia partly accounts for the inflexible character of the Mennonites within Russia; they never learned to mix readily with other people. The introduction of trading centres into their communities in Manitoba marked the real break from the Mennonite life in South Russia, and these centres ultimately served as the bridgeheads for the assimilation of the Mennonites into prairie society.

Winnipeg played a role that was comparable to that of large urban centres of South Russia such as Ekaterinaslaw and Taganrog that existed close to the Mennonite settlements, yet were not a part of them. The influence of such centres was attenuated by distance, and did not affect Mennonite life directly. Much more important than Winnipeg, in Manitoba, were the outposts of the city, the small trading centres established right in the Reserves in the midst of the Mennonites. These centres were to have a far stronger effect in the West Reserve than in the East, because in the West Reserve the trading centres were railway-based and the entrepreneurs were non-Mennonites. In the East Reserve the impact of the trading centres was not nearly as great, because the one railway-based centre did not become a dominant one. Here, a Mennonite trading centre soon assumed the leading role, and naturally it was an integral part of the Mennonite community.

The difference in this regard between the Reserves can be attributed to the different land uses prevailing in the two Reserves: the West Reserve required railway-based grain depots, the East did not. Furthermore, in the West Reserve many conservative Mennonites accepted the trading centres with ill grace, just as they had greeted municipal government, but in the East Reserve the Mennonites gradually adopted the trading centre until they made it on their own, just as they had unobtrusively absorbed the municipal government.

To understand the settlement geography of the Reserves it is necessary to study the establishment and growth of the trading centres, not only because they are settlement forms in their own right, but also because they are a necessary component in a commercial agricultural economy and thus are related to the rural landscape.

#### Winnipeg and Emerson as Mennonite Trading Centres

Winnipeg was the first trading centre for the Mennonites of the East Reserve. Almost all of the early outfitting was done in Winnipeg (Chapter 3) but Winnipeg merchants did not get much trade from the Mennonites once they had bought their basic supplies.<sup>1</sup> Even though direct retail trade with the Mennonites died away, and revived only temporarily when a boat load of immigrants arrived or

when supplies were obtained for the winter, Winnipeg remained the market centre for all their agricultural produce, and, of course, once stores were established in the Reserve, it became the wholesale centre as well. Also, until at least 1877, the Mennonites had their gristing done in Winnipeg.<sup>2</sup> Not until 1877 did the Mennonites have sufficient produce to be able to bring some to Winnipeg. Then Winnipeggers became quite familiar with the Mennonite farmers who peddled their butter, eggs, meats, and vegetables, from door to door, or sold it at the market place, where in 1877 they were leasing about one half of the stalls.<sup>3</sup>

Cattle were driven to the Winnipeg market, grain in bags was brought there in wagons. The Winnipeg newspapers of the 1870's are full of the comings and goings of the Mennonites, especially since they were so distinctive in their somber dress, but after 1880, as Winnipeg grew, they were not so conspicuous any longer, and attention too was focused on other parts of Manitoba, so that they were practically ignored by the newspapers. This does not mean that the Mennonites from the East Reserve ceased going to Winnipeg. Far from it. The city always remained their main market centre. As well as bringing produce to market, they occasionally did some shopping, but not very much was purchased because by the middle 1880's the stores on the East Reserve were able to supply most of the Mennonites' simple requirements.

Emerson was the first trading centre to serve the Mennonites of the West Reserve (Figure 16). It had been laid out in 1874 by two American promoters, just north of the boundary on the east bank of the Red River, in the expectation that a proposed railway from St. Paul to Winnipeg would pass there. Four years later the railway reached the site, and before the railway network was extended west from Winnipeg, Emerson was in a very advantageous position to serve South Central Manitoba via wagon trail. It grew rapidly, increasing in population from 100 in 1875 to 2,500 in 1881.

Many stores were built in Emerson in the 1870's. J.H. Ashdown, the Winnipeg "merchant prince", was not sure whether Winnipeg or Emerson would ultimately be the dominant centre, and on his instructions, Enoch Winkler, an Ontario German whose family was to play an important role in the development of the Reserve, established a store in Emerson in September 1875.<sup>4</sup> This became known as the "Mennonite Store", and most of the Mennonites outfitted extensively there.

After a time it became evident that the barrier of the Red River reduced some of Emerson's effectiveness for trade to the west, so the Hudson's Bay Co. laid out a townsite, West Lynne, in July 1879, in order to capture some of the western trade.<sup>5</sup> Emerson and West Lynne were the grain and livestock marketing centres for South Central Manitoba, and all the Mennonites delivered their produce to them, or to St. Vincent, an American village just across the boundary from Emerson.<sup>6</sup> But after trading centres were established in the Pembina Mountain Country the trade of the neighbouring Mennonites began to go to these new places.

### Roads

The traffic with Winnipeg and with Emerson necessitated the construction of the first roads in each Reserve. They were not well built but unlike many pioneer trails which just went anywhere across country, these roads were fairly well de-

fined. In the East Reserve they generally followed the beach ridges which formed admirable raised road beds across low areas, and in the West Reserve the main trail was clearly marked with posts.

The Mennonites had been shown the route of the best trail from Winnipeg to the East Reserve by Roger Goulet, the surveyor who had helped the Mennonites locate their Reserve in 1874. There was little choice of where to put the road:

...the road follows the existing trail the one Goulet had shown the Mennonites very closely from Oak Island to Kronsthal, there, being in fact no other place to put it; as, with the exception of the narrow ridge of slightly elevated ground, some two chains wide, the rest of the country may be described as wholly marsh.<sup>7</sup>

This road is shown in Figure 16. It became one of the main routes to Winnipeg. Work on it was begun in 1874-75, and more was done every year following. Corduroy was laid, bridges were built, and drains were dug, but it still remained a difficult thoroughfare. Though the road has been completely abandoned for many years, it is still visible in places (Plate 10-1 & 2).

In the middle 1880's the Manitoba government was becoming perturbed about the poor conditions of the roads on the prairie following the wet years of 1876-1882. Since their poor condition was beginning to retard settlement the government adopted the policy of draining the land, and leaving it to the municipalities to build the roads by statute labour on the road allowances. This did not prove very successful because the government did not have enough money to construct satisfactory drains, and statute labour proved to be too inefficient to build adequate roads.

The East Reserve Mennonites, therefore, went about building their roads in their own way, and right up to 1900 did not build them on the road allowances, but followed the high ridges. Fortunately these provided a quite adequate "trunk" system linking the various parts of the Reserve (Figure 16).<sup>8</sup>

One of the main roads used was the "Ridge Road" on the beach leading from Steinbach to Grunthal and Bergfeld. This is a very well formed gravel beach, in some places up to 10 feet above the surrounding country side, and forms a perfectly dry, smooth road bed (Plate 10-2 & 3). A number of villages were built on it or close to it. At Schoensee the ridge road connected with what was called the "Winnipeg Road", the most direct route to Winnipeg for the Mennonites living in Range 5 (Figure 16). This road was not on a beach in township 6-5, but was built over fairly well drained stony soil which presented no difficulties in road building, and it is still visible through some of the back pastures along its route. North of Gruenfeld it entered the low area of township 7-5; here travelling was frequently difficult because the Mennonites did not have the machinery to build an adequate grade, and this trail was sometimes impassable. A road very similar to the one connecting Schoensee and Gruenfeld ran between Gruenfeld and Steinbach.

Oak Island was the junction where various trails met and continued along a single road to Winnipeg. The Kronsthal road has been mentioned and in addition there was a southern detour of the Dawson Road (Figure 16). By the early 1880's there was yet another trail from the Reserve to Oak Island, coming from Blumenort.<sup>9</sup> The trunk system was completed by a six mile trail connecting Steinbach with Blumenort. This system of roads was to remain practically unchanged until 1920,



Figure 16

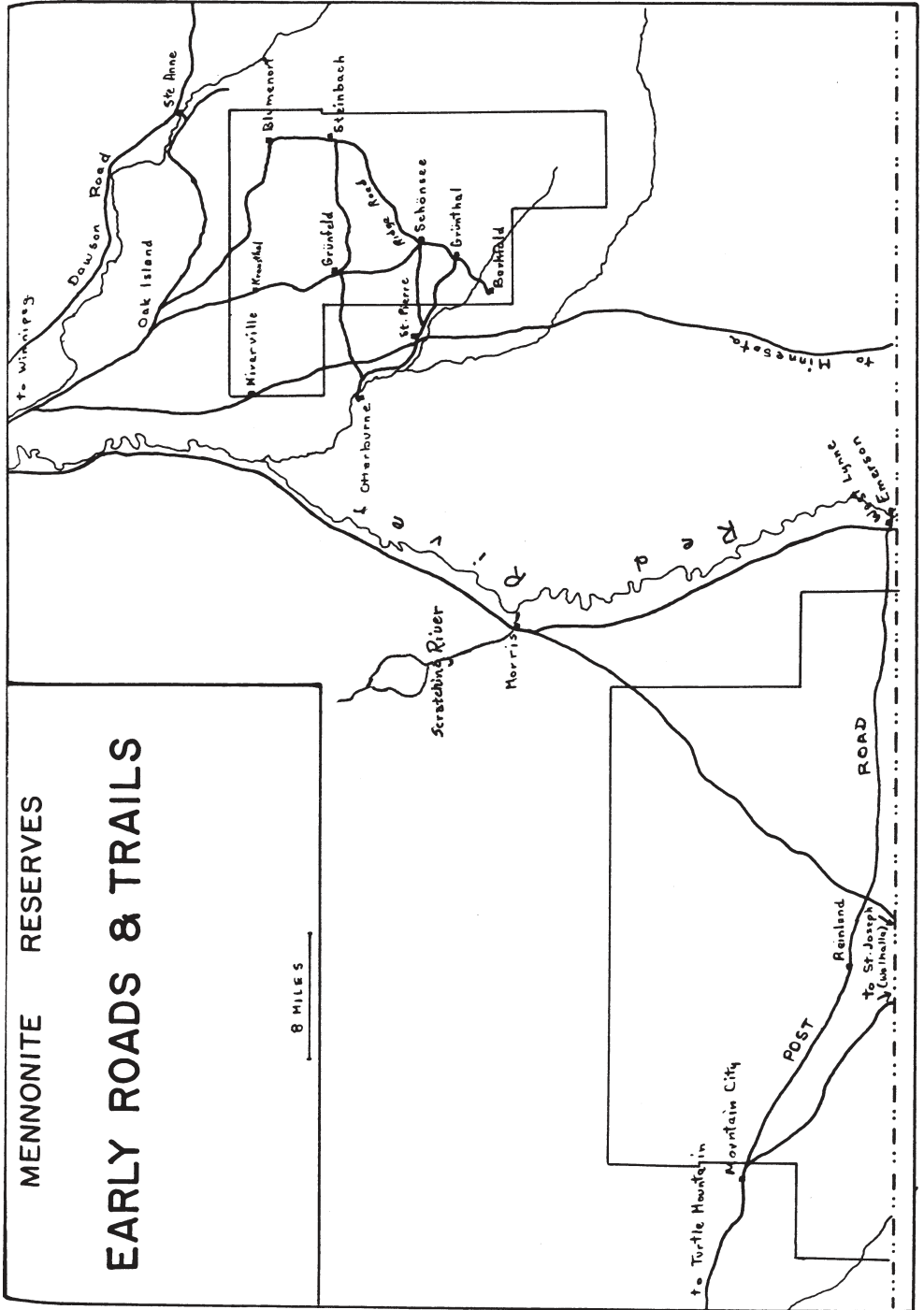


PLATE 10



*1. Old Mennonite road intersecting section road in 31-7-5E. This road was once the main road to Winnipeg from the East Reserve.*



*2. Traces of an old Mennonite trail in 33-7-5E. Depression across the pasture marks the ditch of the former trail. Again this road is heading across country to Winnipeg.*



*3. Ridge Road passing through grain fields in 2-6-5E. Here the beach gravels are being excavated. Trees flank the beach most of the way, but the top of the beach has usually been cleared and is cultivated.*



*4. Ditch being cleaned – 1 1/2 miles north of New Bothwell. Dirt is dumped on farmer's land to form a levee. A road is on the spoil bank at the left.*

when the first serious roadbuilding was begun on the road allowances. Some parts of this old trunk road system were still in use in 1955, particularly the Ridge Road, but by 1959 even it was abandoned.

Even with these relatively good roads transportation was slow. A trip to Winnipeg with oxen took three days. It was faster with horses, but if some produce was taken to market in a wagon it still took a full day to get there, and another day to come back. This was indeed slow, but it must be remembered that the Mennonites only went to Winnipeg on business, which meant they travelled in wagons, not in light fast buggies. Buggies, of course, were used in visiting friends in the different villages of the Reserve, but generally they were too expensive until the 1890's, for wide distribution.

In the West Reserve the same complex road system did not develop because by 1883 railways were operating in the area so that instead of a network of trunk roads only short market roads to the nearest railway centres were required. However, before the railways were built there was one main trunk road running approximately east-west through the Reserve carrying traffic to Emerson (Figure 16). This road was named the "Post Road" after the wooden poles, about 14 feet high and 75 feet apart, that were used to mark the trail in winter. This practice was common in the early days in Manitoba, and laws were even passed punishing anyone caught damaging the markers. The Post Road was a portion of one of Manitoba's most famous early trails leading westward from Emerson to the Turtle Mountain Country. Hundreds of settlers came down this trail to their homesteads in Southwestern Manitoba. Settlers' effects, lumber, pianos, mill machinery and even small houses were teamed along the trail. And of course there were frequent shipments of hardware and foodstuffs, which were delivered to the storekeepers established along the route. The average freight load was between one and two tons, and the maximum distance covered by a team in a day was about thirty miles. Emerson controlled the trade of all southwestern Manitoba through this route, and the buildings erected in Emerson at this time testify to the volume of the trade. Large, long three storey brick business houses were built on the main street (Plate 36-1), and many warehouses, roughly built of lumber, sheltered the merchandise which was to be sent west. The Emerson and West Lynne businessmen were well aware of the value of the Post Road to them, and the West Lynne newspaper sometimes published editorials pleading with the government to improve the road.<sup>10</sup>

### **Service Centres in the Reserves**

The first attempt to make local services available to the farmers of the East Reserve was made in 1876, when four grist mills were erected. Until then the Mennonites had to obtain flour from Winnipeg at rather exorbitant prices. Three small windmills were obtained in 1876 from the Red River Settlement, dismantled, and reassembled in the Reserve.<sup>11</sup> They were setup in the villages of Gruenfeld, Tannenau, and Eigenhof. That same year a steam mill was built in the village of Reinfeld. It was a 24 x 26 feet, 2 1/2 storey structure, and had one run of stones, powered by a 12 H.P. engine. The approximate cost was \$4,000.00.<sup>12</sup> In its first year it ground 1,700 bu.<sup>13</sup> None of these mills proved too successful. The Reinfeld mill proved to be in a poor location, because shortly after it was built the farmers in the

vicinity began to move to the West Reserve, and it lost much of its trade. In the 1890's it ended up as a feed mill in Steinbach. The windmills were not even this successful, because none of them lasted longer than a couple of years, and they all disappeared without a trace. None of the mills could meet the competition of the properly constructed and properly operated steam mill that was built in Steinbach in 1880.<sup>14</sup> A saw mill was connected with this enterprise, but the portable mills operated in the woods were of greater significance, so that saw milling was of little importance in the villages.

The next step in the development of services in the Reserve was the establishment of stores.<sup>15</sup> Erdman Penner, an aggressive young Mennonite who had spent a year clerking in a store in Winnipeg, built the Reserve's first store in 1876 at Tannenau. He was in partnership with a German-Canadian from Ontario named Otto Schultz. It is significant that a non-Mennonite was connected with this enterprise, because it points up the fact that Mennonites, as a rule, were not inclined to go into trade. This was only a small shop but it proved a great convenience to the settlers, supplying them with staples like coal oil, hardware, cloth, and a few groceries. Mennonites still continued to shop in Winnipeg, and at the Hudson's Bay Store at Ste. Anne, which drew considerable trade from the northeastern part of the Reserve. The second store in the Reserve was established in 1877 at Steinbach. It was not founded through the enterprise of the Mennonite proprietor but through the insistence of a Winnipeg wholesaler who persuaded the man to retail goods for him in Steinbach. The stimulus thus came from the outside, even though it was a Mennonite store. Mennonites still had to become acquainted with the Western scheme of things, where the pioneer storekeeper accompanied the farmer in the settlement process. But it didn't take the Mennonites long to learn, and some storekeepers turned out to be astute businessmen. Soon a number of villages had stores. Usually they were operated by farmers as sideline enterprises for the convenience of themselves and their neighbours: often to enable the community to buy supplies at wholesale prices. None of these stores was particularly impressive, and at the end of the 1870's no one central trading place had been established in any of the farm villages of the East Reserve.

Late in 1878 the first railway line in Manitoba, the Pembina Branch of the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed. William Hespeler, who was always prepared to take part in what looked like a profitable venture, acquired the townsite of Niverville the same year. Before winter he had a gridiron street plan prepared and had commenced to promote Niverville as the future Mennonite trading centre. At first glance this appears plausible enough, and one might think Hespeler had made a sound investment. Niverville was located on the railway, and the East Reserve Mennonites needed a nearby railway supply centre. Since the railway only touches the Reserve for six miles there was obviously room for only one railway townsite in the Reserve. Hespeler's prestige with the Mennonites was another great advantage for Niverville. Ever since his first visit to Russia he had continued to act as the liaison man for the Mennonite group in any transactions they might have with government officials, and in a private capacity he acted as a business agent for individual Mennonites.

So Niverville was optimistically launched. The columns of the *Free Press* con-

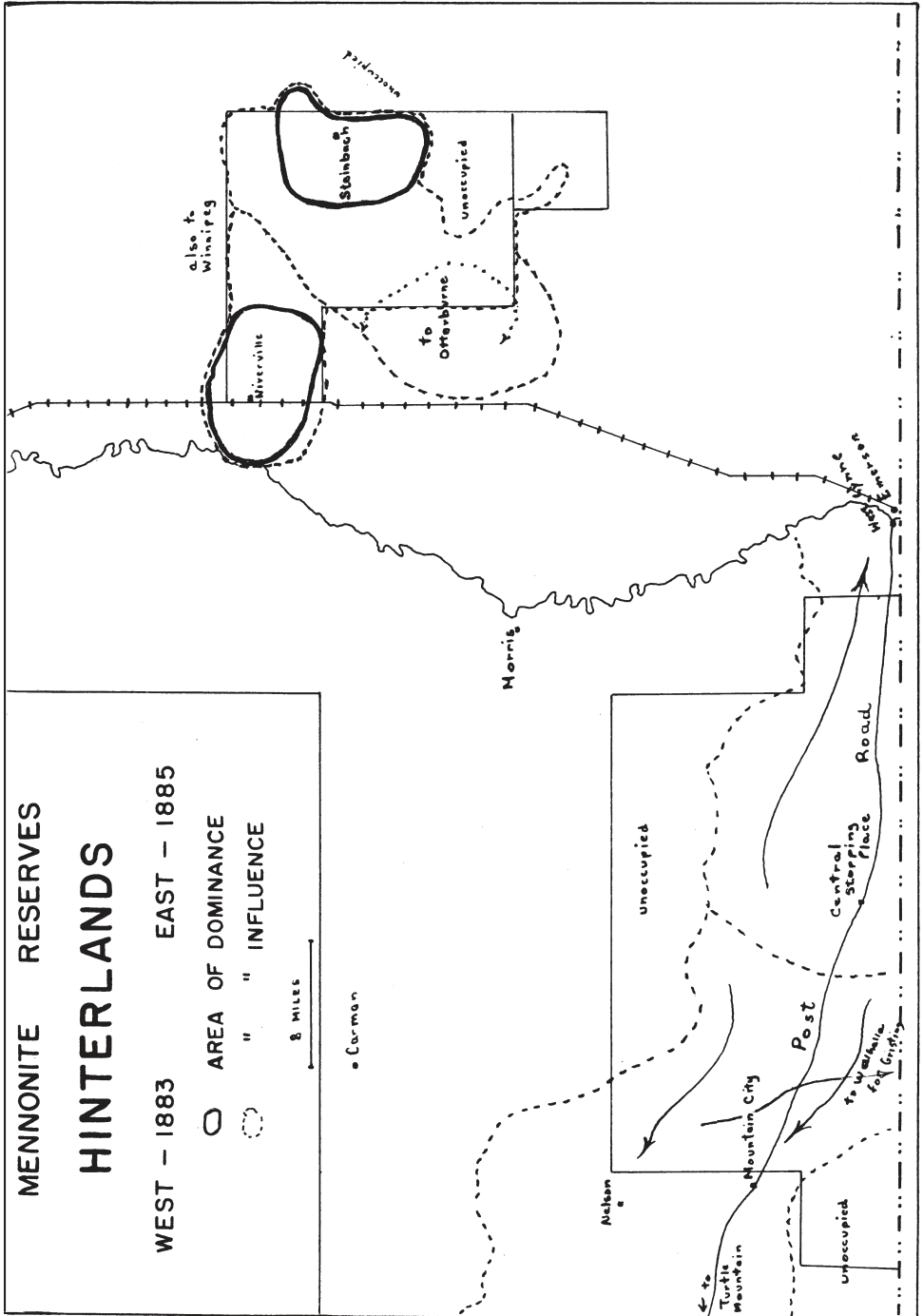
tain frequent lurid accounts, probably “planted”, of the great business prospects that existed in Niverville in 1878 and 1879. One correspondent wrote that: “Niverville will be the point towards which the business of the Mennonite settlement will gravitate,” and goes on to say that the nucleus of an important town is forming: “two general stores are established, the lumber for a grain elevator is being secured, and a hotel, flax mill, grist mill, and a linseed oil mill are to be added shortly.”<sup>16</sup> The last three of these businesses never materialized, but the hotel and the elevator were built, and a store was established by Erdman Penner, who moved to Niverville from Tannenau. The elevator is quite a noteworthy structure and has a place in the history of the West. It was the first elevator constructed in Western Canada, and was built by Hespeler, who never let any grass grow under his feet. Mennonite farmers hauled its timbers, and it was erected in 1878 according to the round design common in Minnesota and other North Central states at that time. Mennonites were delivering grain to its doors by the fall of 1879.<sup>17</sup>

Eventually Niverville managed to secure a fair amount of trade, but it was largely dependent on its *umland*,<sup>18</sup> which consisted of an Anglo-Saxon district to the west, and a few nearby Mennonite farms to the east. It did not develop into the large, dominant trading centre that its promoter had envisaged, for various reasons. The marshy, low lying area to the east was not the least of these. In the first place it drove most of the farmers out of Niverville’s hinterland into the West Reserve during the unusually wet years of 1878-82. Also it was a barrier between Niverville and the main Mennonite settlements. To add to the problem the beaches and off-shore bars, which provided the only trails through the marsh, lie north-south, and led traffic past Niverville towards roads leading to Winnipeg. Then too, strange as it may seem for horse and buggy days, Niverville was really too close to Winnipeg to develop properly. Otherwise it might have been able to overcome its other disadvantages. Mennonites were used to bringing their products to Winnipeg, had established contacts there, and, what was most important, the Winnipeg market was larger and offered better prices. Niverville did not grow until land drainage was commenced after 1900, and it could depend on larger and steadier wheat deliveries. During the years of stagnation another place, Steinbach, developed into the dominant centre in the Reserve.

Steinbach does not appear to have a particularly advantageous situation for a trading centre. It is not located in the midst of the good agricultural land of township 7-6, and it was cut off by the Clearsprings settlement from the Mennonites living in the one good farming area to the north and northeast. There were hardly any farmers south of Steinbach in the 1880’s, and there was no settlement to the east; later the few people who did settle there were French rather than Mennonite. Steinbach is at the extreme eastern boundary of the Reserve, not on the way to Winnipeg; and it was settled by a relatively poor group of Mennonites with few economic resources. Why then did a place with so few advantages develop?

Steinbach’s rapid rise to a pre-eminent position among the Mennonite villages can only be explained, especially in the formative years, by the presence there of a number of ambitious, hardworking men. Though poor, they made an attempt to start such businesses as a store, a blacksmith shop, and a grist mill and when they had proved themselves capable of supplying the local market, they pressed on to

Figure 17



expand their establishments, introduce new ones, and always bring in more trade. Soon there was no doubt that Steinbach was the one centre where all the services required by the Mennonites could be obtained. It was this concerted effort on the part of a few men, rather than the isolated endeavours of a single individual that gave Steinbach its initial impetus.

Steinbach had some special problems. Since it was not on a railway all the supplies had to be teamed in. Most were brought in from Otterburne by using the Ridge Road, which was also one of the main market roads into Steinbach.<sup>19</sup> Niverville station was rarely used because of the poor road connections. Steinbach's trading area in 1883 is shown in Figure 17,<sup>20</sup> and it corresponds fairly well with the distribution of population in the Reserve.

By the late 1890's Steinbach had the appearance of a small industrial centre. It had a five storey flour mill, a large machine shop, a tannery, and two saw mills.<sup>21</sup> All the basic farm services which could be obtained in the average Western trade centre were also available in Steinbach, but Steinbach did not have any auxiliary services, such as a bank, hotel, law office, or drug store, which many trade centres possessed. Steinbach was a trading centre developed solely by sober Mennonite farmers turned businessmen and offered the regular services which the Mennonite farming community needed. Any others had to be obtained in Winnipeg.

It is of great importance that Steinbach and not Niverville became the dominant East Reserve centre. Niverville would have been a "Canadian" outpost, and would have undoubtedly exerted considerable influence over some of the Mennonites; it probably would also have driven the conservative Mennonites in upon themselves, as happened in the West Reserve, where two fundamentally different worlds lived side by side – that of the *Gewann* villages and that of the trading centres. Steinbach, on the other hand, was part and parcel of the Reserve and developed with it.

Niverville and Steinbach were not the only trading centres in the East Reserve by 1882. There were some stores scattered about the Reserve, some in villages, others at cross roads, that supplied the immediate needs of the farmers.

Grunthal was the only village, besides Steinbach, which developed into a trading centre. A store and a steam driven feed mill were established there in 1892.<sup>22</sup> Grunthal was sufficiently far removed from both Steinbach and Niverville that it was able to carve out its own trading area among the "bush farmers" in that marginal land.

The development of the trading centres in the West Reserve took a different course than in the East Reserve. Nelson, the first centre near the western part of the West Reserve (Figure 17), owed its existence to a grist mill and a saw mill built in 1877 by an enterprising farmer. A store was erected the next year, and after that the village grew very rapidly, since it immediately became the regional centre of the Pembina Mountain Country. Nelson had a population of over 400 by 1882, the year in which it was incorporated.<sup>23</sup> In 1879 another trading centre, Mountain City, was established eight miles south of Nelson on the Post Road (Figure 17), with a grist mill and a saw mill again the nucleus. Mennonites obtained supplies and had wheat gristed at both places.

Few services or trading establishments appeared in the Mennonite villages. A



grist mill and a saw mill were erected in Blumenort in 1877.<sup>24</sup> Two small stores were established in 1879, one in Reinland in the western townships, and one in Neuanlage in the eastern townships (Figure 8). The latter was built by Erdman Penner and Otto Schulz who followed the Bergthal migrants from the East to the West Reserve, though retaining their interest in the Niverville store. Other villages subsequently acquired small shops, but not one village became a trading centre.

The absence of trading centres in what was the most densely settled area of rural Manitoba has no parallel in the non-Mennonite settlements, where trading centres were invariably established at the same time as the land was occupied by farmers. Trading centres did not immediately develop among the Mennonites because their Russian heritage was still too strong; they had not developed a strong business group in Russia by the 1870's. In Russia the Mennonites had depended on Jewish peddlers and businessmen for their outside needs, and in the West Reserve they relied at first on non-Mennonites entrepreneurs in Emerson, Nelson and Mountain City. The railway was instrumental in bringing about a change in this almost complete divorce between the Mennonite settlements and the trading centres.

The Mennonites in the West Reserve looked with mixed feelings on the coming of the railway. Some were apprehensive about its effect on their settlements, others welcomed it (in 1880 a group had even petitioned the Manitoba government for a railway).<sup>25</sup> But when the rails were finally laid, it was through no effort on the part of the Mennonites, but through the work of railway promoters in the urban centres who hoped to tap the agricultural wealth of the Reserve and the lands beyond.

Both Emerson and Winnipeg interests applied for charters to build railways through the Reserve. A railway was a life and death matter for Emerson, because its carefully fostered trade with the West would be completely eliminated if Winnipeg established rail connections with southwestern Manitoba and it did not. Emerson, unfortunately for it, was caught in the early Dominion railway legislation, which gave the C.P.R. a monopoly in Western Canada on all the territory south of its main line, and as a result every application from Emerson for a railway charter was disallowed by the Dominion government. Winnipeg secured the much sought trade through the South Western and Pembina Branch of the C.P.R. that was begun in 1881. The South Western went from Winnipeg to the town site of Hespeler (now Gretna) in township 5-1-1W, and the Pembina Mountain Branch as built westward to the Escarpment from a point 11 1/2 miles north of the boundary (See Figure 21 ). Regular freight and passenger service commenced on December 1, 1882.<sup>26</sup>

Many trading villages in South Central Manitoba had been established before the railway was built, something quite unusual in the West. They were severely affected by the new means of communication because the C.P.R. generally avoided established town sites, in order to benefit from the sale of lots on new sites located on the railway. For example, the railway passed between Nelson and Mountain City. Eventually both sites had to be abandoned, and the buildings were towed to a new townsite on the rail line.

Emerson lost its trade to Winnipeg, but not without an interesting struggle. In 1883 the town contracted with the C.P.R. to build a bridge across the Red, if the



C.P.R. would build an 18 mile loop between Emerson and Pembina Junction, which would regain for Emerson her trading hinterland.<sup>27</sup> The C.P.R. finished the loop line, but the bridge was not completed in the stipulated time, so although the tracks had been laid, the C.P.R. refused to operate the line. Emerson finally gave up its ambitious plans for rivaling Winnipeg after a series of set backs of this kind, and in 1884 the town was declared bankrupt.<sup>28</sup>

As well as eliminating and ruining well established centres the railway also produced new ones, which were to have a profound effect on the development of the Reserve. Two new trading centres Morden and Gretna appeared suddenly and almost fully formed as soon as the railway decided on the town sites; outside businessmen<sup>29</sup> were taking advantage of the latent need for central places in the Reserve. Morden and Gretna differed from Steinbach, which grew slowly and was developed by the Mennonites themselves.

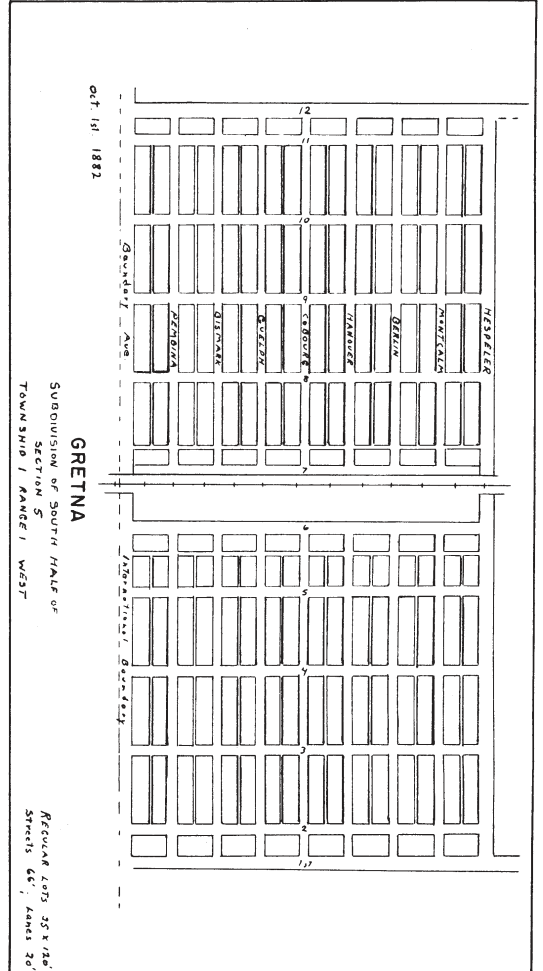
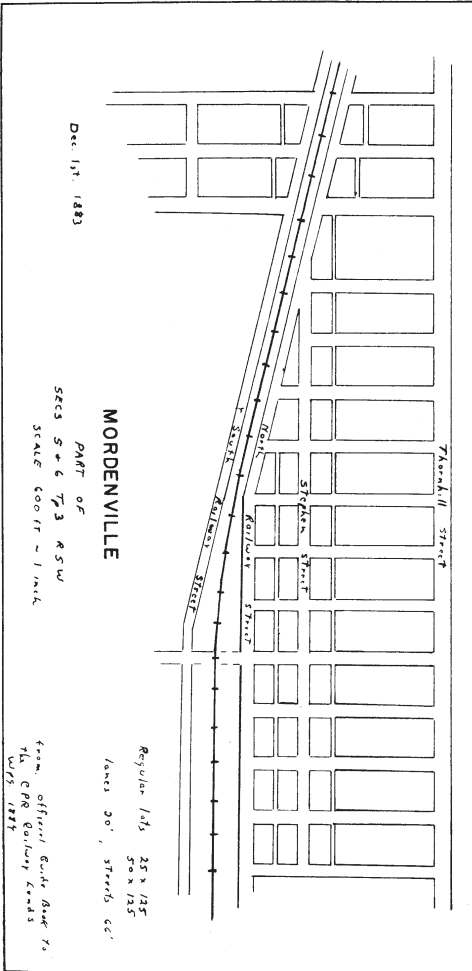
The town site of Morden was laid out in 1883 where the Pembina Branch line crosses Dead Horse Creek (Figure 19). It was surveyed into the regular gridiron pattern (Figure 18) with the plan taking shape along the railway's right of way. The fact that the main business street in C.P.R. towns generally runs parallel to the rail line is not a mere accident. Winkler was laid out by a C.P.R. surveyor in 1892, and the co-promoter, Mr. Valentine Winkler, attempted to have him include a town square with space for markets and recreation facilities, but the C.P.R. refused to allow this on the grounds that all the business firms in the town should be on the street facing the railway.<sup>30</sup>

Morden's first store, built by Penner and Schultz of Tannenau, Niverville and Neuanlage started operating in 1883, and catered to the Mennonite trade. Morden grew very rapidly because business establishments from Mountain City and Nelson were moved to the town, and in 1884, when it had two elevators and a flour mill was being built, its trade was reported to be that of an old flourishing settlement.<sup>31</sup> Nelson put up a stout struggle for a time and even obtained a charter in 1884 to build a railway to Morden, but this did not materialize and throughout 1884 and 1885 buildings were moved from Nelson to Morden.<sup>32</sup> Most of the Morden merchants were Anglo-Saxons serving the farmers of the Pembina Mountain Country, so that Morden was essentially an Anglo-Saxon trading centre, though Mennonites were very welcome and very frequent customers.

Gretna was established in 1883 where the South Western line crossed the Boundary, and it also was laid out in the usual gridiron pattern (Figure 18). Since it did not have any existing centres to draw upon it grew more slowly than Morden, and did not have the same variety of services to offer, although it maintained all the essential ones. Gretna was situated in a purely Mennonite area, so that most of the businessmen who settled here were German Lutherans and Catholics who could converse with the Mennonites.

The business streets of Morden and Gretna, in common with those of all the early small prairie centres, were not attractive. In the pioneer years there was no fully built up business street facing the railway. Instead there might be a large store, followed by a vacant lot, and then a livery stable, with perhaps a small harness shop next to it, and so on down the street. All the false fronts were grotesquely visible from the sides. Unpainted buildings of all shapes and sizes, frequently of ramshackle construction, straggled along the business street. A few buildings were

Figure 18



sheathed with "tin", and horse dung was piled up in the street, so that the whole picture was most unpleasant, though it was certainly never intended to be pretentious. The full intention in the stores, for example, was to keep the merchandise on the shelves moving, and there was an amazing turn-over of goods in these unpretentious business houses. Fortunately these towns were cleaned up gradually. Fires in both Morden and Gretna wiped out the early ramshackle buildings, which were replaced by more substantial structures; both Morden and Gretna eventually managed to achieve fairly attractive business streets. Steinbach by contrast still had the appearance of an agricultural village.

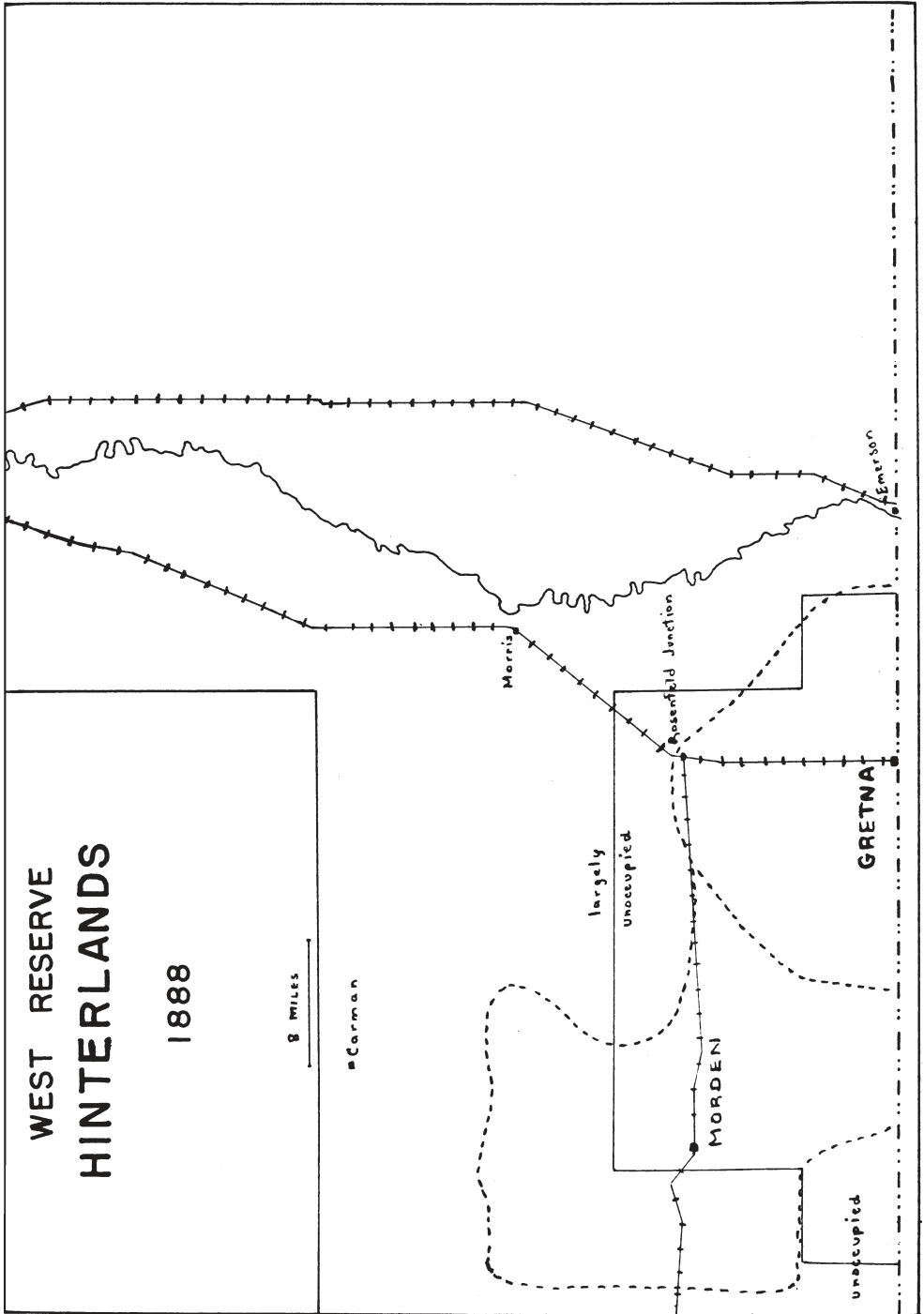
It is difficult to get a completely accurate picture of the hinterlands of the two centres, but an approximate delimitation for 1888 has been attempted, based on interviews with oldtimers and comments in the newspapers (Figure 19). Both hinterlands were at their greatest extent at this time. Gretna's was restricted to the eastern part of the Reserve, but Morden's extended well to the north, since the Northern Pacific line from Morris to Brandon was not built until 1889. Morden was probably the largest agricultural supply and grain marketing centre, aside from Winnipeg, in South Central Manitoba at this time.

Gretna remained a small centre of less than 400 people right until 1900, but the citizens of Morden were not satisfied in allowing their town to remain only a small trading centre, and it soon became one of Manitoba's outstanding towns. A Board of Trade was established in 1890 to look after the merchants' interests.<sup>33</sup> Civic needs were not neglected; electric lights were introduced in 1891,<sup>34</sup> and a hospital opened in 1892. The buildings in the town which were all of frame until 1889, improved greatly when the granite erratics found on the beaches and wave washed terraces of the Escarpment began to be used as building stones. The masons squared the boulders roughly, and out up substantial structures that added much to the appearance of the town (Plate 18-4). Attempts at establishing small industries were not successful before 1890, and the whole town remained dependent on agriculture. Everyone was aware of the close ties of town and country. The newspapers contained articles on new machinery, new agricultural methods, and always had a running commentary on the crop situation and on grain prices.

As grain growing progressed in the Reserve, and as settlement moved north into the heavier clay soils, it became clear that a new trading centre was needed where the hinterlands of Morden and Gretna met (Figure 19), so in 1888 the townsite of Plum Coulee was laid out. An elevator was erected the next year, and Morden and Gretna businessmen took advantage of this new site by opening branch stores. Within three years of its founding Plum Coulee even had a butcher shop and a hotel besides the usual services, and in the fourth year of its existence a flour mill and a liquor store were added.<sup>35</sup> A tow factory for processing flax straw was opened in 1891,<sup>36</sup> but this attempt at rural industry failed because the Mennonites persisted in growing wheat. Plum Coulee, however, did rise rapidly into an important trading centre because the lands to the north were being developed; it did not attract any substantial trade from the Gretna and Morden hinterlands except some from the district immediately south of it.

Rosenfeld, at the junction of the Pembina Branch and the Gretna Branch of the C.P.R., had been a telegraph station since the building of the railway, but it did not

Figure 19



develop into a trading centre until the early 1890's. Before then the land was simply too wet for farming, and even in the 1890's settlement was sparse.<sup>37</sup> Consequently development lagged behind Plum Coulee, and for the next decade Rosenfeld consisted of a flat warehouse, a general store, and a lumber yard besides a few homes.

At this stage in the development of the Reserve the trading centres were still run by non-Mennonites, but a few of the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* villages supplemented the larger centres by maintaining flour and feed services. A large, well-equipped, four-storey, steam roller mill was operated in Rosengart for many years after 1891.<sup>38</sup> European style windmills, used for grinding feed, were built at Blumenort, Neuhorst and Burwalde in the 1890's.

Morden, Gretna and Plum Coulee had a great impact on the settlement geography of the West Reserve because they were the first trading ventures with which the West Reserve Mennonites were intimately acquainted. The rectangular survey was the first unfamiliar feature that confronted the Mennonites in Manitoba, but they largely managed to avoid its confines, as we have seen, whenever they desired. Yet the rectangular survey system, holding out the temptation of the individual homestead to each Mennonite, was to prove a very strong disruptive force in the Mennonite settlement pattern. The influence of the trading centre was a force that hastened the dissolution of the Mennonite settlement pattern in the West Reserve. Homesteads made it possible for a Mennonite to operate a farm away from the *Gewannfluren*; trading centres enabled him to survive on his new location. The townspeople recognized those Mennonites who had broken from the villages as emancipated individuals and as progressive farmers, and made them feel welcome in the towns. In South Russia there had been no such convenient alternative society to which a farmer could turn even if he had been able to break away from the nucleated settlement. Hence the trading centres were to be instrumental in breaking up Mennonite solidarity, and in doing so they were the agents that introduced the lively prairie society to the Mennonites. The conservative Mennonites recognized this, and bitterly opposed the influence of the trading centres, shunning them as much as possible, and declaring them off limits for the younger generation. They tried to treat the new towns as if they were not part of the Reserve, and regarded them as business places, much as they had looked upon the Russian centres. Thus the trading centres confirmed the conservative Mennonites in their isolation, but performed their usual function in the prairies for the Mennonites who moved on the homesteads. This divided attitude has remained to this day.

In the East Reserve trading centres did not play a similar role. Steinbach was both a Mennonite trading centre and an agricultural village until 1910; this seems to indicate that it was the outside society they represented that made the trading centres of the West Reserve destructive forces, not their trading function alone. Near Niverville it was true there were no agricultural villages, but this was largely because of the poorly drained land in the area which had forced the people from the district in the years from 1878 to 1882, and the existence of Niverville had nothing to do with the change.

- <sup>1</sup> A. Begg and W.R. Nursey, *Ten Years in Winnipeg*, Winnipeg, 1879: 115.
- <sup>2</sup> Alexander Begg, *Practical Hand-Book and Guide to Manitoba*, Toronto, 1877: 94.
- <sup>3</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, December 4, 1877.
- <sup>4</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, September 11, 1875.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid*: January 24, 1880.
- <sup>6</sup> *West Lynne Southern Manitoba Times*, October 30, 1880.
- <sup>7</sup> *Manitoba: Sessional Papers*, 1883, Annual Report of the Department of Public Works, L.P. Gauvreau, Report on Roads Survey: 16.
- <sup>8</sup> There is a map of the early Mennonite trails in *Gedenkfeier*, 1949: 152. Many of the older maps of the province show these trails and they are even indicated on the Emerson sheet of the 1: 190,080 series.
- <sup>9</sup> *Manitoba: Sessional Papers*, 1886, Annual Report of the Department of Public Works, D.J. O'Keefe, Report on Roads Survey: 34.
- <sup>10</sup> *West Lynne Southern Manitoba Times*, June 10, 1881.
- <sup>11</sup> *60-jabrigje Jubiläum*: 33.
- <sup>12</sup> A. Begg, *Practical Handbook*: 94.
- <sup>13</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1877, J.Y. Shantz, Evidence before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 118.
- <sup>14</sup> *60-jabrigje Jubiläum*: 34.
- <sup>15</sup> The information on which this paragraph is based was obtained from interviews with J.J. Toews and K.J.B. Reimer, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955. Mr. Reimer has some manuscript material, which he made available to me, on the early history of Steinbach containing information on the stores.
- <sup>16</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press* November 30, 1878.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid*: March 6, 1880.
- <sup>18</sup> I am following Van Cleef's definitions of umland and hinterland. See Eugene Van Cleef, "Hinterland and Umland", *Geographical Review*, Vol. 31, 1941: 308-311.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview with H.W. Reimer, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955. Mr. Reimer is the son of the pioneer store keeper in Steinbach.
- <sup>20</sup> There is no exact way of determining the trade area of Steinbach at this early date, so I had to rely on interviews with older people interested in the history of the Reserve. Data on Niverville was obtained in a similar way. At this small scale boundaries are fairly accurate, because my informants had a good knowledge of where people from various parts of the Reserve did their business.
- <sup>21</sup> See *Der Nordwesten*, March 28, 1895, for a description of Steinbach at this time.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with H.W. Reimer, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955, and *Gedenkfeier*, 1949: 115.
- <sup>23</sup> *Henderson's Directory*, 1882.
- <sup>24</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, January 31, 1878.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid*: December 11, 1880.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid*: November 24, 1882.
- <sup>27</sup> *Emerson International*, October 22, 1885.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid*: June 19, 1884.

<sup>29</sup> They were not all outsiders. One Mennonite whom we have already met, Erdman Penner, was in the vanguard of the businessmen.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Howard W. Winkler, Morden Man., September, 1955. Mr. Winkler is the son of Valentine Winkler and a noted local historian.

<sup>31</sup> *Morden Manitoba News*, October 31, 1884.

<sup>32</sup> *Statutes of Manitoba*, 47 Vict., Ch. 73 (1884).

<sup>33</sup> *Morden Monitor*, February 26, 1890.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*: July 2, 1891.

<sup>35</sup> *Henderson's Directories*, 1889-1892.

<sup>36</sup> *Morden Monitor*, January 15, 1891.

<sup>37</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, July 1, July 15, 1892.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*: May 22, 1891.



## Chapter 7

### THE LAND 1881-1900

#### Agriculture

##### East Reserve

Farmers in the East Reserve found life a struggle in the 1880's and 1890's; only a few areas were progressing and fairly prosperous. Marketing the produce was difficult. Wheat was easily transported but not much could be grown in most areas, and the herds of livestock were only small. Butter could be marketed, but it was difficult to bring it to Winnipeg in good condition, and since farmer-made butter lacked uniformity in quality it was often difficult to sell at a good price. Vegetables were sold regularly in Winnipeg, or to agents in Niverville or Otterburne.<sup>1</sup> They were an especially important source of income for the people living on the gravelly soils extending from Gruenfeld to Bergfeld. Still other means of making a living were found. The Mennonites hauled straw to Winnipeg livery stables, sometimes from a distance of 50 miles. Rye straw was sold to harness makers, who used it for stuffing horse collars.

This variety of activities indicates that there was no staple agricultural product that could be readily produced over the whole Reserve and thus make economic development simple, but despite this handicap there was some advance in agriculture before 1900. By using census and assessment statistics it is possible to trace the farmers' progress in clearing the land from 1881 to 1900 (Table 6). The effect of the migration to the West Reserve is apparent, and the 1891 figures show that scant attention was paid to summer fallowing.

Table 7 depicts the agricultural development for the years 1881 to 1900 in greater detail. The following remarks are based on a study of the Hanover Assessment Rolls. A considerable number of farmers in the northern townships were commercial grain farmers by 1891, and an occasional farmer was working well over 100 acres. Agriculture was not nearly so successful in the southern area, and furthermore there was greater variation from one farmstead to another. Only the 1881 figures for the size of farms have any real significance as far as farm operations are concerned. Practically every farmer owned 160 acres, but a few had bought extra land, bringing the average size into the 170 to 180 acre range. For 1891 and 1900 there is not much correspondence between the farm size as given in the Assessment Polls and actual farming operations because investors had bought up wet lands. Only a few farmers were buying land, and then usually just for haying purposes; they had enough trouble getting their homesteads broken, let alone any additional land.

It is apparent from Table 8 that oxen maintained their importance on the farms right until 1891. But horses were almost a necessity for efficient transportation to and from trading centres, especially when trips had to be made to Winnipeg. Hence farmers switched to horses as soon as possible, even when they could not really afford them, and would even mortgage their farms in order to buy them. As could be expected, the northern townships changed from oxen to horses before the southern townships; but by 1900 horses outnumbered oxen everywhere.

**Table 6**  
**Arable Land East Reserve 1881-1900**

	Population			Land Occupied (acres)			Land Cultivated (acres)			Land Seeded (acres)		
	<u>Hespeler</u>	<u>Hanover</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Hespeler</u>	<u>Hanover</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Hespeler</u>	<u>Hanover</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Hespeler</u>	<u>Hanover</u>	<u>Total</u>
A 1881	1250	1112	2362	39520	36160	75680	5042	3603	8645			
C 1886	1012	1095	2107	35470	36593	72063	4503	5839	10392	3820	5400	9220
C 1891	1123	1177	2300	42279	39605	81894	7159	6290	13449	6883	6060	13043
A 1891	1126	1168	2294	47520	42720	90240	7509	5779	13288			
A 1900	1490	1444	2934	58687	57563	116250	12675	8957	21632			

A Assessment Roll, Steinbach Municipal Office

C Census of Canada

**Table 7**  
**Land Utilization – East Reserve. 1881-1900**

Tp.	Population			No. of Farm Units		
	1881	1891	1900	1881	1891	1900
7-4	207	200	398	39	40	63
7-5	666	370	486	114	58	76
7-6*	377	506	606	73	66	103
6-5	370	378	345	70	59	58
6-6	228	392	616	45	58	81
5-5	514	312	418	96	53	73
5-6		30	27		10	7
4-6		56	38		11	13
Total	2362	2294	2934			

**Land Occupied**

Total Acres	Acres/Farm	% of Area	Total Acres	Acres/Farm	% of Area	Total Acres	Acres/Farm	% of Area
1881	1881	1881	1891	1891	1891	1900	1900	1900
6880	173	30	12640	316	55	17018	270	74
19520	170	83	15040	260	65	19458	255	84
13120	180	76	19840	230	88	22211	216	96
12800	180	55	14880	250	64	14960	258	65
7680	170	33	12480	215	54	19804	245	86
15680	160	67	12480	235	54	16879	230	73
			1120	112	5	1920	274	8
			1760	160	7	4000	308	17
75680			90240			116250		

**Improved Land**

Total Acres	Acres/Farm	% of Area	Total Acres	Acres/Farm	% of Area	Total Acres	Acres/Farm	% of Area
1881	1881	1881	1891	1891	1891	1900	1900	1900
901	22	13	1815	45	14	2980	47	17
2406	22	12	1849	32	12	3330	44	17
1735	24	13	3845	42	18	6365	62	28
1375	20	11	1794	30	12	2058	35	14
923	20	12	1994	34	16	3645	45	18
1305	14	8	1712	32	14	2839	39	17
			92	9	8	80	11	4
			187	18	11	335	26	8
8645			13288			21632		

\* 1881 figures do not include Clearsprings  
(Data from Hanover Assessment Rolls)

**Table 8**  
**Livestock-East Reserve. 1886-1900**

Tp.	Horses			Horses/Farm			Oxen			Bulls		
	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>
7-4		112	267		2.8	4.2		78	11		10	16
7-5		157	254		2.7	3.3		183	64		3	14
7-6		281	461		3.3	4.5		146	36		6	18
6-5		170	203		2.9	3.5		160	34		6	10
6-6		133	299		2.3	3.7		131	25		5	9
5-5		98	223		1.8	3.1		153	28		16	6
5-6		3	8		0.3	1.1		24	2		0	0
4-6		17	21		1.5	1.6		18	4		1	0
Hespeler	390	550	982	2	3	4	285	407	111		19	48
Hanover	341	421	754	2	2.2	3.3	307	486	93		28	25
Total	731	971	1736	2	2.6	3.7	592	893	204		47	73

Tp.	Cows			Cows/Farm			Sheep			Swine		
	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>	<u>1886</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1900</u>
7-4		204	357		5	5.7		47	37		76	190
7-5		342	520		6	6.8		362	572		87	178
7-6		479	704		5.9	6.8		440	164		131	555
6-5		313	390		5.3	6.7		587	118		90	181
6-6		391	430		6.7	5.3		251	189		93	458
5-5		213	293		4	4		519	175		98	148
5-6		18	15		1.8	2		35	0		9	13
4-6		23	21		2	1.6		17	0		13	17
Hespeler	719	1025	1581				534	849	773	561	294	923
Hanover	615	958	1149				724	409	482	923	303	817
Total	1334	1983	2730		5.3	5.8	1258	2258	1255	1484	597	1740

(Data from Hanover Assessment Rolls)

**Table 9**  
**Crops – East Reserve. 1886-1891**

Year	Wheat				Oats				Barley				
	acres	% of crop land	bu.	bu./acre	acres	% of crop land	bu.	bu./acre	acres	% of crop land	bu.	bu./acre	
1886	2677	46	35199	13.1	1746	30	42711	24.5	489	8.4	8962	18.3	Hespeler
1891	4189	58	41694	10.0	2168	30	37931	17.0	479	6.8	9720	20.0	
1886	2189	48	25906	11.8	1179	26	29023	24.6	264	5.9	4393	16.6	Hanover
1891	3604	57	32465	9.0	1760	28	30025	17.0	431	6.8	5712	13.0	
1886	4866	47	61105	12.5	2925	27	71734	24.5	753	7.2	13355	17.7	Reserve
1891	7793	58	74159	9.5	3928	29	67956	17.0	910	6.8	15432	17.0	

(Data from D.B.S.)

The Mennonites were not by inclination livestock raisers, but mixed farming was essential in the East Reserve, so each farmer kept some cattle, both for milk and slaughter. As a result the average number of cattle per farm in the Reserve was greater than in the rest of the Province. No Mennonite farmer, however, attempted to raise livestock on a large scale or in a scientific manner. Sheep were not as widely distributed among the farmers as cattle. Some of the first Mennonite settlers, remembering that wool had been an early staple product in South Russia, commenced raising sheep in Manitoba. The flocks in the Reserve were in only a few hands (some farmers owned as many as 200 sheep), but they never were of much importance over the whole Reserve. The Mennonites also kept the other animals and fowl associated with a mixed farm. Hogs and poultry both brought in an important part of the small farm income.

Most of the cultivated land was devoted to grain crops (Table 9). Wheat was a cash crop and was also used for local gristing, but oats and barley were generally used for feed on the farm. Yields for all crops were very low, often the lowest in the province. In 1886 the provincial wheat yield averaged 15.3 bu. per acre, while that in the Reserve was 12.5; the 1891 figures were 25.2 and 9.5 bu. respectively. Oats and barley fared just as badly. There are several reasons for this poor showing. Most Mennonites lived on marginal land and had become inured to a subsistence scale of living. As a result their agricultural practices were deteriorating because they were not producing for a competitive market. Much of the grain was being marketed in the form of meat, so that they were not too conscious of yields. Before too long their grain growing methods became extremely backward. Their fields were weed infested, ploughing was carelessly performed, seeding was often late, and crops were caught by frost in fall before they could be harvested.

Small acreages of rye and flax were grown. Potatoes, of course, were an important food crop, but the total acreage remained small. Beans, buckwheat, and corn were grown, but not in sufficient quantities to be recorded by the census.

The meagre income from farming was supplemented during the winter by work in the woods. The first saw mill, powered by two horses, was operated in Steinbach in 1876, but was shortly followed by more powerful machines.<sup>2</sup> Lumber was only roughly sawn for the houses which the Mennonites were building at this time. No planers were used, and finished lumber still had to be hauled from Winnipeg. In these early years the logs were obtained within a distance of about ten miles of Steinbach.

Various individuals and even villages owned timber lots in the townships immediately to the east of the Reserve,<sup>3</sup> and spruce and poplar trees were the trees usually logged. In 1880 there were three saw mills operated by proprietors from the Reserve.<sup>4</sup> The outfits were portable, and were hauled from one camp to another in the bush. By February the mills would be running day and night in order to finish sawing all the logs before spring break-up, after which it would be impossible to team out the timber.<sup>5</sup>

In the fall of 1891 a large mill, capable of sawing 8,000 feet per day, was operating in Steinbach. By this time the supply of timber to the immediate east of the Reserve was exhausted and the Mennonites had to go further afield. In 1892, Abraham Reimer of Steinbach blazed the way to Pine Hill, 25 miles southeast of

Steinbach; this remained the major Mennonite saw milling centre for many winters.<sup>6</sup> Other small mills operated from some of the villages in the southern townships.

Lumbering enabled the farmers to carry on their largely subsistence way of life, because instead of spending their money on lumber imported from British Columbia, or the United States, they went into the bush, cut their own logs, and worked off the greater part of the cost of sawing it into lumber. Very little of this lumber was sold outside the Reserve. Neighbouring French Canadians sometimes bought a little, but most was used by the people who went to the trouble of getting it out.

This early logging was the only even remotely romantic occupation that the Mennonite pioneers had, and as late as 1955 old timers were still talking nostalgically about life in the logging camps.

Most of the economic activities, whether agriculture or lumbering, still produced little better than a subsistence living for the Mennonites. The first real impetus to agriculture in the area was given by the cheese factories established in the Reserve.

Cheese factories were established in the French settlement at St. Pierre before any were built in the Reserve, and it is quite possible that the Mennonites got the idea from their French Canadian neighbours. In the 1880's there was great interest in Manitoba in diversification of agriculture. With the equipment then at the disposal of the ordinary farmers in the province large scale wheat farming was not yet possible, mainly because the settlers could not adequately handle all the land that they had broken. Consequently strong emphasis was placed upon diversification, such as dairying, and almost the only way of getting dairy products to market was in the form of butter and cheese. The first Manitoba cheese factory was established in 1878 in Nelson;<sup>7</sup> by 1888 there were 24 factories and three creameries in the province.<sup>8</sup>

The first factory was established in the Reserve at Steinbach in 1889,<sup>9</sup> and was followed by five more in the next eight years.<sup>10</sup> By 1890 some farmers were already receiving \$100.00 annually by selling their milk to a cheese factory,<sup>11</sup> and the statement was made in *Der Nordwesten* that, "more and more farmers are beginning to realize that it is better to deliver milk to cheese factories than to make butter."<sup>12</sup> By 1893 the cheese factories caused a rise in the price of cows, as farmers became increasingly aware that they could make a profit selling milk to a cheese factory.<sup>13</sup> Farmers usually delivered their milk to the factories themselves; as a result more factories were built so that the length of haul for widely scattered farmers would be reduced.

It is impossible to give any production figures that will show the importance of cheese in the economy of the Reserve. It is not likely that the value was actually very great, nor is there any evidence that the quality of the livestock was improved,<sup>14</sup> but the important fact is that the farmers in the Reserve did take heart when this additional means of obtaining badly needed revenue was developed. All the elderly farmers I interviewed were unanimous in placing great importance on this particular aspect of the cheese factories. Cheese production continued to be a significant part of the Mennonite economy into the twentieth century.

## West Reserve

Agriculture progressed far more evenly and rapidly in the West Reserve, where the emphasis was on wheat growing. The railways completed in 1883 had a great deal to do with the rapid agricultural progress revealed in Table 10. The contrast with the East Reserve is revealed by the fact that in 1891 there were 13,449 acres cultivated in the East Reserve and 98,206 in the West. Table 10 clearly shows the expansion in agriculture. The number of farms increased as farmers moved into the northern townships and as some homesteads in the south were subdivided. The increasing concentration on wheat is shown by the larger proportion of the cultivated land devoted to it, as well as by the drop in the number of livestock per farm.

The Mennonites were willing to keep cows for incidental income from butter, but as yet they were not prepared to go in for full scale dairying. A well organized attempt by A.E. Shantz to establish a cheese factory at Schanzenfeld in 1885 failed because he could not induce the Mennonites to supply him with sufficient milk.<sup>15</sup> In this fact alone the great difference in farming conditions between the two Reserves is brought home, because in the East Reserve cheese production played a significant role in the economy only a decade later.

Now that the railway was at hand the Mennonites concentrated on wheat, and the fact that in 1885 the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites were willing to take part in the Farmers Union protest against elevator companies and the grain handling practices of the C.P.R. indicates how far the Mennonites had come along the road to commercial grain farming in Manitoba.<sup>16</sup> The Farmers Union movement came to nothing, but the complaint against the grain companies continued and in 1899 the farmers in the Gretna area built their own elevator, and also started to ship grain directly to Fort William.<sup>17</sup> These problems apparently did not loom large in the East Reserve.

As wheat acreages increased in the Reserve it became necessary to acquire more and better machinery, and during the middle 1880's the Mennonites were becoming prosperous enough to be able to afford new implements;<sup>18</sup> binders sold very well from 1886 on.<sup>19</sup> Mechanical improvements such as band cutters and self feeders for threshing machines were introduced in 1889,<sup>20</sup> but the great new implement of this time was the press drill, which began to replace the broadcast seeder in 1889.<sup>21</sup> It required about half as much seed per acre, it allowed no grain to be swept around by wind or eaten by birds, and every grain was embedded so that it could germinate more easily. Gang ploughs were first advertised in 1890,<sup>22</sup> but they may have been introduced earlier, and traction steam engines were bought by farmers in the Morden area in 1891.<sup>23</sup> Of great importance to the farmers was the fact that the quality of implements was improving, especially in the complicated machines such as threshing outfits. In order to pay for this expensive machinery many Mennonites mortgaged their land, and some lost it as a result. They did effect many savings by organizing "combinations" to obtain binder twine and barbed wire in bulk, fore-runners of the consumers cooperatives of the 1930's.

Most of the improved implements were also purchased by the few prosperous Mennonites in the East Reserve when they came on the market, but the majority of farmers in that Reserve could not afford them. Not until 1890, for instance, did the village of Hochstadt give up scythes for reapers.



**Table 10**  
**Selected Agricultural Statistics Rhineland and Douglas 1886 and 1891**

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>No. of Farms</u>		<u>Land Occupied</u> ( <u>acres</u> )		<u>Land Cultivated</u> ( <u>acres</u> )		<u>Wheat Acreage</u>		<u>No. of Livestock</u> <u>per farm</u>	
	1886	1891	1886	1891	1886	1891	1886	1891	1886	1891
Rhineland	658	701	106259	142939	34479	53255	16411	39159	6.6	4.8
Douglas	447	886	71598	131570	24776	44951	13732	34509	7	5

(Census of Canada 1886, 1891)

Ploughing, sowing, and harrowing were practically the only spring and summer field activities that occupied the grain farmer before weed infestation became a severe problem in Manitoba fields in the 1880's. By that time, weeds were serious, partly because dirty seed was used. The Mennonites suffered on both counts, but especially on the latter because unscrupulous grain dealers are reported to have frequently taken advantage of them.<sup>24</sup> In the East Reserve there was a belief that weeds had been introduced in seed grain from Russia, because the Clearsprings land was always cleaner than that farmed by the Mennonites.<sup>25</sup> Little could be done in eliminating weeds in either Reserve until adequate cultivators were introduced in the late 1880's and early 1890's. Up until that time the only implements which could be used were harrows and ploughs, neither very effective in destroying the invaders.

This lack of proper cultivating machinery was a factor which prevented adequate summerfallowing,<sup>26</sup> a practice almost unknown among the farmers of either Reserve, even in the group from Molotschna in the East Reserve.<sup>27</sup> This was virgin soil, and there was sufficient rainfall; as a result some fields were worked for 20 years before they were given a rest. But summerfallowing was recognized by the early 1880's as the only means of eradicating weeds and it was begun on a piecemeal basis. In Rhineland Municipality a By-law was even passed on April 29, 1884 (By-law No. 8) stipulating that if there were too many obnoxious weeds in a field it was "to be summerfallowed to cleanse it". Despite by-laws, newspaper articles and the recognition that fallowing was necessary, little was done in Manitoba. One traveller in the West Reserve believed that the Mennonites were more conscious in fallowing than Ontario Canadian settlers.<sup>28</sup> But even then careless farming predominated among the Mennonites and by 1894 the spread of noxious weeds in the West Reserve was alarming. Government weed inspectors from Winnipeg went to the area to help the Mennonites fight the weeds.<sup>29</sup> Some Mennonite farmers absolutely refused to do anything towards destroying noxious weeds, but fortunately this attitude was not general, and continued outside pressure had its effects. By 1897 the weeds were beginning to be subdued in the Reserve,<sup>30</sup> though they could not be eliminated by cultivation and weeding alone. The danger that some districts might have to be abandoned to weed infestation, as had happened in the

United States, had been averted. It had been impossible to find out whether the East Reserve experienced a similar weed crisis. In any case most of the area would not have been affected.

By 1900 most farmers in both Reserves would appear to have accepted summerfallowing as standard farming practice. It is interesting to note that even before 1900 one farmer near Morden (not a Mennonite) was planting corn as a row crop on land that would normally have been fallowed.<sup>31</sup>

It is hard to credit the fact that the Mennonites would deliberately use poor seed, yet in 1893 the Grain Exchange in Winnipeg urged the Manitoba government to step in and procure new seed for the Mennonites, since they were shipping inferior smutted wheat to market.<sup>32</sup> This slovenliness continued right into the 1920's, because from interviews I learned that even then a considerable number of Mennonites as a matter of course were using dirty smutty seed that was full of weeds.<sup>33</sup>

There were few new significant field practices other than summerfallowing. By 1890 a few Gretna farmers were attempting to maintain a firm seed bed, to prevent soil blowing, by rolling the land after seeding, and some farmers also sowed grass for pasture.<sup>34</sup> Ontario Canadian farmers did much ploughing in order to have the land ready for sowing in spring, but as late as 1888 the Mennonites were neglecting this.<sup>35</sup> What little manure the farmers had was not generally spread on the land in either Reserve, partly because it only increased the growth of straw in the grain fields.

Many statements eulogizing the advantages of mixed farming in Manitoba were made throughout the province before 1900 but they had little effect in the West Reserve. Two attempts to establish creameries in the Reserve in 1895, one at Morden,<sup>36</sup> and one at Rosenfeld,<sup>37</sup> were unsuccessful. The only village in the entire Reserve that showed any interest in livestock was Neuberghal, where a large dug-out was constructed in 1899 to facilitate watering stock,<sup>38</sup> and this village is still the centre of an important dairying area (Figure 32). However, as we have seen, livestock and cheese factories were important in the East Reserve by 1900. Thus, in the years from 1880 to 1900 the West Reserve, in contrast to the East, became a great grain farming region. But in these years changes were occurring in the settlements that led to the closing of both Reserves.

### **Settlement Changes in the 1890's**

#### **East Reserve**

By 1885 most of the lands which were regarded by the Mennonites as suitable for settlement had been occupied (Figure 20), and the first symptoms of population pressure were being felt. Despite the fact that there were empty areas in the Reserve, the Mennonites began to look elsewhere for land, especially those who occupied the stony, poorly drained soils of the south.<sup>39</sup> The East Reserve Mennonites knew that their fellows on the West Reserve had sent delegates to inspect lands in Assiniboia and Alberta in 1889 with a view to starting new settlements, but not much attention was given to this venture because the delegates were thought to be of "the wrong sort" by the folk of the East Reserve.<sup>40</sup>

Instead of going to the Northwest Territories the East Reserve Mennonites moved, during the 1890's, into the empty French Canadian municipalities to the north and east of the Reserve. By 1895, for example, fifteen Mennonites owned quarter sections in the southeast corner of township 8-6.<sup>41</sup>

Significant changes were taking place within the Reserve as well. Investigations undertaken by the Department of the Interior showed that the Mennonites were availing themselves of the reservation not only for religious but also for commercial purposes; they raised objections when outsiders were allowed to obtain homesteads within the Reserve, yet they were willing to sell their own lands to them. By 1896 thirteen quarter sections had been disposed of in this way.<sup>42</sup> Obviously the purpose for which the Reserve had been originally intended had been fully served, especially since the Mennonites did not appear to be desirous of occupying the vacant lands, so by Order-in-Council of June 27, 1898, it was declared that on August 1, 1898 all the lands remaining vacant in townships 4-6 and 5-6 would be thrown open for general settlement. (The remaining townships were to be opened for general settlement on November 30, 1898.) For just over 25 years the East Reserve had existed for the exclusive use of the Mennonites. In that time the population had increased rapidly to about 3,600 in 1878, fallen to about 2,300 by 1882 as a result of migration, and gradually returned to 3,000 by 1900.

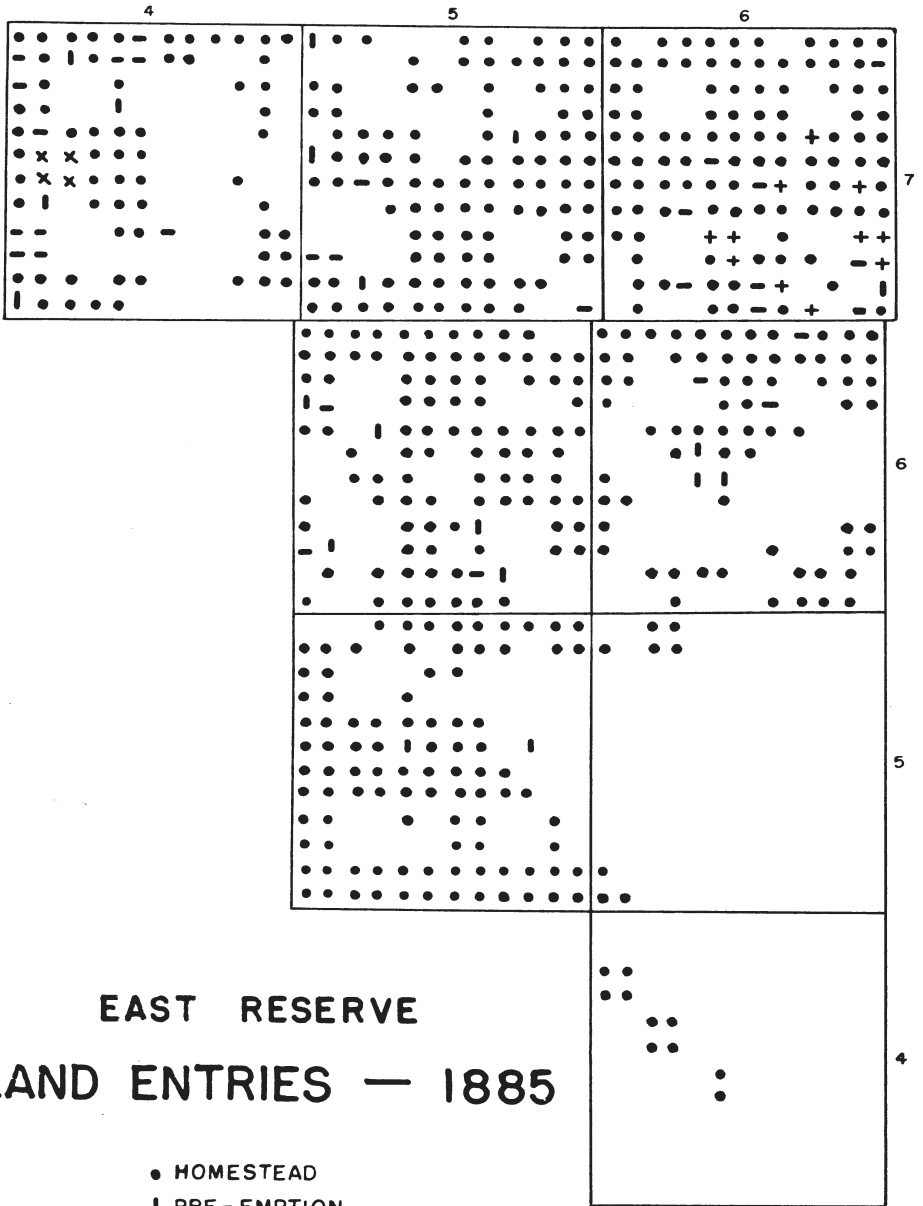
Shortly after the Reserve was thrown open for settlement two groups of non-Mennonites entered the Reserve and settled on land which had been avoided by the Mennonites. In 1899 a large group of Ukrainian immigrants arrived in Winnipeg, and were sent to Stuartburn in Southeastern Manitoba to select homesteads. One of these Ukrainians settled in the southern part of the Reserve instead, and in the spring of 1900 over 200 of his fellow Ukrainians followed him from Stuartburn.<sup>43</sup> They all homesteaded in township 5-6, which was empty except for a few French-Canadian squatters. The nucleus of their settlement was in the present Sarto district (Figure 4P and Plate 11-2), where they had a very difficult start. The French remained aloof, but some of the Ukrainians became acquainted with the Mennonites of Grunthal, who advanced them money, and provided them with cattle on easy payments.

In 1901 there were still fewer than 300 Ukrainians in the Reserve, but more continued to arrive coming directly from the Ukraine. In 1903 a Greek Catholic Church was built, and in 1904 a post office called Sarto, in honour of Pope Pius X (whose family name was del Sarto), was established. By 1921 there were 700 Ukrainians in the southern part of the Reserve.

While the men went out in summer and found work on farms or on the railways to earn money for clothing and food, the women stayed at home and did the farm work. In winter the men cut logs for their homes and also brought cord wood to the Steinbach flour mill. Hauling wood to Steinbach was an economic mainstay for Ukrainians from as far away as Caliento. Conditions were uniformly pathetic throughout the Ukrainian district, and they no more than managed to eke out a living for about 40 years.

There was also a group of Lutheran settlers in the Reserve. They settled under only slightly better conditions than the Ukrainians, on the wave-washed soils of township 6-6, just south of Steinbach. This is called the Friedensfeld settlement. About 20 Lutheran families moved in here just after the Reserve was opened in

Figure 20



**EAST RESERVE  
LAND ENTRIES — 1885**

- HOMESTEAD
- | PRE-EMPTION
- SALES
- + MILITARY BOUNTY GRANTS
- × SPECIAL GRANTS

3 MI.

from Manuscript Map  
in File 27630  
Dept. of Interior. (Archives)  
(continued)

1898, and started clearing land. They were not quite as isolated as the Ukrainians, and prospered more quickly, since they had a closer market for dairy products. Otherwise they were also fighting a marginal environment. In 1901 there were 233 Lutherans in the Reserve; in 1921 just over 500. Most of these were in the Friedensfeld area, where they had two churches (Plate 25), but all their trading was done in Steinbach.

### West Reserve

The population of Rhineland increased from 3,964 in 1886 to 5,093 in 1891, and of Douglas from 2,681, to 4,467 (Census of Canada), so that a shortage of land also began to be felt in the West Reserve. Figure 21 shows that there still were some empty areas in the northeastern townships in 1885, but these lands were poorly drained and not desirable for settlement.<sup>44</sup> Still some of the more enterprising *Bergthal* Mennonites began to settle on the heavy clay soils north of Plum Coulee in the late 1890's and a few were buying land as far north as Lowe Farm in 1897.<sup>45</sup> The land was not closely settled north of Plum Coulee because much of the area was inadequately drained, and many sections were owned by speculators who were waiting for prices to rise as settlement progressed. As yet there were hardly any settlers north of Rosenfeld, because that land was simply too wet. Since there were no suitable empty lands close to the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* part of the Reserve these Mennonites looked farther afield for new lands in the North West Territories. There were various reasons for moving so far. Many of the conservative Mennonites wanted to leave the Reserve because they felt that they and their children were exposed too directly to outside influences. Others were not satisfied with the climate, and wanted to move to the West Coast. But the strictly economic reasons were the most important. Some Mennonites were so poor that they couldn't start farming in the Reserve where farm prices were high, so they were anxious to homestead in the West. Many found it to their advantage to sell their farms at a good price (often to outsiders), move west and homestead again, thus making a handsome profit by the move.

The practice of selling lands to outsiders, who were frequently speculators, brought about the formal termination of the Reserve. The church leaders did not have sufficient control over their members to prevent the sale of land to outsiders, as this comment by an elder from the *Bergthal* Church indicates:

But we confess that we do not have that power over the individual members of our church by which we could prevent them selling their lands to whomever they please, and we fear that it would be asking too much of our Government to prohibit the sale of lands within our Reserves to persons not belonging to our denomination.<sup>46</sup>

The officials of the Department of the Interior decided that since the Mennonites were voluntarily allowing their lands to pass out of their hands there could be no reasonable ground for complaint if the Reserve was terminated, and by Order-of-Council of June 27, 1898, all the lands in the West Reserve were thrown open for general settlement on November 30, 1898.

A township that was part of the Reserve, and that had been neglected by the Mennonites since it was not suited for grain growing, township 1-6, was finally occupied after 1898 when it was thrown open for general settlement. It had been

## PLATE 11



1. *Metis house on Seine River, east of Ste. Anne, 16'x16' with saddle and lap corners. Inside was plastered, using willows for lathes. Mennonites built larger homes than this and therefore used the Red River style.*



2. *Ukrainian house in 12-6-6E; built in 1902. Only house left in the East Reserve with a thatched roof. Well sweep is still typical of Ukrainian farms in the Reserve.*



3. *Josiah Coboe's house 3 miles north of Steinbach. This house was built by Coboe, a Clearsprings pioneer, in 1894 and was one of the first large frame houses to be constructed in the Reserve. Most of the other large homes built after this one were cottage style or of a simple 2 storey rectangular plan, as in the picture opposite.*



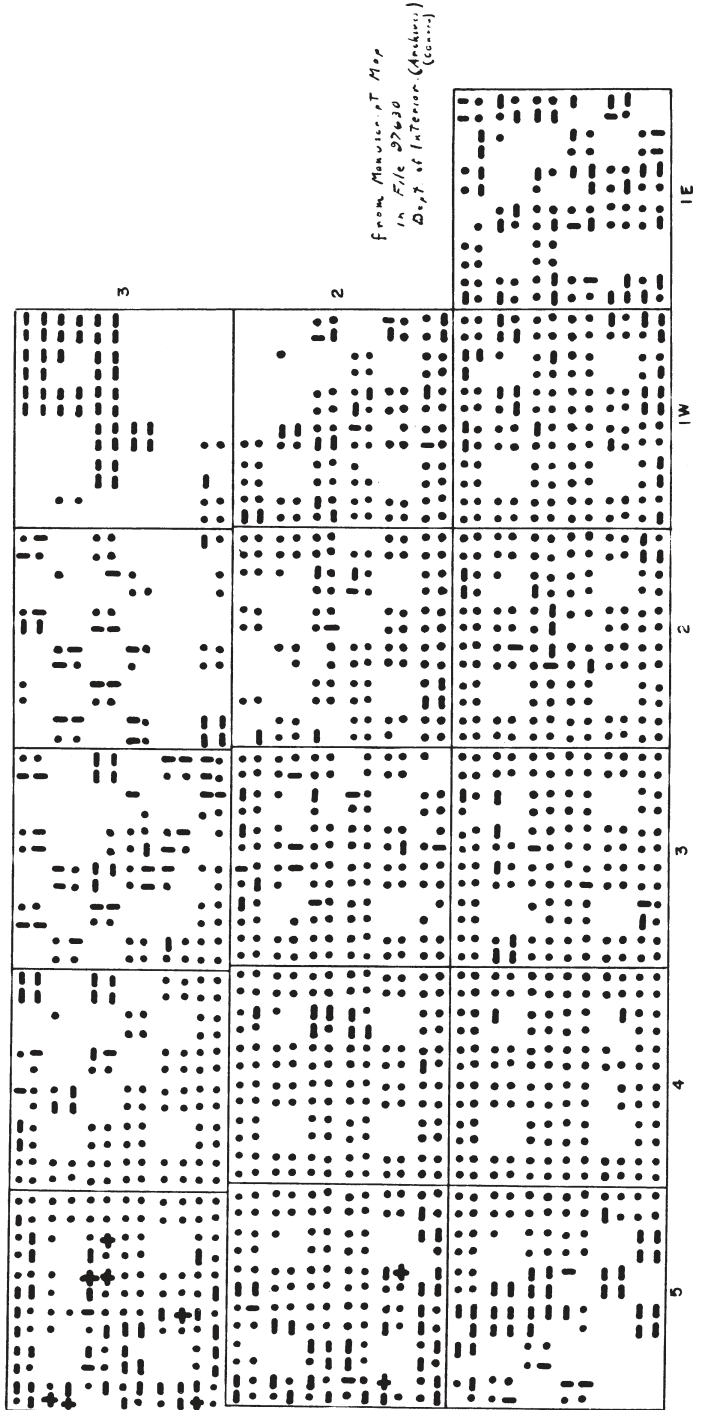
4. *Big old house in 16-7-6E. This type was one of the earliest non-Mennonite styles introduced into the East Reserve during the 1890's. Foundation is of fieldstones. There are about 6 of these houses north-west of Steinbach; some built by Clearsprings settlers, others by Mennonites.*

Figure 21

# WEST RESERVE LAND ENTRIES — 1885

- HOMESTEAD
- SALES
- † PRE-EMPTION
- ‡ MILITARY BOUNTY GRANTS

3 MI





avoided by the Mennonites because they believed it to be badly broken by ravines, and covered with poplar and oaks. In truth it was broken only by the Pembina River; there were a few sloping valleys that added greatly to the prospect (Plate 2-3 & 4), and many small patches of open prairie among the trees, to make it ideal mixed farming country. The entire township was taken up in 1899, mostly by Icelanders from North Dakota,<sup>47</sup> along with a few Germans and Mennonites.

But in the meantime the Mennonites had been moving from the Reserve. As early as 1888 a deputation from Gretna inspected land in British Columbia, Oregon and Washington on behalf of 500 interested Mennonites,<sup>48</sup> but of the ten families who actually moved there in 1890 none remained.<sup>49</sup> Land in the North West Territories was more to the Mennonites' liking, and in 1890 they even applied to the Dominion government for a Reserve near Calgary, which was not granted, though they were given informal concessions so that they could settle by themselves.<sup>50</sup> In 1891 the Mennonites obtained similar concessions near Gleichem and many moved there that year.<sup>51</sup> This was only the beginning of a migration which continued right through until 1914. A poor man had a better chance in the far West. By 1911 there were 14,400 Mennonites in Saskatchewan, and 1,524 (Census of Canada) in Alberta, all stemming from this migration.

Most of the vacated farms were easily disposed of to neighbouring farmers, but there was also an inflow of wealthier immigrants from Russia at this time and they bought many of the farms. Approximately 900 Mennonites arrived from Russia in the early 1890's.<sup>52</sup> The Manitoba Department of Agriculture unsuccessfully tried to persuade the Mennonites from Kansas to come to Manitoba in 1892, which was a drought year.<sup>53</sup>

Very few of the outsiders who bought land from the Mennonites ever settled in the Reserve. They held their land only for investment purposes. A few non-Mennonite farm workers finally came into the Reserve in 1893, when a group of Lutherans went to work as labourers on Mennonite farms in the Plum Coulee area.<sup>54</sup> Later, after drainage was commenced, many more came and settled around Rosenfeld.



- <sup>1</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, October 3, 1890.
- <sup>2</sup> K.J.B. Reimer, article in *Steinbach Post*, April 4, 1952.
- <sup>3</sup> *Land Register*, Land Office, Winnipeg.
- <sup>4</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1880, No. 4, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior.
- <sup>5</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, August 14, 1891.
- <sup>6</sup> K.J.B. Reimer, article in *Steinbach Post*, February 1, 1952.
- <sup>7</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, March 29, 1879. It has been thought until now that the first cheese factory in Manitoba was established in Stonewall in 1882. See L.A. Gibson, *Fifty Years of Dairying in Manitoba*, Winnipeg 1935: 14.
- <sup>8</sup> Gibson, *Dairying*: 18.
- <sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*
- <sup>10</sup> See *60-jährige Jubiläum*: 28. The factories were built at: Gruenfeld (1890), Hochstadt (1892), Blumenort (1893), Grunthal (1895), and Hochfeld (1896).
- <sup>11</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, September 5, 1890.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: March 6, 1891.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: January 13, 1893.
- <sup>14</sup> It is strange that the Mennonites showed no desire to increase cheese production by improving their herds. This may have been due to their poverty, but at the same time it is unfortunate because it might have brought about an agricultural revolution in the Reserve.
- <sup>15</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, January 14, 1885. Apparently there was a cheese factory at Reinland that same year, but I have found no records of it in primary sources. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*: 121 refers to it. In any case it was not successful.
- <sup>16</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, March 12, 1885.
- <sup>17</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, September 28, 1889.
- <sup>18</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1889, No. 5. Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Appendix 24: 113-114.
- <sup>19</sup> *Morden Monitor*, October 1, 1886. Also many later issues, e.g. January 31, 1889.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: June 6, 1889.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*: July 7, 1889.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: May 14, 1890.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: September 10, 1891.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*: April 12, 1888.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview with J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with K.J.B. Reimer, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955.
- <sup>28</sup> W.H. Barneby, *Life and Labour in the Far; Far West*, London, 1884: 364-65.
- <sup>29</sup> *Manitoba: Sessional Papers*, 1894. Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture: 14.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: 1897: 19.
- <sup>31</sup> *Nor-West Farmer*, January, 1899.
- <sup>32</sup> *Morden Monitor*, February 27, 1893.
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with J.J. Hildebrand, North Kildonan, Man., October, 1955.
- <sup>34</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, May 23, 1890.

<sup>35</sup> *Morden Monitor*, November 23, 1888.

<sup>36</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, February 28, 1895.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*: May 2, 1895.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*: October 22, 1899.

<sup>39</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 179925 (2), No. 163535, Report of H.C. Jacobsen to H.H. Smith, September 7, 1889.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*: September 11, 1889, No. 163844.

<sup>41</sup> *La Broquerie Municipality Collectors Roll*, 1896.

<sup>42</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 179925, J. Allison to H.H. Smith, September 25, 1891.

<sup>43</sup> See the *Carillon News*, April 19, 1948 for an account of the Ukrainian settlement.

<sup>44</sup> Most of the Hudson's Bay and the School Lands had not been sold as yet in the Reserve, but even many Mennonites with money to buy land preferred to obtain their land at no cost even if this meant leaving the Reserve. Naturally they hoped to create new Mennonite settlements elsewhere, and did not intend to settle as isolated individuals.

<sup>45</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, August 19, 1897.

<sup>46</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 179925 (1), No. 44083, J. Funk to Commissioner of Lands, January 18, 1897.

<sup>47</sup> T.J. Gilsason, address on the 50th Anniversary of the Icelandic Settlement, July 15, 1949. Quoted in the *Morden Times*, July 27, 1949.

<sup>48</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 179925 (1), G. Young to H.H. Smith, June 21, 1888.

<sup>49</sup> *Morden Monitor*, January 6, 1891.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*: January 9, 1890.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*: April 16, 1891.

<sup>52</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1892, No. 7, Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Appendix 12: 105.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*: Appendix 37.

<sup>54</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, March 13, 1892.

## Chapter 8

### BREAK UP OF THE AGRICULTURAL VILLAGES

In some districts in both the East and West Reserves the village system began to dissolve almost from the first year of settlement. No governmental pressure whatsoever was exerted in bringing about changes in settlement pattern; they resulted entirely from forces working within the Reserves. Though the end result was the same in both Reserves, in that the open field system was eventually completely eliminated, the processes that brought this about were not identical because of the difference in the physical and economic geography of the two areas.

#### West Reserve

Many factors were working at the time the railway was built to bring about a change in the nucleated settlement pattern of the West Reserve. The two trading centres introduced by the railway made it a certainty that the settlements would not develop in isolation. And the increasing prosperity of the Mennonites, as commercial farming developed (facilitated by the new railways), quickened their adoption of Canadian ways. Farmers tended to take up the most efficient system of grain farming, which was believed to be quarter section farming. However, the fact that many villages were not broken up at this time, is a testimony to the strength of the church, which managed to stay many of the new forces which were threatening to eliminate the villages.

In the 1880's rumours were already circulating among the Ontario Canadians that the Mennonites were going to abandon their villages. George Newcombe, an agent of the Department of the Interior visited the Reserve in 1883 and reported:

As roads are built, as fuel gets cheaper, and wire fencing begins to be generally used [the advantages of the villages will] disappear. The fact that they are all bound to submit to the direction of the Schulz, that they are compelled to accept the strips of land apportioned to them, whether their neighbours on either side are poor farmers who allow their plowed land to grow up in weeds or the reverse and that the quantity of land is limited to this strip without regard to the means, the industry, or the economy of the village, more than counterbalances the advantages. I think it is probable that in the near future the villages will be erected along the lines of railroads now running through the Reserve, and the majority will be living each on his own homestead.<sup>1</sup>

J.E. Tetu made a similar statement in 1885:

The Mennonites' contact with the dominant race has sporadically worn down the unyielding segregation of the elders, until the young men, tired of the antiquated communion of their fathers are leaving the villages and erecting houses each for himself on his own homestead.<sup>2</sup>

A quotation from a Morden newspaper reveals the local reaction:

One by one the Mennonite villages established some years ago by the pioneers in Manitoba are fast disappearing. The pretty village of Hoffnungsfeld probably the finest in this part of the country, is to be broken up this spring, the owners of the houses will move them on their farms, and it will not be many years before a Mennonite village will be a curiosity.<sup>3</sup> (Plate 13-1).

One reason for the break up of some villages is that they were not soundly established; a few in the western townships broke up soon after their founding, because the manner of apportioning land caused friction among the farmers.<sup>4</sup> Other villages had so few farmers that the land had not been divided into *Gewanne* and *Kagel*, and before long the farmers moved on their homesteads.<sup>5</sup> Both cases were uncommon in the western townships, but in the eastern townships there were many villages that lacked firm foundations. Most of these lands were occupied by Mennonites from across the Red River. The 80 acre homestead, the odd sections claimed by the railways, and the marshiness of some districts were obstacles to the development of *Gewann* villages in some areas in the east. Also, many farmers who had migrated from township 7-4 in the East Reserve already had had some experience of living on quarter sections, and were willing to continue that form of settlement.

It is clear, therefore, that from the beginning, in both parts of the Reserve, the germ of the desire to settle on their homesteads was present among the Mennonites – it required only sufficient cause to make many farmers move there. Only social convenience and the centripetal force of the church prevented such a move at the beginning.

Once established, the village was subjected to many disruptive forces which had not existed so strongly in South Russia, and practically all these related to the ambitious farmer's endeavours to increase the size of his business. He wanted to be independent, unfettered by the restrictions placed upon him by his fellow farmers, the *Gewann* village, and by the rigid *Gewanne* and *Kagel* themselves. And the way lay open because the Achilles heel of the *Gewann* villages in Manitoba was the quarter section. Since the quarter section was the legal unit of land, not the *Kagel*, no one could prevent a farmer from moving on his homestead, selling it, or buying more land outside the village, even though there were local rules against all these practices. The expansion and dispersion of land holdings tended to weaken the solidarity of the nucleated settlement; not only did a number of villages break up as a result of the ambitions of the landowners, but most villages were weakened by them.

The expansion of holdings could not have taken place without the new implements that were being produced in the late 1880's in the factories of Eastern Canada. In order to handle larger acreages farmers often had to borrow money to buy implements and the horses with which to pull them. Thus the introduction of better designed implements encouraged the farmers to disperse, often at the cost of going heavily into debt to mortgage companies.<sup>6</sup>

Some *Gewannfluren* were badly disrupted when as sometimes happened there was a danger that part of the land would fall into the hands of a mortgage company. Very little land was actually taken over by mortgage companies, but the danger was present in many villages, and this by itself was a potent force which helped to break them up. A.E. Shantz, a nephew of J.Y. Shantz, described how this happened in Schanzenfeld and other nearby villages in 1885. Of the 30 families in the villages, all except a dozen intended to take up their residences on their farms:

Various circumstances cause this – financial difficulties being no doubt one of the chief causes. Many farmers have become involved through the purchase of horses, wagons,

and agricultural implements, and the fact of some mortgages falling due has led to a sense of insecurity. The people see that when their homes and cultivated land are on the farms of others they are exposed to the danger of losing these by the action of the owners in selling or mortgaging their property; because they are beginning to feel the necessity of placing their improvements on their own lands. No doubt the change will be very inconvenient – as they will have to break up the prairie again, and go to the labour and expense of removing and rebuilding their dwellings – but the more enlightened of them see this must come about sooner or later. Some of the leaders still cling to the old system and strongly oppose the changes, so that there is quite a little revolution in progress in the generally calm and quiet communities.<sup>7</sup>

There is no way of ascertaining how widespread this problem was, but a considerable number of farmers were making heavy capital investments on borrowed money, and since it required only one person to disrupt a particular village, there is every likelihood that it was very important.<sup>8</sup>

The loss of land as a result of the falling due of mortgages was always involuntary, but various farmers sold their lands to people from outside the village community, and this could have the same effect if the property were sold to an undesirable individual. Efforts were made to stop this type of sale. In 1882 a group of Mennonites vainly requested the Department of the Interior to rule that none of the inhabitants of a village should be permitted to sell their property without first obtaining the consent of 2/3 of those interested.<sup>9</sup> In every village the Mennonites had an agreement among themselves to prevent sales, yet violations occurred. In 1882 some farmers sold and others proposed to sell their land to outside speculators at large prices, and as a result a number of villages were demoralized.<sup>10</sup> In South Russia the Mennonites had a more direct control over the sale of property rights within a village, but in Manitoba a village assembly's rulings carried no legal authority.

A few conservative Mennonite leaders thought that if they could place a greater distance between their settlements and Canadian influences they could still return to the insular life that they had led in Russia. Accordingly towards the close of the 1880's a migration began from the Reserve to the North West Territories. This loosened the bonds of the villages still more because now the steadying influence of some of the most conservative Mennonites was lost. The *Morden Monitor* called these Mennonites, who moved to the Calgary area in 1889, the "neither-use-nor-ornament-variety".<sup>11</sup> However, not all Mennonite migrants were fleeing "progress". Many land hungry Mennonites, as we shall see, were also heading West to homestead again.

Another factor of considerable importance in the break up of the villages, was the need to replace the first houses. New construction was undertaken in the late 1880's as money became available, and since most families had to build a new home anyway, this was an excellent opportunity to move on the homestead. Most Schanzenfeld houses, for example, were still of log construction in 1885 when many families moved out of the village; they were replaced on the homesteads by frame buildings.<sup>12</sup>

We are still left with the question of whether the open field system was actually so inefficient that it really did not provide sufficient scope for an enterprising farmer. The only persons really qualified to give a definite answer are those who

have farmed both *Gewanne* and on quarter sections. There are not many of those farmers left, but all whom I interviewed agreed that the quarter section was better adapted to grain farming and they much preferred it. It was not that the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* system did not work, but that the quarter section worked better. There was the nuisance of having fields scattered in various *Gewanne*, the trouble of travelling long distances to reach them, and the necessity of taking water and fodder along for horses. These aspects of the open fields were bothersome, but they could be tolerated. More damaging were the ridges which often developed along the *Raine*. They were over grown with weeds and quack grass, and were filled with grasshoppers and insects. In the lighter soils of the western townships the wind blew dust into the *Raine* until some of them eventually became 20 feet wide and seven feet high (Plate 12-1). The ridges sometimes made threshing almost impossible if the wind happened to blow in such a direction that the threshing outfit had to be set across the *Kagel*.

Mennonite farmers in the *Gewann* villages found it very difficult to keep their *Kagel* clean in the years when the weeds were proving a nuisance, because agreement in summerfallowing seemed almost impossible.<sup>13</sup> Open strife sometimes developed over different methods of farming, and over the kinds of crops that should be grown, making life in the villages distinctly unpleasant and sometimes intolerable. Often the quarter section farm seemed a peaceful haven.

Reinforcing these various reasons for leaving the villages was the fact that after a time excommunication from the church for doing so seemed less terrifying. New Mennonite church organizations were formed in the 1880's which welcomed any one thrown out of the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* church, and the people of the trading centres were also sympathetic. Once the municipal government began to function efficiently the clergy were still further weakened. Still it was a hard decision for the average farmer to make, and the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* ministers who never compromised held most of their villages together.

### East Reserve

It did not take long after the first settlements were founded for the processes of disintegration to start in the East Reserve, and a main factor again was the acquisition of land by many farmers that was not in the *Gewannflur*. Theoretically all the land belonging to the farmers of a village should have been contiguous. This was the case during the first few years of settlement, but soon after that changes occurred, made possible by the fact that legal title of the land was issued in quarter sections, rather than in *Gewanne* or *Kagel*.<sup>14</sup> Prosperous farmers often bought an extra quarter section, not in the *Gewannflur*, for haying purposes. In some villages vacant areas of land were left when farmers moved to the West Reserve, and on occasion these were bought by farmers from other villages. Furthermore, many quarter sections originally designed to be part of some particular *Gewannflur* had never been registered as homesteads, and thus gaps were left in the *Flur* which were occasionally taken up by Mennonites not living in the village. By 1881 the village lands were just beginning to be dispersed through these means and by 1891 the dispersion was very marked. Sometimes it happened that land belonging to a farmer in one *Gewann* village would lie in the midst of quite another. Then also,

PLATE 12



*1. One of the few high Raine still visible in the West Reserve; 1 mile northwest of Blumenfeld. It is 4' high and 15' wide; some were even larger. This one was left because it is on the 1/2 mile line, and accordingly was not ploughed down after the open field system was abandoned in the 1920's.*



*2. Trees marking a grave in a cemetery; 1/4 mile east of Kronsthal.*



*3. Potato cellar just west of Blumenfeld. There are a few of these in the West Reserve-most of them south of Winkler.*



some farmers living in villages owned land that was five or six miles from any village.

The compactness of the *Gewann* villages fast disappeared as the Mennonite farmers bought and sold their quarter sections. No village agreements could legally prevent any farmer from completing a real estate transaction, so that the stability characteristic of the Mennonite villages in Russia was soon undermined by the North American view that agricultural land was property that could be exchanged just as readily as any other commodity.

There probably were not more than 25 *Gewann* villages functioning in the East Reserve by 1891<sup>15</sup> (See Figure 7) and these slowly broke up during the next 32 years, until in 1923 the last village abandoned the *Gewanne* and *Kagel*. Here in the east the transition to the individual homestead seemed to come about more naturally than in the West Reserve, mainly because the *Gewann* villages were not really adapted to much of the terrain of the East Reserve, and the farmers were thus probably resigned to abandoning them. Many of the southern villages were in the midst of bush and did not even have the appearance of a *Gewann* village. The farmers, living on land that was unsuitable for arable agriculture, had yielded to a subsistence way of life for which no highly complicated *Gewanne* and *Kagel* were needed. There was no need to break up these *Gewann* villages; they fell apart of their own accord. Farmers simply drifted onto their own homesteads, if it seemed more convenient, and began to farm on them. It did not make any difference to the general agricultural situation, because few villages had achieved a level of organization which could be disrupted by the pulling out of a farmer or two. In fact, often a formal loosening of bonds was hardly even necessary.

A few villages on poorer soils had been well organized when they were founded, and curiously enough they stayed together longer than any of the other *Gewann* villages. These Mennonites lived in township 5-5, where they were particularly isolated, and they continued to farm, if one can use that word, on their *Gewanne* and *Kagel* until World War I and after, because there simply was no pressing reason to change. The land was so poor to start with that extensive farming could not be practiced, and hence no one would particularly benefit by breaking up the village, and yet they would lose the social advantages of living in a *Strassendorf* if they did so. However, there were only a few villages where this occurred. In townships 7-4 and 7-5 the drainage worked against the *Gewann* villages, because it was difficult to find a sufficiently large compact area of arable land that would support a settlement.

The ease with which the dispersion of land and the disintegration of the nucleated settlements occurred, can probably be attributed to the isolation of the area.<sup>16</sup> The Mennonites of this Reserve did not try so tenaciously to hold onto their traditional settlement pattern, in an endeavour to maintain the status quo and fend off outside influences, as did the West Reserve Mennonites. No outsiders were particularly interested in the land of the East Reserve. Thus there was little of the hysterical attempt to resist change that characterized areas of the West Reserve. There was conservatism among the older people, but this was because they naturally liked the old way of doing things, not because they thought that the *Gewann* villages were an essential part of the Mennonite social fabric, and that with their



disintegration the Mennonite way of life would disappear as well. There is no evidence that the leaders in any village attempted to halt the break up of any village for the reasons just mentioned.

In general then, the disintegration of the *Gewann* villages of the East Reserve was uneventful. But in each village the break up can be attributed to specific reasons, often closely linked to the frailties of human nature. Since the land was legally subdivided into quarter sections, it was necessary to have harmony among the farmers if a *Gewann* village was to work. As soon as a disagreement arose, the will of one man could, and in some cases did, break up a village. In one village, for instance, one man owned the quarter section on which all the arable land was located, and since he wanted all the good land for himself, he actually employed physical means to drive the other farmers away from the *Kagel* that were situated on his quarter section.<sup>17</sup> Naturally he won, and the village disbanded, because he was fully within his legal rights.

There were other instances where the entire village population came to the conclusion that they would be better off on their homesteads, and therefore the village was broken up by mutual agreement.<sup>18</sup> In the villages on the Black Earths in township 7-6 a decisive factor, in this regard, was the wear and tear the machinery suffered in travelling to and from the fields. On this heavy clay loam, the village street became a sea of mud when it rained, especially with cattle moving about, and traffic soon came to a halt in the resulting morass. Once the street dried the implements were practically shaken to pieces in travelling over the ruts to the fields. The solution adopted was to move on the homesteads.

Some villages continued to exist, and the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* to be farmed, despite the fact that all the farmers were in favour of disbanding, simply because every one dreaded the task of reallocating the lands. Steinbach was an example of this. It continued as a *Gewann* village until 1910, even though there was little incentive for effective farming amidst the weeds which throve in the *Raine*, and because of the waste of time in moving machinery from one field to another. The break up was continuously postponed in Steinbach, but since young people were beginning to move away from the place, to get away from what they described as a backward way of farming, the task was finally undertaken.<sup>19</sup> An equitable redistribution was achieved by requiring a farmer who owned the title to a good quarter section of land to compensate the less fortunate farmers, and so on. In some instances the exchange became so complicated that a piece of property had to be sold, and the redistribution accomplished by apportioning money to ensure that everyone would receive the proper compensation. In Steinbach the redistribution proved to be most acrimonious, and it was an unpleasant task in a number of other villages.

### **Perspective on the Break Up of the Villages**

It is evident that a complex set of processes brought about the break up of the villages in the two Reserves. In North America the Mennonites lost the feeling of affinity with the soil that characterizes the European peasant. In Europe there had been a passion for equal shares of the precious soil, as something to be handed down from generation to generation, but the better conditions for commercial

farming in the West Reserve acted as a catalyst in effecting a psychological change. The *Gewannflur* could not contain extensive, large scale farming, hence many Mennonites abandoned it, willing now to accept the philosophy that there are always better lands further on. In the East Reserve the same feeling developed, but in this case it was because much of the land was useless for anything but subsistence farming, so that individual farmers moved to better land and in the process established themselves on individual homesteads. As a result of these processes some of the ties with the soil of a particular locality, typical of European farming, began to disappear in both Reserves.

It may appear that the Mennonite farmers were quite willing to change their survey system whenever the occasion demanded, and thus were not really too firmly set in their agricultural ways. In moving from the Danzig area to South Russia they adopted a new survey (See Appendix C), and in Canada they started to make a switch soon after they arrived. But a change in settlement pattern was always made for good reasons, and not simply because the Mennonites had a tendency towards change. For instance, it is very significant that when the Mennonites moved to Manitoba they were sufficiently set in their ways, and believed enough in their own settlement pattern, that they deliberately rejected the prevailing land survey. But when various new factors made themselves felt among the farmers, some quite rationally switched to a survey system which seemed after all better adapted to the new conditions. Yet other farmers still continued to favour the *Gewann* village because of its social advantages and because it served as a bulwark to protect their way of life. Some farmers were so attached to the *Gewann* villages that they recreated them in Mexico, when they moved there in the 1920's. The only generalization that we can make is that individual Mennonites or small groups of Mennonites made their own decisions as to the most important value that a survey had for them; it was on a personal basis that they made their selection.

<sup>1</sup> *Canada: Sessional Papers*, 1883, No. 23, Annual Report of the Minister of the Interior, Part 1: 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 1886, No. 10, Annual Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Appendix 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Morden Monitor*, February 26, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with W. Giesbrecht and J. Heide, Blumenfeld, Man., August, 1955. The village of Waldheim was an example.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with J.B. Warkentin, Winkler, Man., August, 1955. The village of Kronsthal is an example.

<sup>6</sup> *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1886, Appendix 6, Evidence of J.Y. Shantz before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization: 34-35.

<sup>7</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, January 14, 1885.

<sup>8</sup> Shantz's evidence cited in footnote 6 indicates that there was considerable borrowing, and my interviews substantiate this.

<sup>9</sup> P.A.C., Department of the Interior, File 3129 (2), A. Walsh to L. Russell, March 2, 1882.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: A. Walsh to L. Russell, August 25, 1882.

<sup>11</sup> *Morden Monitor*, May 8, 1889.

<sup>12</sup> *Manitoba Daily Free Press*, January 14, 1885.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with J. Heide, Blumenfeld, Man., August, 1955.

<sup>14</sup> This paragraph is based on a study of the *Municipal Assessment and Collectors Rolls*, 1881 to 1900, for the area comprising the East Reserve. They are now in the vault of the Hanover Municipal Office, Steinbach, Man. These municipal records are more complete than those for the municipalities comprising the West Reserve, so that it is possible to trace the dispersion of the village lands in this Reserve.

<sup>15</sup> *Hanover Municipality Assessment Roll*, 1891.

<sup>16</sup> This paragraph is largely based on an interview with J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Man., September, 1955.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Interview with K.J.B. Reimer, Steinbach Man., September, 1955. He states that in 1907 there was a considerable migration from the Steinbach area to Alberta.



## Chapter 9

### AGRICULTURAL VILLAGES AFTER THE BREAK UP

#### The Results of the Break Up

When the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* were abandoned in the East Reserve the farmers invariably moved out to the homesteads, instead of staying in the *Strassendorfer* and farming their quarter sections from there. There were good reasons for completely abandoning the *Strassendorfer*. In many villages the farmers had wanted to get away from travelling back and forth to the fields, which would still be necessary if they farmed their quarter sections from the villages. In the southern townships the arable pockets were so small and scattered that they were best farmed by setting up a farmstead right on the property, instead of trying to carry out the improvements from a distance. As a result, most of the villages disappeared without a trace, though a few were transformed into service centres, rather than completely eliminated from the landscape.

Steinbach was an important Mennonite trading centre by 1910, and the break up of the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* eliminated only the farm element in the town; the *Strassendorf* itself continued as a trading centre. In Grunthal, a secondary main street had developed around a cheese factory and a flour mill, just beyond the *Strassendorf*, and that ultimately became the new centre at the expense of the *Strassendorf*, which has lost all semblance of its former character. Bergfeld, of which I have more to say later in this chapter, was abandoned completely in 1923, and stood empty for years. In the northern townships the people who moved on the farms would occasionally build their new homes close together (though each on a separate quarter section) near cross roads, so that they would preserve some of the social advantages of the villages. However the *Strassendorf* itself disappeared. In other districts there has occasionally been a redevelopment of a small trade centre on the road allowances near a former *Strassendorf*, but there is no district connection with the former *Strassendorf*, and the only thing that remains, if anything, is the name. At present not one of the *Strassendorfer* of the East Reserve survives as a functioning agricultural village.

Despite all the centrifugal forces operating in the West Reserve, the binding forces that prevented the nucleated settlements from disintegrating completely were still strong. These consisted of the social advantages of living in a village, and the direct will of the clergy, who for very good reasons of their own wanted to keep the agricultural villages. Tradition was a strong binding element, and was clearly allied with the most powerful restraining force of all, the direct intervention of the church. The *Gewannflur* was not so much the object to be protected, nor the German language which the leaders were also trying to maintain. Both were just essential protective devices which had to be retained to stave off Canadian influences.

In any village the church was a very potent force. (Even today farmers belonging to a church different from that to which the majority in a village belong find life unpleasant, and have told me they are anxious to move – even if only to a quarter section farm in the area.) Yet it was not long before the more dynamic

farmers were willing to question even this restraint. After about 20 years these elements had departed for the quarter sections, where of course the control of the clergy would be further reduced, and outside ideas were bound to infiltrate even more easily among the Mennonites. The amount of control exercised by the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* and the *Bergthal* leaders varied. The *Chortitza-Fürstenland* leaders excommunicated anyone who left the village. The *Bergthal* church was not so strict, and indeed would take in banned *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites. The threat of excommunication is thus an important reason for the survival of more *Chortitza-Fürstenland* villages than *Bergthal* villages.

There were two conflicting processes at work: those tending to break up the *Gewann* villages, and those tending to maintain them. And as can be expected, neither proved completely overwhelming at this time, nor were there any definite stages in the changes that occurred.

The farmers in the very first villages to break up moved directly to their farms. That is, they adopted the Canadian system completely. The villages which broke up in the 1880's in this fashion were either on poor land, or right on the fringes of Mennonite settlement. The *Chortitza-Fürstenland* *Gewann* villages which survived the initial period of break up to about 1895, and there were over 20 of them, generally managed to survive until after World War I. Among the *Bergthal* Mennonites the centrifugal forces continued to operate effectively, and the *Gewann* villages steadily broke up, though a few survived almost until World War I.

Some of these later break ups are of special interest, because in many of the settlements only the *Gewannfluren* were abandoned. The farmers continued to live in the *Strassendörfer* and went out each day to their quarter section farms. The Mennonites were well aware of the social advantages of living in a *Strassendorf*, and the economic disadvantages of the *Gewanne* and *Kagel*.

It is noteworthy that no *Strassendörfer* survived in the East Reserve after the 1920's. In the East Reserve the villages were not protective devices against Canadian assimilation, because there was little danger of Canadian influence in this difficult area. Therefore the *Strassendörfer* had to rise and fall on their own merits as settlement patterns, and ultimately they succumbed to the environment and the land use practices of the Mennonites. In the West Reserve some *Strassendörfer* were broken up because they proved too restrictive for progressive Mennonite grain farmers, and others lasted because the clergy thought that they would be an effective means for protecting their Mennonite society. The conservative leaders might instead have adopted the more positive approach of educating the children, so that they would have a true understanding of and regard for the Mennonite beliefs, and be able to step into the world boldly. But this was not done. The only way the conservative Mennonites knew how to keep their young folk was by restrictive measures, and when this failed they even resorted to an emigration from Canada after World War I. The roots of that migration lie back in the 1880's when the Mennonite leaders decided to retreat into their villages – as much a flight from the world as any of their migrations from country to country. It is unfortunate that no outstanding conservative Mennonite emerged to lead the Mennonites in another direction: to meet Canadian society instead of running away from it. So a divided Mennonite society resulted in the West Reserve; some Mennonites moved

to a homestead and maintained a rural life dependent on the trading centres, and others followed the church leaders and remained in the *Strassendörfer*.<sup>1</sup>

### The West Reserve Villages in the Twentieth Century

The foregoing analysis does not quite complete our discussion of the agricultural villages, because various migrations after World War I caused further changes in the villages of the West Reserve. These changes were not due to any difficulties connected with farming operations within the villages. In 1917 there were 22 villages (Figure 4P) of which at least nine still had *Gewanne* and *Kagel*. Life was tranquil in the villages after the flurry of disintegration of the 1880's and 1890's. The farmers who wanted to move on their homesteads had done so at that time, leaving the conservative Mennonites, content with the villages, to themselves. The villages remained important social centres. Even in 1955 there was little social communion between town and village, and 40 years earlier there was still less. Life in the villages was somewhat paradoxical. Farming was strictly a commercial activity, largely based on the cash crop of wheat, and hence there was an inevitable connection with the outside world. Yet this extended only as far as the elevator and the stores. Apart from that association the village could still be considered a peasant community in South Russia. Even though the administration of road construction and tax collecting had been taken over by the municipality, the municipal government was practically ignored, and the church still helped to maintain discipline in each village.

Their conservative customs never prevented the Mennonites from procuring the latest agricultural equipment, and they even bought gasoline tractors for use on the *Kagel*. Many were also willing to try out new seeds if they were made available, but when it came to adopting new cultural practices the farmers usually balked. They did not have much experience in mixed farming, and therefore ignored its possibilities. Many of them took little care of their land, and neglected to keep it as clean as they should; they were not particularly careful farmers. Occasionally, if a farmer let his *Kagel* deteriorate too much he would be reprimanded by the other farmers in the village, but the whole tenor of agriculture was easy going, and there was no real stimulus to improve cultural practices.

In order to understand the changes which occurred in the villages after World War I we will have to examine some social and educational aspects of Mennonite life and see how they are related to the development of the settlements. Differences existed among the Mennonite groups in the West Reserve with regard to their attitudes towards education. When public schools were introduced into the Reserve in the 1890's most of the *Bergthal* Mennonites accepted them, and only a small minority of this group, called the *Sommerfelders*, continued with the private schools. The *Cbortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonite too refused to accept public schools. The conservative Mennonites adopted this stand because they felt that they would lose their hold over the young people if they were allowed to get too ample an education. All attempts by the Department of Education to improve standards in the private schools ended in failure, and some Mennonite communities that had adopted public schools even returned to private schools over such issues as flying the Union Jack over the public school, which the Manitoba government had made compulsory in 1907.

Over issues such as these, the conservative Mennonites began to debate whether Canada was a suitable home, and events associated with World War I confirmed their doubts. On March 10, 1916 a new School Attendance Act was passed in Manitoba whereby English was made the sole language of instruction in all the public schools in the province, and measures were introduced to see that the regulations were followed. Private schools were condemned and closed if they did not measure up to the standards prescribed by the Department of Education, and to replace them public schools had to be organized. The conservative Mennonites refused to send their children to public schools; many parents were fined, and a few were even jailed over this issue. Other issues rose directly out of the war. In 1917 the Dominion Elections Act was passed disenfranchising all conscientious objectors, and by Order-in-Council in 1919, further migration of Mennonites to Canada was prohibited. Thus the Manitoba Mennonites became apprehensive about the attitude of the Canadian government toward them, despite the fact that their rights to military exemption had not been infringed during the war. The trouble over the schools, and over conscientious objection during the war was a warning to the conservative Mennonites. In 1920 they definitely began to look about for a new land to which they could migrate.

There were substantial economic as well as ideological reasons behind the desire to migrate. In the 1920's the Mennonites were still growing wheat, which meant extensive farming, and yet a large number of people (many of them poor) were living in the Reserve. The conservative Mennonites were limited in their agricultural foresight, and did not want to learn intensive and improved farming techniques from government agricultural advisers; therefore migration seemed a promising solution for their economic troubles as well as for their ideological difficulties.

The Mennonites enquired in many places; among them Quebec, the United States, Argentina, Mexico and Paraguay. Eventually they chose the latter two countries because both countries would guarantee their demands.

About 6,500 Mennonites left Canada in the 1920's. There were about 3,200 *Chortitza-Fürstenland* and 600 *Sommerfelder* Mennonites from the West Reserve (a few of the last mentioned were from east of the Red River), and 2,700 conservative Mennonites from Saskatchewan. The migration to the states of Chihuahua and Durango in Mexico began in 1922 and continued strong until 1924. In the late 1920's about 1,800 settlers went to Paraguay, where a settlement was being established by Mennonite refugees from Russia.

In the early 1920's the Manitoba emigrants had no trouble disposing of their land at a good price, especially to their brethren (about 500 people) who had elected to stay behind and who wanted to enlarge their holdings. One whole village, Blumenort, was sold to a colony of Hutterites in 1922, and much land was sold to speculators from the trading centres. By the mid 1920's it was proving more difficult to dispose of the land profitably as wheat prices dropped, but the problem was solved when another migration of Mennonites from Russia started in 1923, the year the Order-in-Council against the migration of Mennonites to Canada was changed. In the next seven years, approximately 10,000 of these Mennonites (called *Russländer*) settled in Manitoba. Many took over the lands left behind by the emigres and filled the partial vacuum that was threatening to develop.



The *Russländer* Mennonites had a different cultural background than the Manitoba Mennonites. They were descended from the progressive Mennonites who had remained in Russia in the 1870's, and they had become a well educated group in Russia, with a professional core of teachers and doctors, and even a number of commercial men and factory owners. They had a positive attitude to the world, compared to the negative tendency to withdraw from society shown by many of the Manitoba Mennonites. By 1930 the switch was complete; all except about 500 of the conservative Mennonites had left Manitoba, and been replaced by *Russländer* Mennonites.

These migrations are an important landmark in the development of the Mennonite landscape, because they marked the end of the *Gewannfluren* in Canada. Blumenort, Neuhorst, Reinland, Blumenfeld, Hochfeld, Friedensfeld, Chortitz, Osterwick, and Reinfeld had continued the *Gewannflur* until the migration, and a few other villages had maintained the *Fluren* in modified form. The last of the *Fluren* was abandoned in 1923 in Blumenfeld; the open field system had been in operation for 48 years in the West Reserve.

The Mennonites had farmed with fair success in the *Fluren*, even though their field practices left much to be desired and diminished the productivity of the land. The *Raine* became unmanageable because they had grown into great ridges that wasted a great deal of land in addition to harbouring weeds and insects. In the war years enormous damage was incurred from insects living in these weed infested ridges, which ran every 200 feet or so through the *Gewanne*, and the problem almost constituted a local agricultural crisis. Naturally the *Raine* were not an inherent problem of the *Gewannfluren*, but only the most important manifestation of the way some of the farmers were mistreating the land. Farmers who bought land from the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites after the migration informed me that some of these farmers were getting only 10 to 11 bu. of wheat per acre just before they left due to successive croppings, poor field practices and the weed problem.<sup>2</sup>

It proved hard work to turn the *Gewannfluren* into quarter section fields. Pastures when broken up by the new owners gave excellent crops, but the *Kagel* and *Raine* proved to be miserable farm land for years. It was impossible to work down the higher *Raine* with horse drawn implements, and farmers had to use tractor drawn equipment, especially the one-way, to accomplish the job. A few even used bull-dozers on the very large *Raine*. For years they had to be very careful when working in these fields to ensure that they did not upset their tractors. Farmers put fertilizer on the *Kagel*, grew sweet clover, fallowed the land faithfully, and finally they managed to re-habilitate the land. Some of the *Raine* are still susceptible to blowing and have to be specially cultivated. Yet farmers maintain that in dry years it is quite noticeable that the crops on the former *Raine* are better because of their accumulation of top soil.

Even though the *Gewanne* were all abandoned, the villages still remained in the hands of the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites who had chosen not to migrate. At first a few *Russländer* farmers occupied the vacant houses in the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* villages, but they left as soon as possible for the farm because there was active hostility between the two groups. The villages did not remain half empty though, because during the 1930's some 500 to 750 penniless *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites returned from Mexico, and obtained work as agricultural labourers on the large farms of the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* farmers who had remained behind.

On the whole the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites carried on their former mode of life in the villages to the south of Winkler. They adapted themselves to the public school system, and to modern machinery, and even bought cars and radios, but these changes did not seem to have much effect on the community. The bolder spirits always left and their leavening influence was lost to the community, so that even today an old world, patriarchal atmosphere still prevails in each village.

There is some variation in the style of buildings among the 17 villages still remaining. From west to east they are: Chortitz, Osterwick, Schanzenfeld, Hochfeld, Blumenfeld, Reinfeld, Neuenberg, Friedensruh, Reinland, Gnadenthal, Rosengart, Schoenwiese, Rosenort, Blumenort, Neuhorst, Neuberghthal, and Sommerfeld (Figure 4P). Most of the buildings in these villages date back to before World War I and naturally reflect the taste of the people living in them at that time.

In the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* villages most of the houses and barns were connected end to end. The pitches of the roofs of the house and barn were generally the same, although occasionally that of the barn was somewhat less. Generally, also, the ridge poles of the house and barn were equally high, but there were deviations, and occasionally the ridge pole of the barn was slightly higher by about six to twelve inches. Only very rarely was the ridge pole of the house higher.

There was a greater variety of house designs among the *Bergthal* Mennonites (Figure 22). In Neuberghthal, pre-World War I houses were built in the residential styles popular in the trading centres at the time, except, of course, that the barns were attached to the residences. Most of the houses were of the simple gable design, often two stories high, with dormer windows upstairs, and frequently a porch with a balcony and railings attached. One house in Neuberghthal attached to a barn is a square two storied building with a mansard roof. Alt-Altona is another village that has a bizarre appearance today. Its houses, which are attached to their barns, have fret work in the gables and along the ridge poles.

The way in which the house and barn were attached varied considerably in the *Bergthal* villages. Originally the house and barn were in a line, as has already been explained. After some years (probably during the 1890's) the long axis of the house was placed at right angles to the long axis of the barn in some villages (Plate 14-3). Eventually every conceivable way of joining the two was used, and it became obviously just a matter of personal taste. Figure 22 shows some of the arrangements found in the Reserve in 1955. Most of them exist only in the *Bergthal* villages.

One quirk of fate about the villages remaining in the West Reserve should be mentioned. The open field system was finally done away with after it had been used for 48 years in growing commercial grain. The older men still remember this and are unanimous in approving the change from the *Kagel*. However, it is interesting that the younger *Chortitza-Fürstenland* Mennonites, who are using the latest machinery to grow crops such as beets, beans, peas, sun-flowers and tomatoes, sometimes maintain that the open field system would be admirable for present day crops. This may be true, because for such crops the land must be intensely farmed and fertilized and often kept clean by hand, and for this the open field system would be well suited. It takes only a matter of minutes to travel to distant fields with modern tractors, so that there is little doubt that the open field system disappeared just before it could really have been used to full advantage. As for grain farming from the *Strassendörfer*, today it is carried out quite efficiently in the *Bergthal* villages close to Altona.

## PLATE 13



1. Village street of Hoffnungsfeld; village disintegrated in 1889. One of the few villages which had planted box elders instead of cottonwoods. During the 1880's Hoffnungsfeld had the reputation of being the most beautiful village in the Reserve. It has a beautiful location just above an Agassiz Beach, with a deep creek (Hespeler Coulee) at the far end of the street.



2. Hoffnungsfeld. View of the back of the Hauskagel, showing how 3-4' of dust have accumulated at the back of the Hauskagel which were kept in grass and therefore were not susceptible to blowing. The pasture is now being plowed up. This picture shows the kind of damage which was done to the light farm lands of the area by careless cultural practices.



3. Gnadenfeld. The tall cottonwoods lining the village street are starting to go, and here they are only left at the far end of the villages. Smaller trees are being planted on the yards. Gnadenfeld is noted for its well kept fences, and its neat, well painted houses.



4. Village street of Blumenfeld. Probably the best preserved of all the Mennonite villages. Note the neat fences.

## PLATE 14



1. Oldest house in Blumenfeld – built in either 1877 or 1878. Dove tailed corners; windows are small and square. Barn has long since been demolished, but the house was lived in until 1945.



2. "Classic" Mennonite house and barn, built at the turn of the century in Neuborst. Note: shutters, barn door, and the barn windows. Pitch of roof is not very steep because wooden shingles were used. Note flower garden and orchard in front yard. Pediments above the windows are the one embellishment.

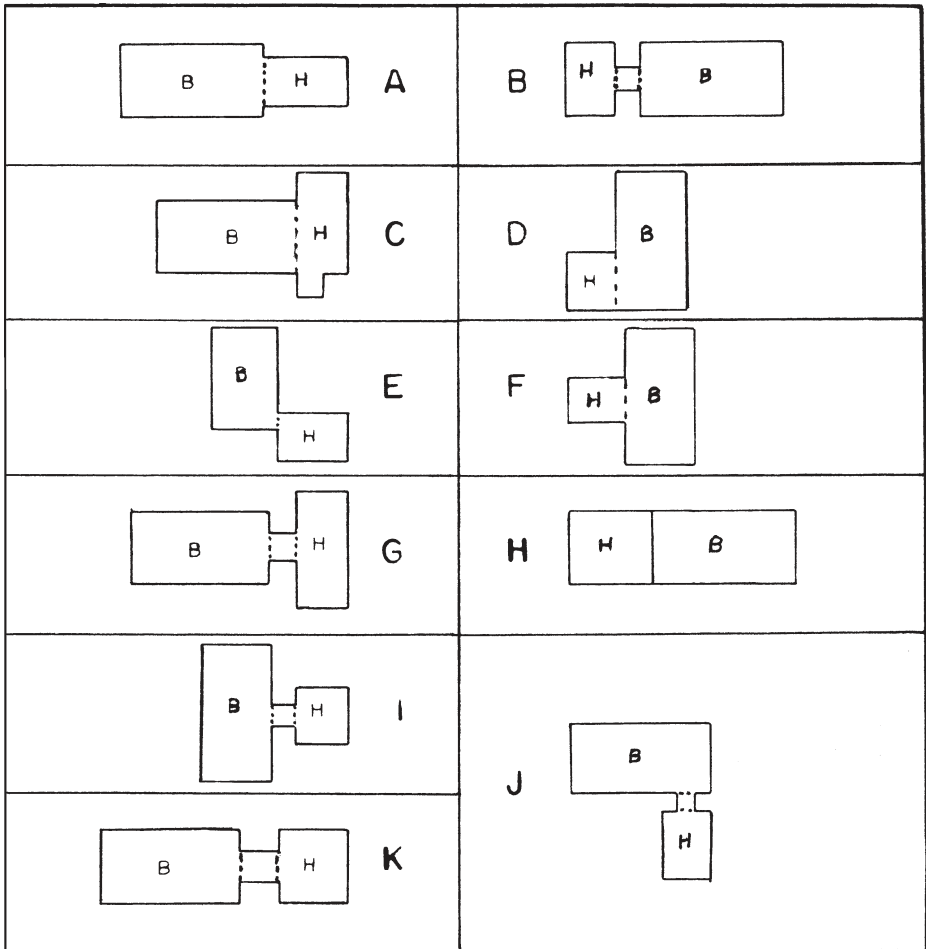


3. Sommerfeld; showing the long axis of the house perpendicular to the land axis of the barn. Every house in Sommerfeld is oriented this way – probably for hygienic reasons. Shutters are a conspicuous feature of the Mennonite house. The connecting passage between the house and barn is well shown. Note the size of the barn door now that bay is hoisted into the loft via the gable.



4. Some Mennonites still like the convenience of having their house and barn together. This combination was built in the 1950's in Reinland, but it is the rare exception – even in the villages.

Figure 22



WEST RESERVE

ARRANGEMENTS : HOUSE AND BARN

A - MOST COMMON

B - POPULAR WITH BERGTHALERS - FEW FÜRSTENLANDERS

C - K - FOUND ONLY IN BERGTHALER DÖRFER

J - OCCASIONALLY SEEN - ESPECIALLY IN GNADENTHAL

K - POPULAR AT PRESENT

H - HOUSE

B - BARN

30'

### Bergfeld, East Reserve

Very little evidence of the *Gewann* villages can be found in the East Reserve today. Steinbach, for instance, has two old houses left, practically hidden by the modern town (Plate 6-1);<sup>3</sup> Grunthal has three houses, and on each of about a dozen village sites there is still one of the old houses remaining (Plate 15-2). In no case has a whole *Gewann* village been left intact. Least touched is Bergfeld (often called Old Barkfield) in township 5-5, where much evidence of the village and the open field system can still be seen. It is worth analyzing the open field system in this village because it offers the last evidence of it in Canada.

Plate 1P shows the section of land on which the village is located. The original Bergfeld *Flur*, when the village was established in 1875, comprised sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 17, and three-quarters of 18 in the southwest corner of the Reserve. The village was located on section 7. A Lake Agassiz beach ridge, about ten feet above the countryside, trends roughly northward through the eastern side of section 7. A small creek, rising in a boggy area to the southeast, flows northeastward through section 7, and joins Joubert Creek, the largest and most beautiful stream in the Reserve, in section 18. Bergfeld was laid out this tributary creek (Plate 3-2).

Section 7 consists of sandy outwash materials deposited on reworked till, and the surface textures are dominantly fine sandy loams. The drainage is adequate, but a glance at the air photograph shows how the beach created a swamp by retarding the drainage in the southeast. Sections 4, 5 and 6 are all poorly drained, and also stonier than section 7. Sections 17 and 18 resemble section 7, but they have been broken up by the channel and flood plain of Joubert Creek, which is two hundred yards wide at places.

This village has probably the most scenic location in the Reserve. When the Mennonites first arrived in 1875 poplar woods and willow brush covered most of the area, except for the muskeg (visible on the photograph) and for open prairie on the beach. Joubert Creek and one of the largest beach ridges in the Reserve meet in section 18 to produce the maximum local relief found in the Reserve—about 50 feet. Tall poplars, willows and a dense underbrush cover the river valley, but on the gravelly banks and beaches beyond the valley, bur oak groves give a park-like aspect to the landscape. The site of Bergfeld, just to the south, is a beauty spot itself. A lazy meandering creek, grassed right through its channel, practically loses itself in what is now the front pasture (Plate 3-2), and the hedges growing on the *Raine*, visible in the air photograph, give an attractive formal appearance to the area. The grey buildings in the background blend unobtrusively into the scene. The setting is completed by the gentle rise of the beach to the east, and by the woods to the north and south.

It was only after considerable deliberation that the village was founded on this site, because it was obvious that the terrain would not permit extensive grain cultivation. The first homestead claim in Bergfeld was filed in 1875, but the village was not fully established until two years later, when there were 23 farmers in Bergfeld. The maximum population of the village was attained in 1881, when there were 126 people living in Bergfeld, with all 23 families still there.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the land in the *Flur* was too wet for farming, but the Mennonites did use the light, easily blown soils in section 7, near the village, for cropping. Three



PLATE 15



1. Mennonite style house in 31-5-5E; not the site of a former village. Although the land has been cleared there is no cultivation because the land is too stony. Immediately to the west the Steinbach Clays start and cultivation begins – in De Salaberry Municipality!



2. Lichtenau village, 2 miles west of Steinbach. Most of the cleared land is pasture.



3. When some of the Bergthaler Mennonites moved their farms from the villages in the late 1890's and early 1900's they still built house and barn together, but adapted the current farm house styles, complete with ginger bread. Most of these buildings are in the N.W. 1/4 of 7-6E, and in the N.E. 1/4 of 7-5E.



4. Deteriorating "mansion". Built on the site of the village of Schoenwiese in 1917 after the village broke up. Most impressive of the old houses in the East Reserve, but the only refinement above the more familiar cottage style is that it has a porch and a balcony.

hundred and eight acres of land were cultivated in 1881 (an average of 13 acres per farmer) in parcels ranging from 8 – 25 acres in size.

Originally the farm buildings were all on the northeast side of the village street, so that the lots ran down to the creek. Through the years the younger people settled on the opposite side, so that ultimately both sides had buildings.<sup>5</sup>

There were only two *Gewanne* in Bergfeld, one on either side of the village street. The average width of the *Kagel* was 200 feet, though there were a few of 100 feet width next to the beach. The distance the *Kagel* were cleared towards the southwest can be seen on the air photograph, indicating the extent to which farmers of varying ambition managed to clear their land. Although the *Flur* was laid out in *Gewanne*, the actual practice was to farm as if this was a *Waldufendorf*, because each farmer's arable fields extended out from his lot, and he cleared his land as far as possible, or as far as he thought necessary to produce enough to make a living. This is readily seen in the *Kagel* north of the village, which extend towards the Joubert. A few farmers carried the *Kagel* to the other side of the river, while others stopped short of the bank. Only the *Gewanne* shown on the air photograph, about 1/8 of the *Flur*, were cultivated. The farmers did not attempt to subdivide the rest of the land into meadow or hay *Gewanne*, since there was abundant hay in the surrounding area, both on and off the *Flur*.

By 1891 some of the farmers had given up, the population was 100, and the number of farmers had dropped to 15.<sup>6</sup> Five hundred and ten acres were cultivated, an average of 34 acres per farmer, with the largest farmer tilling 60 acres. (Probably the large landowner had bought another farmer's holding.) Oxen were still the favoured work animal in Bergfeld; there were 52 oxen, but only 20 horses.

Grain growing was obviously not a successful occupation in this area, so the farmers of Bergfeld went into mixed farming with a will.<sup>7</sup> There was plenty of hay and meadow for livestock, so the farmers raised cattle and poultry, and brought butter, meat and eggs to market.

Instead of concentrating on cereals on such a limited amount of arable land, they grew peas, beans, onions, turnips, and potatoes. For these they found a ready sale in Winnipeg. They also supplied food to many of the French Canadians and *Metis* living on the Rat River to the west. Certainly no surpluses were being produced, but at least they survived.

This was the last village in the Reserve to function on the open field system. It existed until 1923, and the last crop was taken off in 1924. At that time there were 12 farmers in Bergfeld. The *Kagel* had become consolidated and the largest operator owned eight of them. Bergfeld was broken up when the conservative Mennonites living in this village decided to migrate to Mexico, although as eventually transpired they only settled in other parts of the Reserve. A large trust company took over the village lands in 1923 as an investment, but found it could not sell the land again until 1937, when the present owner, Mr. George Robertson, bought it and converted it into a ranch.<sup>8</sup> Since most of the land is not cultivated, but used for pasture, the original field patterns are still almost as clear as they were in 1924. Some crops are being grown, however, and in the southeast the *Raine* are partially obscured where they have been ploughed down. Since the photograph was taken in 1946, these fields have been continuously cultivated and the *Raine* have been



PLATE 16



1. Bergfeld: Kagel south of village street. Photograph was taken from the top of a Rain. Six Raine are visible. The Kagel are 200 feet wide. Trees in the background are the gravel beach from which the next picture was taken.



2. View of Kagel near the beach. Oak and poplar have invaded the Raine nearest the beach. The two closest Kagel are 100 feet wide each – the others are all 200 feet in width.



3. Picture taken from the centre of a Kagel, down the length of a field, showing how blown soil has accumulated on a Rain, and how bushes have invaded it. The house in the background is located on the village street.



4. Bergfeld: cellar of a dismantled house. The cellar is three feet deep and lined with field stones.

(Note – these picture should be studied together with the air photograph of Bergfeld.)

completely obliterated in that portion of the farm.

The photographs in Plates 3, 4, 6, 7, and 16 show what this farm looked like in 1955. As previously noted, the *Kagel* are about 200 feet wide. The *Raine* are gently rounded ridges, about 39 feet wide and two feet high. Actually the ground begins to rise about 40 to 60 feet from each *Rain*, so that every *Kagel* has the appearance of a long shallow trough. Bushes and even oak trees have invaded some of the *Raine*, and the ridges which are formed may be up to three or four feet above the *Kagel*. People who lived in Bergfeld before it was broken up, say that in dry summers an enormous amount of dust was picked up from the fields on windy days. Most of the dust would be blown completely away, but some would always lodge in the *Raine*, gradually building them higher. The effect of the light soil is also seen in the village street, which is about one and one half to two feet below the level of the lots on either side (Plate 4-1), because after the sod was cut up by traffic the dust was scoured away.

This is by far the best example of the open field system of farming left in Manitoba, and the danger is that it may disappear because it won't take many years for the *Kagel* and *Raine* to be obliterated if the fields are brought under cultivation. This village also contains the best remaining examples of the Mennonite style of house built by the Red River settlement construction methods, but these are also disappearing. By 1955 all but three had been dismantled for use as firewood or for rebuilding into storage sheds.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This analysis was written in 1956. My conclusions have been reinforced by my field work in 1959 among the Mennonites in Mexico who migrated there from the West Reserve in 1922-28.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with J.R. Walkof, Winkler, Manitoba, August, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> The one good remaining example in Steinbach was bulldozed on May 18, 1960 to make space for a used car lot.

<sup>4</sup> *Hespeler and Hanover Municipality Assessment Roll*, 1881.

<sup>5</sup> Most of the information on Bergfeld was obtained from interviews with Mrs. C.T. Kroeker, Steinbach, Man., in September, 1955. She lived in Bergfeld for many years.

<sup>6</sup> *Hanover Municipality Assessment Roll*, 1891.

<sup>7</sup> That grain was not important is evident from the fact that the farmers in Bergfeld were still using a horse-powered threshing machine in 1899.

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Robertson died in 1956 and the farm has been sold to another livestock raiser.

<sup>9</sup> In 1960 only two were left.

## Chapter 10

### ROADS 1880-1955

#### East Reserve

The first road system in the Reserve has been described in Chapter 6. In modern terminology these roads would have been designated "trunk highways" because of their function, though their condition would not have warranted the term. These trunk highways all followed natural roadways, usually ancient Lake Agassiz beach ridges or off shore bars. They played an important part in the development of the Reserve; the Ridge Road for example, led from the southern nucleus of Mennonite settlement directly to Steinbach, giving Steinbach a considerable advantage over the other villages. Niverville on the other hand was bypassed by the natural roadways, which tended to lead traffic past Niverville directly to Winnipeg.

Lesser roads leading into these main highways were seldom constructed. In the horse, buggy, and wagon days good road beds were not essential, and cross country travel from a farm to the nearest highway was usually quite easy.

The early roads also certainly influenced the settlement pattern, especially in the south, where a number of villages were built right on the Ridge Road or in direct communication with it. Even so communications were very poor in this area, and the whole district remained backward, not only because of the conservatism of the Mennonites and the poor land, but also because of the transportation barrier which kept farmers isolated, and permitted little contact with the outside world, or even with fellow Mennonites.

The first mention of money invested on roads in the Reserve occurs in the Annual Report of the Manitoba Department of Public Works for 1882.<sup>1</sup> For many years road work consisted merely of facilitating travel on the trails already in existence by filling in low spots and building wooden bridges where necessary. Not until 1893 was some work undertaken on the road allowances.<sup>2</sup> There is little information available on what was done, but it is known that a considerable amount of work was performed on the Steinbach to La Broquerie road after 1900 so that the Mennonites were afforded easier access to the railway. Also a high grade was built across a large bog on the range line between Hanover and La Broquerie Municipalities to the Settlement of Friedensfeld, so that the Lutherans' connections to Steinbach were improved. But the Ukrainians received little help of this nature.

Statute labour was used to build roads until 1914, when the Hanover Municipality passed a By-law providing for taxation instead of statute labour in townships 7-4 and 7-5. The other townships, except 7-6, did not have a sufficiently sound tax base to be able to do this, nor were their road problems as great. That same year the Council passed a resolution resolving to buy a road grader. Furthermore the Reeve was empowered to examine certain road allowances in township 5-6 on which the Ukrainians had requested road work. Changes thus were finally starting in the road policy of Hanover, and in 1914 the Municipality spent \$7,051.00 on roads.<sup>3</sup>

Road appropriations usually did not go so high, the normal appropriation was close to \$500 per township per year, with the highest proportion of the money going to the northern townships, rather than to the poor southern townships which needed the roads the most. Farmers were still required to do a considerable portion of the road work (except in townships 7-4 and 7-5)-both at the time of construction and later when the road bed had to be maintained. In 1926 Hanover was divided into 17 road beats.<sup>4</sup> They were smaller in the north than in the south, and their boundaries approximately indicate the main lines of travel. Near Niverville, for instance, the boundaries were aligned east-west, indicating that the roads were leading towards Niverville, whereas in the northern parts of townships 7-5 and 7-6, they were in a north-south line, leading both to Winnipeg and Steinbach. In townships 5 and 6 the road beats were aligned so that the roads were directed towards Steinbach.

Difficulties were often encountered in building roads along the allowances. When the terrain on the allowance proved simply too difficult, the municipality purchased land from the adjoining farmers and a detour was built. Many of these detours are now being eliminated with the use of modern machinery. In 1929 a "Caterpillar" tractor was hired to construct grades, and a new era in road building seemed about to begin.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately the depression and the war intervened so that it was not until 1945 that widespread improvements were made, in local roads.

As motor transportation became more important, emphasis was placed on the problem of highways. Until about 1920 Hanover had concerned itself mainly with local roads, but it became obvious that since the municipality did not have any railway passing through it, highways would be of great importance.

The Manitoba Good Roads Act was passed in 1919 and the first map showing the highway system planned for Manitoba was included in a Manitoba submission to the Dominion government in 1920 for aid in developing a provincial highways system<sup>6</sup> (Figure 5P-1). The historic Dawson Road was followed from Winnipeg to Ste. Anne, from there the route went south to Giroux, and then to Steinbach and via the Ridge Road to Grunthal and St. Malo. But in actual fact in 1920 the Mennonites were still using their old cross country trails to Winnipeg, proceeding from Steinbach to Chortitz and then north by trail to Isle des Chenes and then to Winnipeg. The 1920 map also shows a trunk route to Sprague and then south to the United States. This was the plan for the short route from Winnipeg to Duluth, and agitation for it continued from about 1910 until 1955 when it was completed.

Figure 5P-2, derived from the *Automobile Road Guide to Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, 1922*, shows a more realistic proposal. The route from Steinbach to Winnipeg shows the many jogs which commonly had to be made from one road allowance to another until adequate trunk highways were established. The Winnipeg-Niverville-St. Pierre road partly follows the general route along which H.Y. Hind travelled in 1858. Sometimes the road was built on road allowances, sometimes on old lake Agassiz beaches. The road was abandoned as a trunk route in 1937 after the Piney Highway was completed.

In 1928 the first *Manitoba Provincial Trunk Highway Map* was published (Figure 5P-3). The map shows how important the road allowances and even the Ridge Road were as routes. It also shows the first stretch of gravel road in the Reserve;

which went west from Giroux. By 1929 important changes had taken place, and the Dawson Road was gravelled between Winnipeg and Ste. Anne. Steinbach transfers, instead of travelling to Winnipeg via the section roads and Isle des Chenes, now travelled north to Ste. Anne and then used the Dawson Road, because trunk transportation was becoming of increasing importance. In 1930 the Hanover Council passed a resolution, resolving to construct a road to the northern boundary of the municipality from Steinbach, under the terms of the Good Roads Act, hoping that it would become part of a trunk highway system. The provincial government did not approve because they had another scheme underway by this time, the Piney Highway to Southeastern Manitoba through Steinbach.

In 1930 arrangements were completed to start construction of the Piney Highway as a joint relief project of the provincial government and the municipalities along the route. The road was to run from Winnipeg to Isle des Chenes, then along the range line to the township line between townships 6 and 7, east along the township line to Steinbach, and then through La Broquerie to Marchand and eventually to the United States Boundary. Work was commenced in the summer of 1931, and the road was in use by 1935, although graveling was not completed until a few years later.

Changes were taking place elsewhere in the Reserve as well. In 1932 a road was graded south of Kleefeld, affording better connections into township 5-5 to Grunthal, and breaking local dependence on the Ridge Road (Figure 5P-5). In 1934 Steinbach for the first time had a direct connection with Sarto; and Sarto, Grunthal, and Kleefeld were connected. (Figure 5P-6B).

From 1934 until the end of World War II there were very few changes in the main road system of Hanover, but section roads were built in various parts of the municipality, though the southern townships got less than their share of the road work. (The Municipal Council even bought land deliberately at tax sales during the 1930's, to avoid building roads, because it was cheaper to hold the land than to allow farmers to purchase it and then demand that roads be built.) The first road south to the Pansy area was not constructed until 1939; before that all the Ukrainian traffic from that district had gone cross country to Grunthal.

Many of the old trails were falling into disuse in the 1930's, as new section roads were built. In 1936 farmers who owned the land through which the Ridge Road passed began to petition to have the road closed. Much of the road remained open until 1957 despite their pleas, but by 1958 all of it had been replaced by section roads.

After the war, road building began in earnest. Roads were essential for the well being of the Reserve because the farmers had livestock and poultry to sell, and to have a reliable way of getting them to market. The *Carillon News* states in 1947:

There has been no constructive program of road building in this township [5-6] during the last 30 years...people not being able to market their product have reverted to a semi-primitive herding of cattle for their living - ...large numbers of young people are leaving, the area is in a rut.<sup>7</sup>

But after a decade of hard work an adequate network of roads was established so that most of the farmers in the Reserve are now able to get to the trading centres (Figure 23). Even today, however, the northern townships have more and better

roads than those in the south (Table 11). This situation has been changing in recent years as more and more work is being done in the southern townships to try and bring the roads up to the standard of those in the north. Until 1954 there were still a few farms in township 4-6 which could only be reached by horse and buggy, but by 1955 roads had been put through everywhere.

**Table 11**  
**Earth and Gravel Roads – Hanover – 1955**

<u>Township</u>	<u>Earth Roads</u>	<u>Gravel Roads</u>	<u>To be Built in 1955</u>
7-4	36 miles	17 miles	8 miles
7-5	33	26	3
7-6	14	36	4
6-5	14	19	6
6-6	26	16	5
5-5	26	8	10
5-6	28	5	5
<u>4-6</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>
	201	127	47

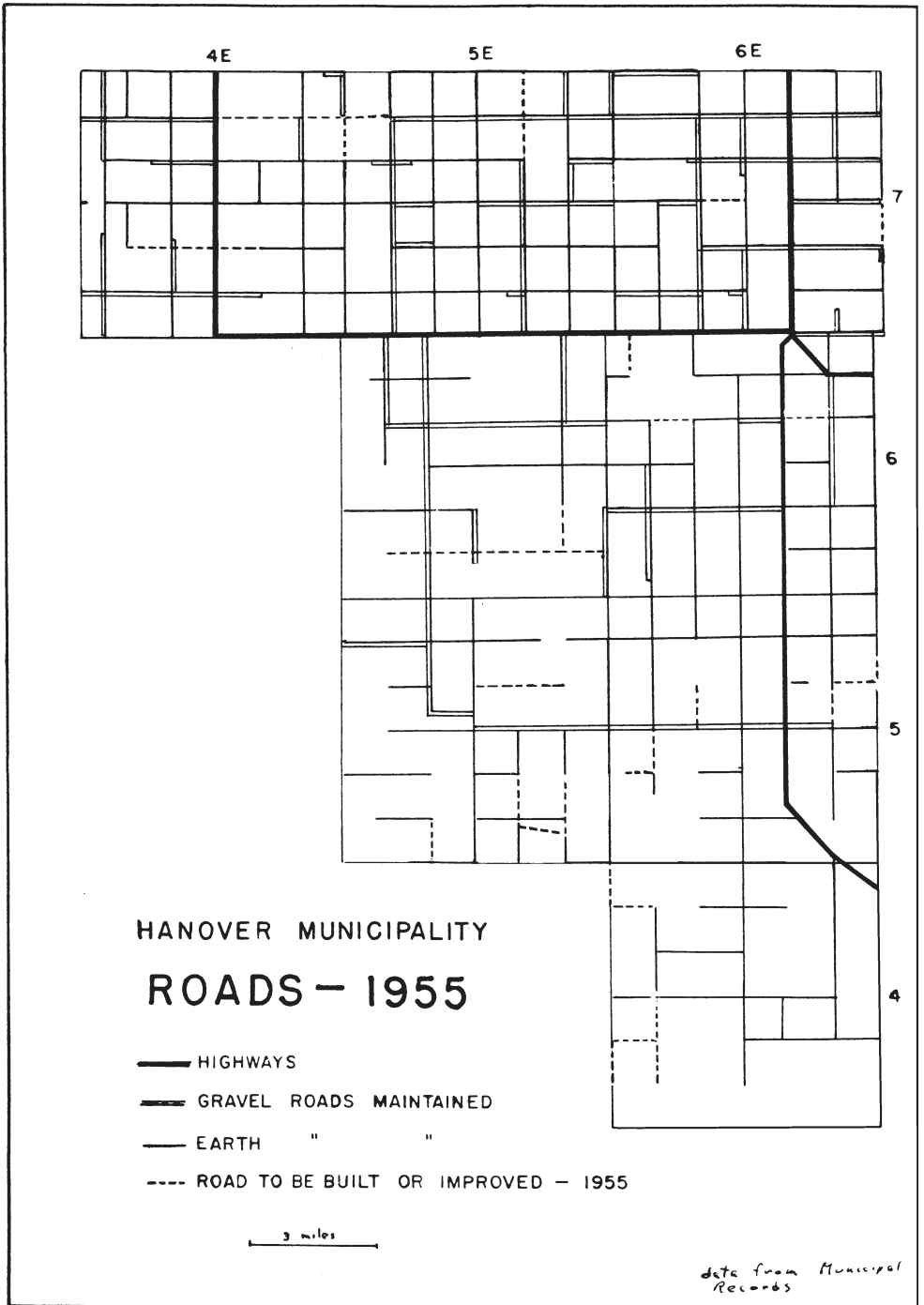
(Data obtained from Hanover Municipal Clerk, Steinbach, 1955.  
Highways are not included.)

New trunk highways were constructed in Manitoba after World War II. Steinbach was connected to Winnipeg only by the gravelled Piney Highway until 1949, when a long awaited trunk highway (P.T.H. No. 12) through Ste. Anne offered an alternative route (Figure 24). Niverville was now getting market connections into an area that it had not been able to tap in its early years.

P.T.H. No. 12 was continued south of Steinbach in 1950 and 1951. It provided Sarto district with an all weather gravel road to Steinbach, and served farms which had been practically isolated for 50 years. In La Broquerie Municipality thousands of acres of farm land were sold once roads were finally brought to the area. Another P.T.H. was designated in 1952. This was P.T.H. No. 59 passing through the centre of township 7-4 from Winnipeg to St. Pierre and then south. Hanover then had a provincial trunk highway on either side of it, both leading to Winnipeg, and with fairly good connecting links between them every six miles or so (Figure 24).

Since Hanover is not directly served by a railway it did not take long for the Mennonites to take advantage of trunk transportation. The first public service vehicle (P.S.V) was licensed in Steinbach in 1922, well before the first transfers were operating in the West Reserve. In 1923 Penners Transfer, still the largest in South-eastern Manitoba, was founded in Steinbach, and regular truck connections were established between Winnipeg and the Reserve. In 1955 there were 45 public service vehicles licensed to serve the Reserve.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 23





## PLATE 17



1. This road, on the north side of 20-6-6E on Pelan Stony soil, was quite passable after a heavy rain even though it is not gravelled. Has a firm road base formed of the gravelly soil. On this same morning roads to the north of Steinbach on the Blackearth soils were impassable. Bush on the left; recently cleared land on right.



2. Shallow soil profile in 30-4-6E. Just a shallow cut is required for the ditch because Joubert Creek is close by and therefore the drainage is good.



3. Difficulties of road building on the north side of 6-5-6E. Boulders of all sizes are abundant.



4. Raising the grade against spring flooding in 24-5-6E. Shows why so much of the land is used for pasture in the southern part of the East Reserve – the rocks were removed from just below the surface of the smooth sod. In this area one Lake Agassiz beach follows another producing these terrain conditions.

### West Reserve

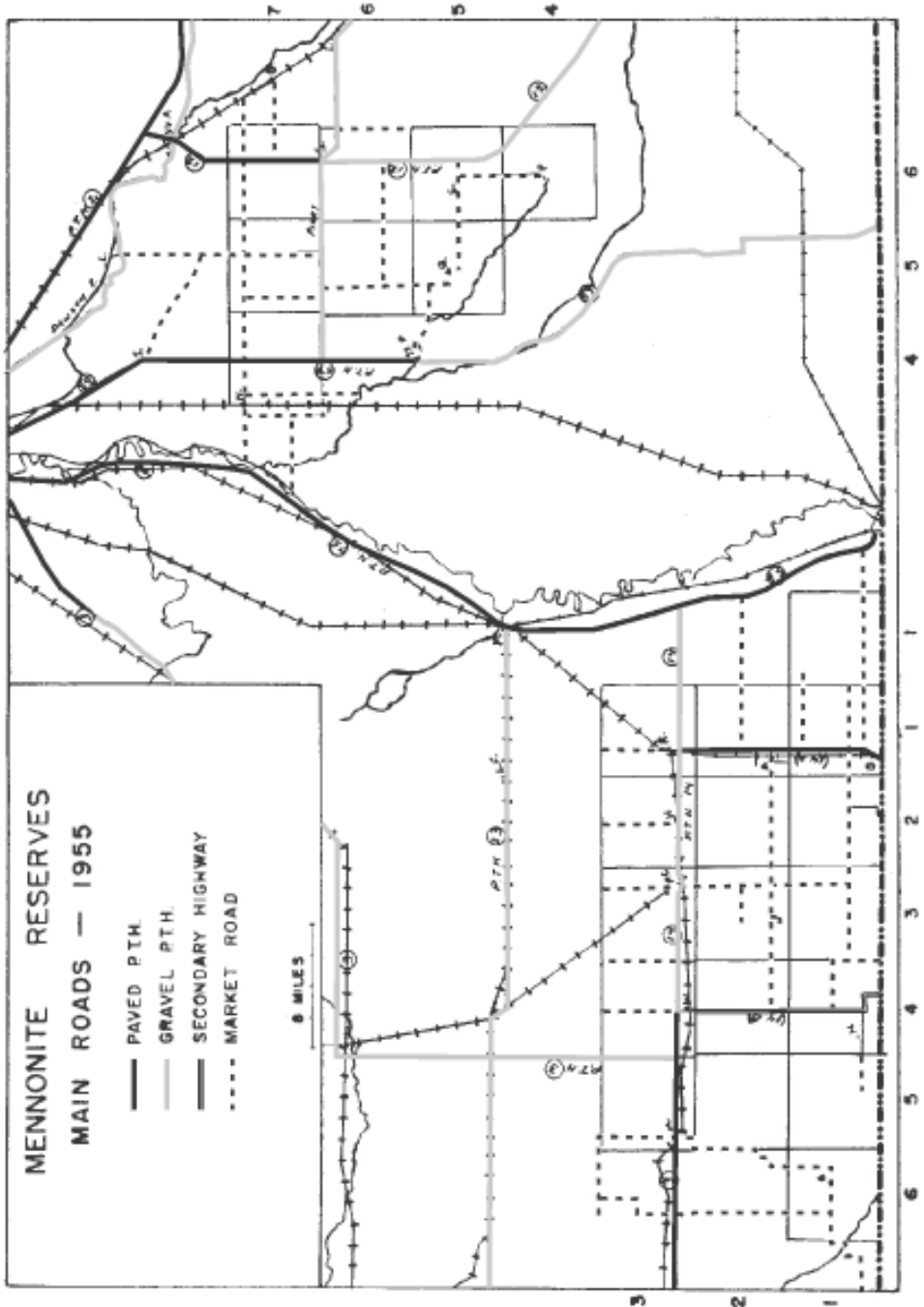
The first important trail, the Post Road, had fallen into disuse as a colonization route after 1883, but it was still used within the West Reserve itself after that date. On the light soils in Rhineland Municipality the villages were directly linked by trails that completely ignored the road allowances. A regular line of travel was more or less maintained between villages but a well defined road was not necessarily impressed upon the landscape, since the trails were not graded. The farmers preferred to detour around low spots rather than grade them. If a trail was so cut up by deep ruts that travel was difficult in wet weather, another path to one side was selected; the road could become very wide and might be moved over completely. It was not quite as simple to produce roads on the heavier soils of Douglas. Here the villages had not been established as independently of the rectangular survey; the road allowances were respected from the beginning, and only a few cross country trails developed. Some grading was done here and a few bridges were built, but only where expedient, not as a part of a fully planned road system.

After municipal government began to function in 1884 increasing attention was given to the problem of roads. All the work was done by statute labour. In 1885, a land assessment of under \$250.00 meant that one day of statute labour had to be performed; \$250.00 to \$500.00 meant two days; \$500.00 to \$1000.00, three days and for every \$500.00 above this another two days labour.<sup>9</sup> All labour was performed between March 1 and September 1 under the direct supervision of the pathmaster. The farmers of each village performed their statute labour in common, and usually they could work on roads which would benefit the village (except on the village street), though this had to be approved by the municipality.

After 1885 the break up of the villages affected the trails which had connected them; petitions from farmers are recorded, stating that the farmers intended to plough up the roads leading through their fields, in the municipal minutes of both Rhineland and Douglas.<sup>10</sup> The abandonment of the original trails was a slow process. Farmers continued to revoke permission to use trails going through their properties right through the 1890's as they increased their grain acreages. Even the road allowances were often used for grain growing, and the municipality had to put a stop to this whenever a new road was built on the allowance. In 1891 the following notice was to be published weekly for three months in *Der Nordwesten*: "All road allowances have to be 99 feet wide. Nobody dare to plough the road allowances and seed them, and wherever this has been done it must be the last time this year and forever."<sup>11</sup>

Progress in road building was slow, largely because of the ineffectiveness of statute labour. The farmers could be called upon only at long intervals when work was slack on the farm. As a result, no work was done until mid-summer, and there would be time only to roughly prepare a road bed. Some more work would sometimes be done after harvest, but there was little time left before freeze-up. No permanent improvements could be achieved when the work was done in this sporadic manner, so in 1895 Rhineland dispensed with the statute labour, and demanded instead \$1.50 for every day of labour that might have been exacted.<sup>12</sup> Road building became even more efficient after 1896 when the first road grader was bought.

Figure 24



No records have been kept of the roads which were built, but few of the old farmers interviewed in 1955 could remember a time when the road allowances did not have roads. This is in direct contrast to the East Reserve where many districts in the south were only getting their first roads in the 1950's. In 1900 only the main section roads, about six to eight miles apart, existed in the West Reserve, but in the 20 years from 1900 to 1914 most of the road allowances in the Reserve were graded. In 1920 there were still road allowances that had no grades, but by 1930 grades had been built on nearly every one. Mechanization helped greatly in the building and maintaining of roads. Steam tractors were used to haul graders from 1900 to 1907, and after that were replaced by gasoline tractors. After 1930 "Caterpillar" tractors were purchased and it was then possible to build grades efficiently.

The trunk highway system that brought the section roads into the trading centres and connected the various centres took shape slowly. But it is significant that the trunk roads proposed by the Manitoba government in 1920 (Figure 5P-1) had all become provincial trunk highways by 1955. The highway pattern was designed to connect the towns and villages and each of these had been located by the railway company. As a result, the present pattern of highways in the Reserve may be said to have been determined by the railways that were constructed in the early 1880's. In 1922 the location of the section roads still influenced the main approaches to the trading centres (Figure 5P-2). By 1928 there was a fairly good development of what we may consider market roads (Figure 5P-3). Morden, Winkler, and Plum Coulee had good north-south as well as east-west connections. The Rosenfeld to Gretna road, and the east-west road bringing trade into Gretna from the agricultural villages along the boundary were also important. Few changes took place in the next years. Roads were graded; for example the road from Winkler to P.T.H. No. 3 was improved, and served as Winkler's connection with Winnipeg for the next decade, especially after No. 3 highway was gravelled all the way to Winnipeg in 1931.

The first truck transfer operation between the Reserve and Winnipeg began in 1928 from Winkler. This was not a regular route at first, but a daily service was supplied by 1930. No transfers operated out of Rhineland at this time, because prior to 1935 there was not one mile of gravelled road in the eastern part of the Reserve (Figure 5P-6A). In 1935 and 1936 the east-west connection through Plum Coulee and Rosenfeld, between P.T.H. No. 3 and the Emerson-to-Winnipeg highway was completed, and the road between Rosenfeld and Gretna was rebuilt. Both were put through to provide relief work and were not well built, but they did provide the first adequate road connections between Winnipeg and Rhineland, and transfer companies were started in Altona and Gretna at this time. During World War II these roads deteriorated badly, but they were declared provincial trunk highways after the war, in 1949, rebuilt in the early 1950's, and are now, along with the highway leading south of Winkler, the basis of the communications system in the Reserve (Figure 24).

Market roads were also improved steadily after the war, and there was keen rivalry among the different centres to ensure that each centre's communications with its hinterland was adequately maintained. The rivalry between Morden and Winkler is a good example. A Morden merchant complained in the March 3, 1948

issue of the *Morden Times* that whereas formerly all roads led to Morden, now all those to the southeast of Morden were third class roads. Farmers from Glencross, only five miles from Morden and clearly in Morden territory were shopping in Winkler because, though Winkler was three miles further away, the roads to it were much better. Most of the traffic went along the market roads directly south of Winkler. The writer complained that the municipality had improved these roads to Morden's detriment, and that now Morden needed an all weather road to Haskett, especially since, "Haskett district since its inception has always considered itself as belonging to the Morden district." But by 1955 all the trading centres had adequate all weather market routes (Figure 24), and trade was not diverted from any centre because of poor roads.

In 1955 public service vehicles were far more important in the East Reserve, than in the West Reserve: the former had 45 trucks, the latter 24.<sup>13</sup> This situation probably results from the absence of a railway in the East Reserve. But the greater prosperity of the West Reserve is shown by the fact that in 1955 there were 914 passenger vehicles in Winkler, 819 in Morden and 734 in Altona, whereas Steinbach had 890.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Manitoba: Sessional Papers*, 1882, Annual Report of the Minister of Public Works: 49.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 1893: 222.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*: 1915: 1033.

<sup>4</sup> See manuscript map in Hanover Municipal Office, Steinbach.

<sup>5</sup> *Hanover Municipal Minutes*, 1929.

<sup>6</sup> *The Canadian Highway and its Development*, Department of Railways and Canals, Highways Branch, Ottawa, 1925.

<sup>7</sup> *Carillon News*, April 24, 1947.

<sup>8</sup> Information obtained from Motor Vehicles Branch, Law Courts Building, Winnipeg, December, 1955.

<sup>9</sup> Rhineland Municipality By-law No. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Rhineland Municipality Minutes*, 1885-90.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*: July 8, 1891.

<sup>12</sup> Rhineland Municipality By-law No. 38 (February 15, 1895).

<sup>13</sup> Information obtained from the Motor Vehicles Branch, Law Courts Building, Winnipeg, December, 1955.

<sup>14</sup> Canadian Automobile Chamber of Commerce, 1955. *Facts and Figures of the Canadian Automobile Industry*.

## Chapter 11

### CENTRAL PLACES 1892-1940

#### East Reserve

I showed in Chapter 6 how a definite pattern of central places had been established in the East Reserve by 1892; Steinbach was the main centre and Niverville and Grunthal were the centres of the smaller districts. One would normally assume that if a railway were to be built through southeastern Manitoba, trading centres would also be established – as happened in the West Reserve. But when such a railway was built it was accompanied by no outstanding new trading centres, and this circumstance, along with the fact that the railway line did not go through Steinbach, requires some explanation.

The Manitoba and South Eastern Railway was built past the northeastern part of the East Reserve in 1898 (it reached Fort Frances in 1901), placing the Mennonite settlements between two railway lines radiating out from Winnipeg, though neither passed through the Reserve (Figure 4P). The railway was intended to be the Canadian Northern's main line to Eastern Canada. Naturally it followed the shortest route, which is just past the east side of the Reserve. It is commonly believed in Steinbach, without any factual foundation that I have been able to discover, that the railway officials purposely directed the line past Steinbach at the request of the village's leading citizens, who objected to the "worldly" influences which would accompany it. This story appears to be spurious. Steinbach merchants had to transport all their goods by wagon, and it would be reasonable to expect that they would jump at an opportunity to avoid that burden. That no formal business delegation from Steinbach appeared before the railway company to request railway service, can be explained by the fact that Steinbach had grown without any conscious promotion, and possibly as a result it never occurred to the businessmen to directly press the railway to build the line through Steinbach.

On the other hand there is some direct evidence that many people in Steinbach would have welcomed the railway. A correspondent from Steinbach informed the *Der Nordwesten* in 1898 that the rumour was circulating in the Reserve that the Mennonites did not want a railway in their neighbourhood. He continued: "Perhaps there are a few Mennonites who say this now and then, but the majority would be deeply grateful if they could deliver their grain here [Steinbach] instead of having to go to Winnipeg", and proposed a line through the centre of the Reserve.<sup>1</sup>

The railway engineers did not deviate from their course, and the line was not built into the Reserve. Steinbach's businessmen immediately began to team their goods from either La Broquerie or Steinbach Station. (From 1898 to 1901 Steinbach Station was the name of the present station of Giroux.) By 1900, a 40,000 bu. capacity grain elevator had been erected at Steinbach Station, and a small store had been established by one of the Clearsprings settlers. But no trading centre had developed.

No new trading centre developed on the railway because the area simply was not prosperous enough to support any large *new* centres at the time the railway



was built. A Mennonite railway centre could develop only if Steinbach businessmen pulled up stakes and moved to the railway. This did not happen. Mennonites were reluctant to move to the already established French Canadian centres of Ste. Anne and La Broquerie, and even Giroux was located in an English and French district at that time. Furthermore, this was not a grain growing area, so that the all-important grain elevators of the West did not serve as the nuclei for a trading centre. Finally, and perhaps this is the most important factor, the Steinbach businessmen had all been raised locally, and were engaged in a trade which was intimately integrated with the surrounding mixed-farming community. In short, they saw no advantage in moving to the railway.

Steinbach in 1900 was the well established and widely recognized Mennonite capital of the Reserve. It had a population of between 400 and 500, all Mennonite except for a handful of Lutherans. It was an agricultural village until 1910, so that in contrast to the commercial towns of the West Reserve, Steinbach had a more rural outlook on life. Not only were all the leading businessmen from Steinbach itself, but most of them were landowners as well. Steinbach had grown from the soil itself, populated by people who had strong roots in the area – not by entrepreneurs from the outside, as in the towns of the West Reserve and in Niverville. It was intimately connected with the agricultural development of the Reserve, and commanded the loyalty of the farm people. There was no similar town in the West Reserve.

Despite its importance, Steinbach did not have as large an area of economic dominance as one might expect (Figure 26). But mere size is deceptive. Steinbach was important for certain special functions. All the agencies which connected the Mennonites with the outside world were in Steinbach. These ranged from the municipal office and the implement dealerships, to the one Mennonite in the Reserve with notarizing authority. This naturally gave the village great importance within Hanover. It had also developed functions of another sort. A large flour mill was located in Steinbach, the only one in Southeastern Manitoba at this time. All the men who organized the annual winter saw milling in the southeast came from Steinbach. Finally, one of the powerful congregations, the *Kleine Gemeinde* group, had its headquarters here.

Neither Giroux, nor any other centre on the railway, was able to supplant Steinbach as the leading centre of Southeastern Manitoba because of the reluctance of Mennonite businessmen to leave Steinbach. The economy of the Reserve favoured Steinbach as the centre. A move to Giroux would have meant severing the close affinity between the farmers and the businessmen and most Mennonites were not prepared to do this, since many families had representatives in both business and agriculture. Moreover the move from Steinbach to the railway, would have meant a shift away from the centre of the Mennonite population, a seven or eight mile move which in those days of horse and wagon transportation was practically inconceivable. It would be obvious that a businessmen who moved would be forcing the farmers to go further to obtain his services, because the supplies were brought at least seven miles closer to them when they were sold from Steinbach. On the other hand a railway was not essential to the East Reserve farmers. They were not as dependent upon the grain elevators as the great majority of prairie



farmers were. Their produce was processed in cheese factories, or shipped to Winnipeg in the form of hogs or cattle throughout the years, and only a small surplus of grain was sold to grain companies.

For a short time, however, Giroux did threaten to overshadow Steinbach, though it was not on the basis of its retail trade. In 1908 a Steinbach merchant, taking advantage of the fact that livestock were shipped through Giroux to Winnipeg, opened an abattoir in Giroux, and began to produce sausages. From 1910 to 1925 it was a prosperous business employing twelve men. The meat and sausages were sold in all of Southeastern Manitoba, and along the railway line as far east as Fort Frances. Just before World War I a milk receiving station was opened in Giroux. Up to 70 teams converged on Giroux every morning to make milk and cream shipments to Winnipeg via the early train. The milk cheques brought many farmers in the Reserve their first steady cash income.

For a time during World War I it appeared that Giroux would expand under the stimulation of its newly founded processing industries. Two hotels were established, but they vanished with the abolition of bars in Manitoba in 1916. A newspaper was published for a short time, a few more stores were operated intermittently and cattle buyers settled in Giroux. But the trading hinterland could not develop against Steinbach's competition. This was fatal, because when trucking started in the 1920's Giroux's advantageous position on the railway lost its importance; the two sustaining industries collapsed and took the village along with them. Milk was first trucked to Winnipeg by the Steinbach transfer in 1923 and by 1930 the Giroux milk receiving station was closed. The trucking business affected the abattoir more subtly but with equally disastrous results. The abattoir had been able to compete against Winnipeg firms by paying the uninformed farmers of the area slightly lower prices than those which prevailed in Winnipeg, but when more trucks started circulating through the countryside the farmers learned what the daily Winnipeg market prices were and demanded them from the Giroux abattoir. Whenever the Giroux meatpackers refused to pay competitive prices farmers shipped their stock directly by truck to Winnipeg, and by 1930 the abattoir had to close.

In 1930 Giroux was left with two small shops, a garage and two elevators. To add insult to injury not only did Giroux lose out in its efforts to supplant Steinbach, but houses were moved from Giroux to Steinbach in the early 1930's, as the former aspiring village went rapidly downhill! This is in complete contrast to the movements which occasionally occurred elsewhere; the parallel case of the mass migration from Nelson to Morden in 1885 affords a fascinating comparison.

The opening of the first garage in Steinbach in 1911 was a more important milestone in Steinbach's development than the abandonment of the *Gewanne* in the previous year. Changing the land survey did not directly affect Steinbach's development as a trading centre. Steinbach, however, is Manitoba's outstanding product of the motor age. The town did not achieve this distinction until the late 1940's, but in the years before the war it continued to grow slowly, despite the depression and poor communications.

From 1900 to 1940 Steinbach provided its hinterland with the basic services demanded of a rural centre. There were at least two outstanding stores in Steinbach at all times, and these carried very large inventories, stocking everything that could

be conceivably required by rural dwellers. Agencies were also maintained where farmers could order implements, parts for machinery, binder twine and so on, and after cars were mass-produced Steinbach acquired garages, and agencies for cars and tractors. The old standbys, the flour mill and the smithy, continued to bring in trade. Steinbach also had a few extra services. A bank was established in 1917, and even today Steinbach has the only banks in Hanover Municipality.<sup>2</sup>

The hinterland of 1901 did not expand appreciably before 1945, yet Steinbach continued to grow in population as a result of local industrial developments. Lumbering in the forests of southeastern Manitoba threatened to come to a standstill as building ceased during the depression, but one of the Steinbach lumbermen hit upon beekeepers' supplies as a product that would still command a market. By 1935 Steinbach had the largest beekeepers' supplies factory in Western Canada, and other enterprises connected with it also flourished. All the tin smithing was done locally, the printery was kept busy producing tags, and labourers obtained work hauling supplies. The people of Steinbach area also earned money throughout the years of the depression from dairying, fur farming, hauling cord wood, growing potatoes and even collecting seneca root.

Improvements were even undertaken during the depression within the town. In 1936 a light and power plant was installed, and a hospital was constructed through local initiative. But despite these new advantages there was fundamentally little change in the life of the village after 1900. True, there were more garages and stores, and even a hotel, but Steinbach still remained purely Mennonite, and relatively immune to outside ideas. There was no theatre, no organized recreation and really no community enterprise aside from the social welfare endeavours of the various churches. Isolation was so complete that until 1940 the auction sale posters were always printed in German!

Niverville in 1900 was the centre of the grain growing area of the Reserve, just as it is today. It had definitely relinquished the position of the Reserve's leading trading town to Steinbach and was only a local centre. It was the only town in Hanover whose functions were really similar to those of the centres in the West Reserve, although the services it supplied were by no means comparable. The enterprising merchants, implement dealers and professional men who accompanied the farmers in the pioneering of the West and developed Morden, Gretna, and Plum Coulee had passed Niverville by. In 1879, when Niverville was established, these perpetual pioneers, always moving on to the next town after staying two to five years in a place, had not yet made their appearance in rural Manitoba – they tended to stay in Winnipeg – and when they did arrive a couple of years later, they set up their establishments in the town sites along the railways going west. If Niverville had had a number of these “boomers” it would probably, despite its many handicaps, have offered Steinbach some serious competition in the early years. If Niverville was to grow, sustained internal development was necessary, such as that which developed Steinbach. But Niverville did not have dynamic entrepreneurs of any sort and therefore remained an unpretentious centre with a general merchant, implement dealer, blacksmith and grain buyer.

Niverville in 1900 was serving a hinterland comprised of Mennonites and a few German Lutherans in the east, and Ontario Canadian and Lutheran farmers in the

west. The boundaries of this hinterland were the Red River on the west, the French settlements to the north and south, and to the east, the Mennonite farmers who had not specialized in grain growing, and therefore were not dependent on a railway centre (Figure 26). Until 1907, when drainage works were begun, the boundary to the east was almost a physical barrier, because it was practically impossible to grow grain on the marshes of township 7-5. Business did increase very rapidly for a time after the drainage canals were built, as more land was brought under cultivation in the existing hinterland. In response to this new development Niverville acquired a second general store, a hotel, a butcher shop, a lumber yard, and another implement shop. These enterprises, together with a smithy and an eventual garage (and with the exceptions of the hotel and the butcher shop which were short lived) comprised Niverville's business district until World War II. The town did not grow in the gradual fashion of Steinbach, but neither did it decline. It possessed the irreducible minimum of services, and so it just stood still. Population figures are always difficult to obtain for these unincorporated villages, but the *Hanover Municipality Assessment Roll* of 1931 gives a population of 143, indicating how small Niverville was.

Until 1930 all the businesses were on Railway Ave. facing the railway, (Figure 8P). That year a store was built by a *Russländer* Mennonite on the main through road, about two blocks east of the existing "Main Street". This store was all alone, but it forecast a migration of the business district. Since a village has to grow in order for a new business district to develop, this solitary store did not carry the rest of "Main Street" with it until the 1940's.

In 1901 Grunthal and Niverville had hinterlands that were comparable in size (Figure 26) but apart from this there was no resemblance between the two centres. Niverville was on a railway and served a reasonably prosperous grain growing area composed of Mennonites, Germans and Ontario Canadians. Grunthal was not on a railway, but was joined only by cross country trails to St. Pierre and Steinbach, and served a relatively poor agricultural area inhabited by Mennonites and Ukrainians.

Grunthal's only advantages as a service centre were its central location in the southern part of the Reserve and the fact that it was situated on one of the main Lake Agassiz beach ridges, which made it important in an area where section roads were not built at an early date.

In Steinbach the trading function took over from the agricultural function within the village, but in Grunthal trading facilities were established outside the agricultural village, and a new centre developed. This trend was started in 1907 when a gasoline-powered flour mill was built on an east-west road to the northeast of the village. Some of the stores followed the mill, and wherever people settled in Grunthal they built their houses along the new street (Figure 8P). By the early 1920's the new street had as many buildings as the old village and on November 1, 1926, Hanover Municipality passed a By-law declaring the main street of "New Grunthal" a public road. Grunthal grew most rapidly in the late 1920's when many *Russländer* Mennonites settled in the vicinity, and also in the new centre itself.

Trade was conducted either through St. Pierre or Steinbach, but more generally through St. Pierre, since the railway station was only another four miles beyond that village at Carey. This link with St. Pierre and Carey was very important

because it was the connection through which the Winnipeg City Dairy established a milk station at Grunthal in 1927. (The milk and cream were shipped to Winnipeg by rail through Carey.) In 1929 the Grunthal transfer started operations and milk was trucked to Winnipeg. The milk station stabilized Grunthal's position as a small regional centre, and allowed it to move ahead of similar centres, but its population did not go over 150 until 1945, because it was serving a very poor area.

Barkfield, Hochstadt, Kleefeld, Chortitz and some of the other villages had stores, and a few even had a smithy and a cheese factory, but none was destined to develop the way Grunthal did. Nevertheless, each was important in its local area right through the 1920's, for it provided farmers with store goods during the horse and buggy days when travel was slow. Chortitz was the most important of these smaller places because besides being a small service centre it was the headquarters of the conservative *Bergthal* Mennonites, called the *Chortitzer* congregation.

In the late 1920's and in the 1930's a new kind of service centre that was independent of the agricultural villages, was rising in the northern townships. At New Bothwell and at Landmark north of the Reserve cheese factories were established which served the milk marketing needs of the local farmers. At this time they did not attract many people, but they were to become the nuclei of larger settlements in the 1940's.

Centres also developed among the Ukrainians. The first Ukrainian church was built in 1903 in township 5-6, but no centre developed about it because the people had no money to spend.<sup>3</sup> In 1912 three school districts were finally organized among the Ukrainians. In 1913 a new church was built close to one of the schools and was shortly followed by a store. This was the start of the hamlet of Sarto. In 1920 the Ukrainians organized an Educational Society and a hall was built at Sarto housing a library and a stage, and providing facilities for dancing and other entertainments. Later a second store was built, and the little Ukrainian capital attained its maximum size. It remained small because it was really a community centre rather than a trading centre.

During World War I a combined shop and post office was established at Trentham, three miles southeast of Sarto (Figure 4P). As the Ukrainians pushed southward into township 4-6 in the late 1920's another store and post office was established at Pansy, about five miles south of Sarto, and in the 1930's a church was built about half a mile south of the store on Joubert Creek. None of these places was more than a cross-road development supplying the necessities of life, in districts where transportation was very difficult.

### West Reserve

In the last decade of the 19th century the pattern of present day trading centres was established in the West Reserve (Figures 25 and 26). The new centres confirmed what the development of Morden and Gretna had already indicated: that the Mennonites could not live in isolation. Further, the new centres provided opportunities for young Mennonites to become businessmen. As a result a well balanced rural prairie society developed during this period consisting of Mennonite farmers and an increasing number of Mennonites in the trading centres. The conservative Mennonites in their villages became an ineffectual though stubborn mi-

Figure 25

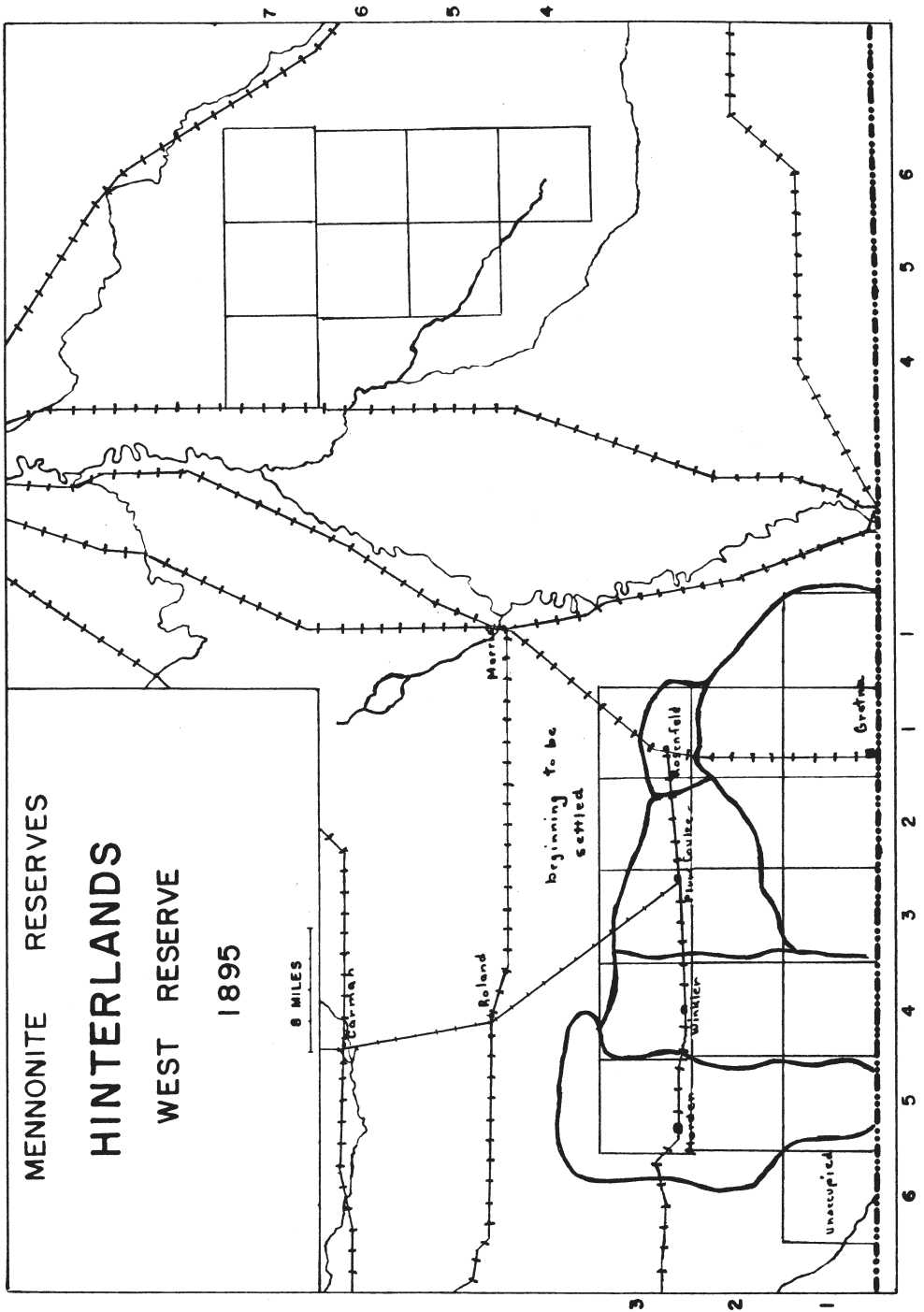
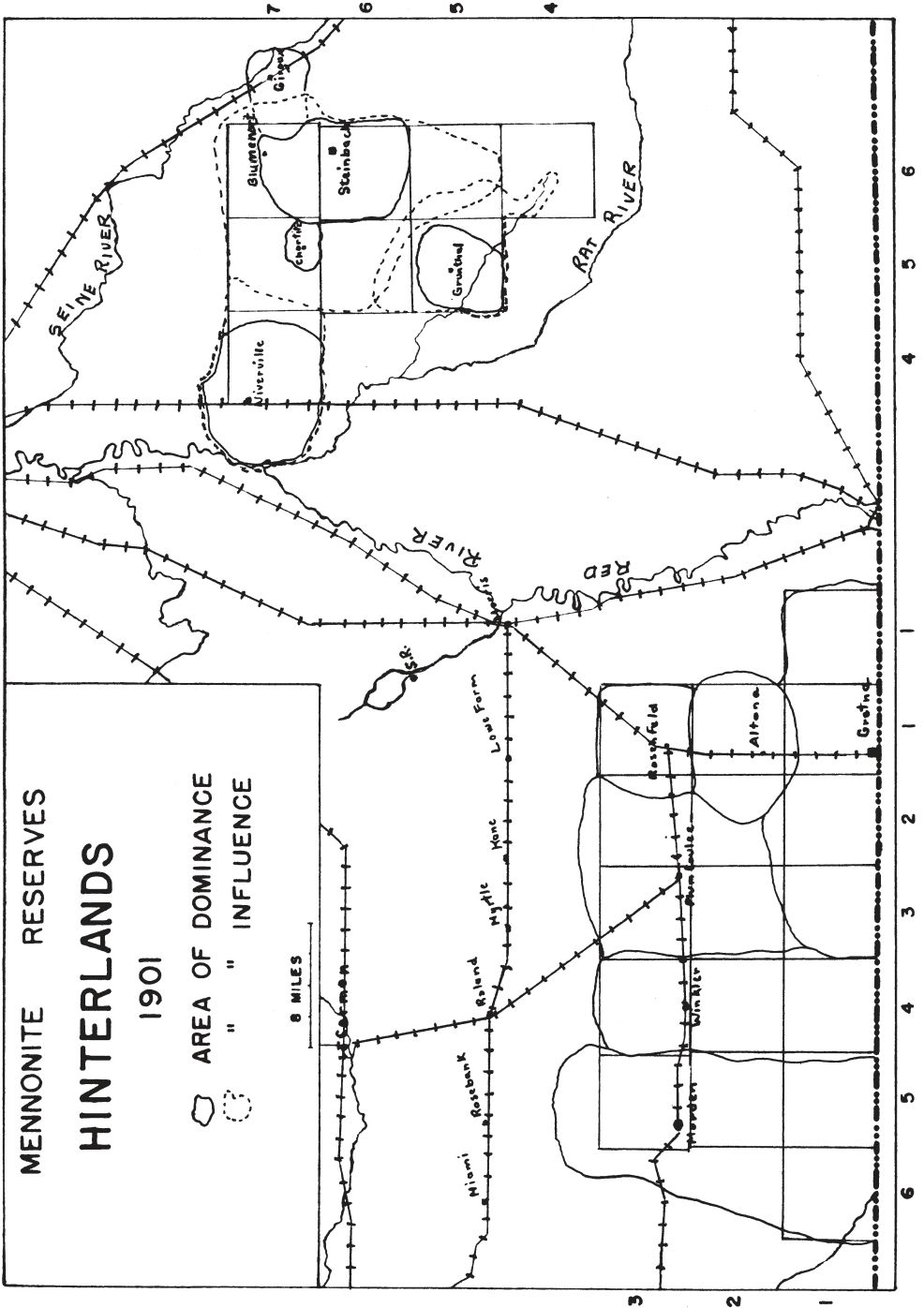


Figure 26



nority group, no longer strong enough to set the pace in the Reserve. "That siding at Hoffnungsfeld will deal a severe blow at Morden's trade."<sup>4</sup>

This is the first indication, in 1892, that a trading centre was to be built between Plum Coulee and Morden. Morden businessmen were opposed to the construction of a siding at Hoffnungsfeld, and even planned to send a petition to William van Horne, the general manager of the C.P.R., to try to prevent its establishment.<sup>5</sup> But it was all to no avail, and a new townsite, named Winkler, after the promoter working with the C.P.R., was established seven miles east of Morden. The growth of Winkler is an excellent example of how a new trading centre can affect the trade of an established town. There were good reasons for founding Winkler. In 1892 over 700,000 bu. of wheat had been shipped from Morden, much of it supplied by the Mennonites, and this potential Mennonite trade was the main stimulus for founding a new centre.

In Winkler, and this is a significant change, a Mennonite erected the first store. It was built in 1892 by a merchant who had been operating a store in Schanzenfeld. By the end of 1892 a chopping mill was in operation, and the machinery for a grist mill had arrived.<sup>6</sup> Ogilvie's built the first elevator in 1893, but grain was shipped even before it was completed. Grain shipments at Morden were immediately affected, although they were still very much ahead of Winkler. Up to June 29, 1893, 656,000 bu. of wheat had been shipped from Morden, 200,000 bu. from Winkler.<sup>7</sup> By August 1893, Winkler had two stores, a third was building, and there were machine agents, three lumber yards, one elevator, one flour mill and one feed mill in the centre.<sup>8</sup>

The rapid development of Winkler had a profound effect upon Morden. The trading boom in Morden had been at its height in 1888 and 1889. But the building of the Northern Pacific line 12 miles to the north in 1889 curtailed its trading area in that direction (compare Figures 19 and 25), and Winkler shortly afterwards cut off the trade to the southeast. Business became quiet in Morden from the effects of the reduced trading hinterland, and as the business of supplying pioneers with implements and supplies disappeared.

An editorial headed, "Why are the Mennonites Leaving Us", in the October 12, 1893 issue of the *Morden Monitor*, reveals the plight of Morden. Business men were wondering why all the Mennonites were delivering their grain to Winkler. The editor explained that Winkler was nearer, sometimes it offered better prices, but the most important was the "incivil, disrespectful, and even contemptuous manner in which it has unfortunately become the custom to treat the Mennonites." He described how the Mennonites were ruthlessly treated by the grain buyers; how their grain was excessively docked and the farmers insulted into the bargain, and how even on the streets the men and women were often made sport of.

The inevitable had resulted, a new German town has sprung up nearer their homes, where their own language, their own customs and their own sellers prevail, and where civility and even respect is accorded them, and it cannot be surprising that while Winkler is taking 6000 bu. of wheat per day, Morden is not taking in 2000 bu.

In the next issue (October 17, 1893) the eight grain buyers of Morden denied the allegations, suggesting instead that the reason for Morden's loss of business was that Winkler was a Mennonite town. What made the new centre such a success, in



my estimation, was a combination of the ill treatment received in Morden by the Mennonites and the fact that they felt more at home in Winkler. In 1894 Morden's largest store sold out, advertising that: "Owing to the limited field the town of Morden now occupies, compared to former years, we have concluded that it is in our interests to retire from business here."<sup>9</sup>

Winkler's trade kept on expanding at the expense of Plum Coulee as well as Morden. In 1894 a store was even moved from Plum Coulee to Winkler<sup>10</sup>, a fair indication of how the trade was running. Plum Coulee was older than Winkler, but it had not been able to supplant Morden as the Mennonite trading centre. It was far too removed from many agricultural villages to make it convenient for the farmers, and of course it was also run by non-Mennonite businessmen. Winkler was started as a Mennonite trading centre, and though non-Mennonite businessmen, especially Jews, came to Winkler, they realized they were catering to a Mennonite trade exclusively, and whatever their nationality they behaved accordingly. In the 1890's some Morden businessmen even opened branches in Winkler, coming over to join the enemy since they apparently couldn't beat them. This proved beneficial for Winkler because it gave it a wider variety of services. In 1889 the Bank of Hamilton opened a branch in Winkler, a sign that the centre had secured a definite trading hinterland, and that its future seemed assured. In 1903 the land north of the railway tracks (Figure 5P) was surveyed into lots, and in 1906 Winkler was incorporated as a village.

Winkler continued to prosper after 1900, because its businessmen were extremely competitive, which made it a good farmers' trading town. Much of the competition was due to the large Jewish business element which settled in Winkler. In the early 1900's seven or eight Jewish peddlers worked out of Winkler, selling goods in the villages to the south. They called at each village once a week, delivered their goods, and took orders for the next week's supplies. Some of these peddlers were very successful and after a time managed to open stores in Winkler where they continued their enterprises. A Jewish merchant of Winkler was the first to buy cream from the farmers, the first to buy chickens by the pound, and also the first to introduce regular "sales". When these techniques were adopted by other Winkler merchants, the town definitely established itself as the leading Mennonite trading centre.

Winkler's population was small, even though its business volume was great. In 1901 it had 391 people, and 458 in 1911, but by 1921 its population had shot up to 812 (Census of Canada). This sudden growth was the result of a great increase in the purchasing power of Winkler's hinterland accompanying the rise in grain prices during the War years. Winkler boomed in 1917, and the eastern part of the village was sub-divided into lots; as many as 16 homes were building at one time that year, among them some of Winkler's best residences.<sup>11</sup> All this was a reflection of the steadily advancing wheat prices (over \$2.00/bu. by 1916) and since Winkler was the greatest grain shipping point in the Reserve a great amount of business was brought there. Winkler also prospered because Anglo-Saxon Morden merchants drove away much Mennonite and German trade during the war. Many farmers from Township 1-6 and even from north of Morden switched their trade permanently to Winkler.

After the *Russländer* immigration of the 1920's Winkler managed to round out its functions to become the Reserve's cultural centre as well as its leading market centre. The *Russländer* Mennonites who settled in Winkler organized a Bible School, musical training was commenced, choirs were organized and musical festivals were held. Winkler also had an outstanding high school, and many Mennonite parents sent their children to school there. By World War I Winkler had taken over from Gretna the position of being the Mennonite capital of the Reserve. It represented the Mennonites to the rest of Manitoba, and not until 1945 did another centre, Altona, attain similar status.

Gretna had until 1895 an excellent trading situation, but the Mennonite farmers between Gretna and Rosenfeld had been asking for a railway siding for some years, and in that year a town site (called Altona after the nearby Mennonite village) was laid out about eight miles north of Gretna. Gretna was to find this rival centre even more costly to it than Winkler was to Morden. Altona's growth was just as rapid as Winkler's, and within a year it had a full complement of service establishments, including a hotel and a flour mill.<sup>12</sup> It was even necessary to measure out more lots on the west side of the tracks in 1896,<sup>13</sup> (Figure 7P). Altona progressed rapidly because Gretna businessmen were setting up businesses and investing in real estate in Altona. Altona was also fortunate in its location, because there were many prosperous agricultural villages in its immediate hinterland.

The competition between Gretna and Altona was keen, but it was a friendlier rivalry than that of Winkler and Morden, because little ethnic prejudice was involved. Gretna easily held the lead until World War I, because it offered more services and also because its merchants had established their farm contacts securely. New buildings were even going up in 1897, including a Lutheran and a Catholic church, and the Union Bank, so that a newspaper correspondent commented in *Der Nordwesten* that "Polen ist noch nicht verloren".<sup>14</sup> The Lutherans were very active in the community. There was a German Literary Society which supported a lending library, and a person such as Pauline Johnson recited her poetry before Gretna audiences.<sup>15</sup> It was impossible to find this sort of activity in any Mennonite community, with the exception of Winkler, for another fifty years. Gretna had a substantial appearance at this time, with a number of fine brick residences and brick business establishments.

After 1900 Gretna slowly decreased in importance, as its decrease in population from 666 in 1901 to 482 in 1946 (Census of Canada) indicates. Altona replaced Gretna, but it did not kill it. Larger forces accomplished that. When the C.P.R. main line to eastern Canada was completed in 1885 Gretna ceased to be an important port of entry, and its fate was sealed. It was not strategically placed as a farming centre and after 1895 it was only a matter of time until Altona replaced it. Gretna managed to keep ahead of Altona for some years because the conservative Mennonites remained loyal to their first trading centre, but then within one decade Gretna suffered two blows from which it never recovered. In 1913 its outstanding "Main Street" was gutted by fire and many of the businesses destroyed, including the bank, were never replaced. The older proprietors retired from business altogether. Then in the migration of the 1920's to Mexico and Paraguay Gretna lost many loyal customers, since the *Russländer* Mennonites who replaced the con-

servative ones had no established loyalties and went to the most convenient centre, Altona. By 1931 Altona had 570 people, Gretna 591 (Census of Canada) and Gretna continued as a placid little country point while Altona went ahead.

Altona profited from the fact that it was strictly a Mennonite town. Oldtimers say that it was very difficult for a non-Mennonite to make a living in Altona, because the Mennonite farmers were patronizing their own people. The attitude that a Mennonite did not go into trade was a thing of the past among the *Bergthal* Mennonites! Altona's superior situation first became apparent at the time that the conservative Mennonites emigrated, and though Altona did not expand greatly until after World War II, its growth never faltered. During the 1930's it had leaders who tackled the problem of depression and drought, and thereby laid the foundations for Altona's future leadership in the Reserve.

Plum Coulee grew rapidly from 1890 to 1900, and has changed little since then. Much building went on in the village in 1898, as the centre was getting considerable trade from the northern townships which were just being settled. The buildings in Plum Coulee were in Victorian style, often with porches on the first and second floors – an innovation in the Reserve. Plum Coulee's ethnic composition was much more mixed than Winkler's or Altona's, and since the Mennonites were not quite so dominant, a more sophisticated social pattern of behaviour evolved than in the other two centres. A compromise between the different groups had developed in Plum Coulee, and a well integrated village society grew up.

After 1900, Plum Coulee failed to grow because it was too close to Winkler. It was not quite as good a trading centre, because most of the financial power was in the hands of a few business people, so that there was little of the stimulating competition characteristic of Winkler. Then, in 1911 Plum Coulee's grain trade was drastically affected by the founding of Horndean, a new centre four miles to the east. The C.P.R. did not really want a siding there, since the distance from Rosenfeld to Plum Coulee is only nine miles, but the local farmers' petitions for a siding won through. Horndean was the last trading centre established in the Reserve, but it could not really develop into anything beyond a grain shipping point (with store and a few other services) because it was too close to other centres.

The final blow which kept Plum Coulee down was the migration of the conservative Mennonites in the 1920's. Many of the settlers who replaced these farmers near Plum Coulee did little to help the trading centre. The Hutterites (who settled as a colony in one village south of Plum Coulee in 1923) bought their supplies wholesale in Winnipeg, and the *Russländer* farmers spent little because they were deeply in debt. Since they had to pay off mortgages and machinery debts, they saved every penny they could.

Rosenfeld in the 1890's was in a poor situation, though it seemingly had an advantage in its location at a railway junction. The land was still swampy to the north, and very few people lived there. Plum Coulee cut off trade to the west, and Buffalo Lake made it almost impossible for farmers from the south to deliver grain to Rosenfeld. When land drainage works in the vicinity were commenced in 1904 there was some hope that Rosenfeld might develop. Even officials of the Bank of Montreal thought so, because it had a branch in Rosenfeld from 1909 to 1912. But the drainage did not help Rosenfeld as much as had been anticipated; Rosenfeld

PLATE 18



*1. Plum Coulee – with the Coulee in the foreground. This is the only centre on the Reserve, except for Morden, which is located on a creek of such size.*



*2. Old house in Plum Coulee. There were only a few of these buildings in any village; simple, inexpensive, box-like, frame houses were far more common.*



*3. Morden, when it was still at its height as a trading centre. Railway Ave. was the important business street. McIntyre, Canadian West, 1904.*



*4. Stone house in Morden; built at the turn of the century. Blocks are roughly squared glacial erratics. These buildings are only found on the Reserve at Morden. A number of these buildings have been erected in other villages to the west. No Mennonite ever built one, although in the late 1890's one or two Mennonites who farmed in the Morden area built brick homes.*

could not capture any trade from Plum Coulee or Altona, and the farmers to the north were relatively few, because the farms were large. Rosenfeld thus never had a population larger than about 200; it simply started to grow too late.

The Mennonite trading centres were no different from the hundreds of other prairie market towns, and little change in their appearance took place from 1900 to 1940. The villages were extremely spread out as a result of their rapid, helter-skelter growth. At first only simple frame houses, with box-like walls, broken by evenly spaced windows, and with steeply pitched roofs were put up, but by 1900 better houses were being erected. All of the villages had at least two or three definitely Victorian frame houses, with fret work along the roof and in the gables.

The villages were non-descript and uninspiring. The elevators were not as tall as they are today, but were shorter, squatter buildings, resembling stubby upended boxes. False fronts dominated the business streets. Buildings, as often as not, were left unpainted, and since galvanized roofing, and even galvanized walls, were also adopted, the villages had an extremely blotchy appearance. For many years there was nothing integrated about any of them and some have never achieved any unity that is apparent to the eye.

As time passed only slight improvements were made, because the centres did not expand sufficiently after their initial outburst to outgrow the first buildings. In most centres there was little difference between the original settlement and that of 1940. Even in 1955 the old buildings still remain, but now newer houses tend to obscure them, and the centres are losing their old fashioned look.

Until World War II the Mennonite centres remained simple trading towns. Morden, however, was at a critical stage in its development by the 1890's. It still had a lucrative hinterland to support its 1,200 people, but further development as a farm centre had been prevented by the founding of new trading centres. Therefore at the turn of the century Morden turned to industry, in an attempt to ensure the continued growth of the town. This was something most prairie towns did not conceive of until after World War II.

Morden's appearance testified to its success as a trading centre. A hospital was opened in 1893 and telephones were installed that year. Two years later its business section was gutted, which was a blessing in disguise, because the ramshackle old stores and blocks were replaced by brick and stone structures. "Boulder stones", as the granite beach boulders were called, were popular building material, and these structures had a strong, assertive beauty which gave an air of distinction to the town (Plate 18-4). The impression Morden made upon outsiders in 1899 is indicted in the following quotation from the *Western Presbyterian*:

Morden takes one by surprise. You expect to see a large town but not to find it so city-like, or with its fine business blocks, public buildings, and private residences of stone or brick. The town gives the impression of solid comfort and the existence of considerable wealth.<sup>16</sup>

Most of this prosperity had been achieved through the farm trade but attempts were made to diversify Morden's functions beyond those of handling the farmers' produce and supplying them with goods. The earliest industries were founded by Ontario craftsmen who settled in Morden with the object of manufacturing items for the surrounding farm population.<sup>17</sup> Two pump factories were established, one in 1895 and the other in 1897, and they supplied pumps to farmers as far west as

Assiniboia. In 1896 the Morden Marble and Granite Works were founded, which soon employed 12 men, and distributed its products throughout the West. A tannery and a carriage works also set up in Morden in the 1890's. The most ambitious enterprise of all was a woolen mill, erected in 1893. It employed 14 people, and its products included flannels, sheetings, blankets, checked goods and yarns.

These light industries just could not meet the competition of Winnipeg and Eastern Canada. The woolen mill was bankrupt by 1899, and though a release from local taxes for 20 years was negotiated that year,<sup>18</sup> the company never fully recovered and was out of business by World War I. The other factories also found it difficult to meet the prices of imported products, nor did they have a sufficient market to expand in order to reduce the overhead costs. One by one they had to close their doors.

By 1900 the leading businessmen of Morden realized that small industries could not meet competitive prices, and therefore they began to cast about for an alternative means of building up the town. Emerson's dream of becoming the wholesale centre of South Central Manitoba now reappeared in Morden, and the local businessmen came to the conclusion that Morden would become an excellent distribution centre if only it could secure another railway. In 1902 Morden negotiated with the Canadian Northern Railway to construct a line from Carman to Morden, and even granted a right of way,<sup>19</sup> but the whole scheme fell through. That same year it appeared that Morden would be selected by Chicago interests as the site for a large cement works, capitalized at \$2,000,000.00, which would bring a railway with it.<sup>20</sup> After much publicity in 1903 this project fell through, as the necessary capital could not be raised.

Morden's attempts to become an industrial and wholesale centre are instructive. By the time they achieved a population 1,000, many small Western towns had these ambitions, but few proceeded as far as Morden in trying to attain them. Its failure demonstrated that small centres like Morden had neither the banking and transportation facilities nor the central location which are necessary to run competitive, complex, well organized business such as wholesale houses, or small factories that do not have the advantage of processing a local raw material. Business survival depended more on business organizations and distribution facilities than anything else, and here Winnipeg dominated all the small Manitoba towns.

Winnipeg's complete domination of the prairies is shown by the fact that when Morden did get a railway connection with the United States in 1906, development of the town was in no way affected. The Great Northern line to Morden was part of a large American scheme to gridiron the Canadian West with railways and ship part of the annual Canadian grain crop to Chicago rather than to Winnipeg. Perhaps James J. Hill was anticipating reciprocity by a few years.

The American spur lines intersected the Reserve at two places. Track was laid on the Gretna-Plum Coulee-Portage la Prairie line in 1906, and grading was commenced on the Walhalla-Morden line that same year, and completed the next (Figure 4P). Remarkably little interest was shown in Morden because all that this line could really be expected to carry was grain from the local elevators. Morden could become no entry port for American implements because all the large American machinery wholesale houses were already established in Winnipeg. On the other



hand, Morden merchants worried lest some of their business should be lost to United States mail order houses.

Both lines were unsuccessful, and by 1926 the Gretna to Portage la Prairie line had been sold to the C.P.R., and the track lifted between Gretna and Plum Coulee. The Walhalla to Morden line was operated until 1936, when it was abandoned.

The Walhalla to Morden line had some impact on the Reserve, because one trading centre, Haskett, was established on the Walhalla to Morden line in 1907, a mile and a quarter north of the Boundary (Figure 4P). Haskett is the best example of a "promoted" town in the Reserve; the promoting was done from Walhalla.<sup>21</sup> Its population never exceeded 100, as it served only the Ontario Canadians in township 1-5 and the Mennonites in township 1-4 as a grain market and a small shopping centre. In many ways Haskett was a satellite of Walhalla. For instance, after 1907, farmers in township 1-4 shipped their cream to Walhalla creameries via Haskett. Morden and Winkler were too well established to fear any competition from Haskett. The promoters' efforts all went for naught, and probably Haskett's only claim to fame is that Frederick Philip Grove taught school there for two years.

From 1900 until the early 1940's Morden was in the doldrums. Its population was 1,522 in 1901, but dropped sharply to 1,130 by 1911. It rose steadily after that until it reached 1,500 again in the 1940's (Census of Canada). Yet Morden weathered the depression well, partly because its stores were always supported by the government employees who were stationed in Morden. But trade was slow just as in all other Western trading centres. There were regular articles in the Morden newspaper extolling the trading virtues of Morden and deploring mail order sales. There were few advertisements, and those were generally automobile advertisements, not local ones, an indication that stock was not really moving in the stores.

Morden's early preeminence has never been forgotten by its citizens, and it is one of the few Manitoba towns which can have successful oldtimers' reunions. (In the summer of 1958 over 350 people attended the dedication of a monument marking the site of Nelson.) The loyalty usually goes back to the Morden of the 1890's, when Morden was the *prima donna* of Manitoba country towns. The fruitless aspirations for the second Winnipeg to Morden railway and the cement works, and the frustration accompanying them have been forgotten. Much of the continuity has been preserved by the judicial and administrative functions of the town, because these supplied Morden with responsible citizens and some social prestige. Further prestige was brought to Morden when a Dominion Government Experimental Farm was located there in 1914, largely on the basis of the horticultural experiments that had been carried out by James A. Stephenson of Morden.



<sup>1</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, June 30, 1898.

<sup>2</sup> A new branch charter bank was established in 1959 in Steinbach.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is based on an account of the Ukrainian settlements in the *Carillon News*, April 9, 1948.

<sup>4</sup> *Morden Monitor*, May 5, 1892.

<sup>5</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, May 18, 1892.

<sup>6</sup> *Morden Monitor*, December 8, 1892.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*: June 29, 1893.

<sup>8</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, August 14, 1893.

<sup>9</sup> *Morden Herald*, November 16, 1894.

<sup>10</sup> *Morden Monitor*, March 8, 1894.

<sup>11</sup> *Morden Times*, January 30, 1920.

<sup>12</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, July 30, 1896.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*: August 20, 1896.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*: July 29, 1897.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*: December 9, 1897.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in the *Morden Chronicle*, October 26, 1899.

<sup>17</sup> The following section is based on a study of the Morden newspapers for 1890 to 1910.

<sup>18</sup> *Morden Chronicle*, December 3, 1899.

<sup>19</sup> *Morden Empire*, June 19, 1902.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: December 11, 1902.

<sup>21</sup> The *Morden Times* of August 15, 1907, carries one of the promoter's advertisements.



## Chapter 12

### DRAINAGE

The agricultural development of large sections of both Reserves had been hindered by poor drainage, but this situation was gradually remedied after 1900. The problem of drainage has been unjustifiably neglected in studies of Western Canada; and the improvements undertaken in the Reserves are only part of the larger works carried out in the Red River Lowland. Drains are of great importance in the settlement geography of both Reserves.

In 1880 the Manitoba government first acknowledged the problem of land drainage in the Red River Lowland, when it became apparent after some abnormally wet years that the settlement of the country would be permanently affected if drains were not constructed. A Drainage Act was passed in 1880, whereby the government undertook the task of constructing drains, and work was started that year on the Boyne and Tobacco Creek Channels to the north of the West Reserve<sup>1</sup> (Figure 4P).

Nothing was done in the West Reserve itself for many years, though a gesture was made in 1892 when government engineers inspected the Buffalo Creek drainage system south of Rosenfeld.<sup>2</sup> Repeated requests for aid in draining the area were made to the Department of Public Works by the municipality, but with only limited results. The government helped the municipality to the extent of providing the services of a surveyor.<sup>3</sup>

In 1895 the Manitoba Land Drainage Act was passed, which established provisions for:

the drainage of an area in order to render it fit for occupation and cultivation, where such will be of public benefit, such work to be done only after receipt of a petition of a majority of the owners of lands within the area, representing more than one-half of the assessed value of such lands.<sup>4</sup>

Before any work could be undertaken the land had to be surveyed by a qualified engineer, who prepared maps, plans and profiles of the proposed work, to decide which lands should actually be in the drainage district. Then, if there was no counter petition to the proposed work by a majority of the owners of the lands affected, a Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council could constitute the lands to be benefited by the proposed works as a Drainage District. The cost of the works were then levied against the land owners in the Drainage District.

In 1899 the Department of Public Works was first petitioned by the municipality of Rhineland to have certain portions of the municipality brought under the Drainage Act,<sup>5</sup> and after the area had been thoroughly studied by an engineer, a Drainage District, the twelfth in Manitoba, was organized on April 30, 1903.<sup>6</sup> There were 123,200 acres in the District (see Figure 27 for the portion in the Reserve), and the assessment was placed at \$1.00 per acre, so 25 debentures were issued for the required amount.<sup>7</sup>

Local drainage was not the main problem in the District, because run-off from within the area was small and comparatively gradual and could easily be dealt with. The serious problem was encountered in the flood waters from the Escarpment

## PLATE 19



1. Gully 6 miles west of Chortitz. Carries water from Pembina Mountains. Note the relatively steep sides; upstream view.



2. Creek at Schanzenfeld. This part of the creek is dried up, but there is a small dam further upstream where the cattle drink. Note the clumps of trees.



3. Creek 6 miles south of Winkler; Pembina Mountain on the horizon. Shallow vale is used for pasture. Note the insignificant meandering stream bed, yet it is only 5 to 6 miles from the escarpment. Surrounding land is well drained by channels of this nature. This creek later meanders past Hochfeld, Neuenburg, and other villages.



4. Creek near Hochfeld. This is the type of creek on which all the villages in the West Reserve were established in the 1870's. Also a typical view of a village from a distance of 3/4 mile.

which poured over the land each spring, and before reaching the Red River kept the ground wet too late in spring to make the land available for any crops other than hay. The water was carried from the Escarpment by three large coulees, Buffalo Creek, Plum Coulee, and Hespeler Creek (Figure 28) which all had well defined channels down to the flatter lands, where the creek beds disappeared entirely and the waters spread rapidly over the prairie. The proposal was to ignore the local drainage, and concentrate on digging channels for the water from the point where the coulees lost themselves in marshes to where the channels were again well defined near the Red River. Thus the water would be conveyed through the District as rapidly and effectively as possible. This is the plan on which all the subsequent drainage projects for the Reserve have been based. Figure 27 shows how the proposed channels were to connect the marshes where the three coulees disappear on the prairie to the channels which reappear near the Red River.

Work on these drains was started in July of 1903.<sup>8</sup> The drains were not very large because the equipment available limited the type of work that could be done. The bottom width of the drains varied from six to twenty feet depending on the need, and the depth from two to four feet. The material was spread out evenly on one side of the drain, so that it served as a dyke and a road bed. The essential part of the drainage system was completed in 1907, when a total of 90 1/4 miles of drains had been excavated.<sup>9</sup>

Improved drainage encouraged further settlement, which led to a further demand for drains, so that many laterals had to be added to the main channel. But the main problem remained the annual spring flooding, because the dredge channels were not as effective as had been anticipated, and they could not carry all the water brought down from the Escarpment in spring. At the time the channels were most needed to take care of the spring floods, the ditch proper was still usually filled with snow. The water quickly accumulated in quantities far in excess of the drainage capacity, and poured out over the sides of the waste dumps to flood the surrounding country. The erosion caused by the escaping water often caused washouts, through which water continued to pour even after the water in the channel had reached a level lower than the original dumps.

After World War I the solution to the annual flood problem was sought in the double dyke system of drainage. Two parallel double dykes, about 300 feet apart, (or such distance that a snow bank which formed behind one set of dykes would not reach the other), replaced the drainage channels (Plate 20-3 & 4). Each set of dykes was about five feet high, and was built from material obtained by excavating a ditch between the dykes. The ditches carried the water as far along as possible and then it was directed by means of gates into the spillway between the two double dykes, which would prevent it from spreading over the land. As the snow in the main ditches melted, the spillways between the double dykes were relieved as the water drained back into the ditches. Two double dykes that drained Hespeler Creek and Buffalo Lake were completed by the mid 1930's (Figure 28) and solved the main drainage problem in the Reserve.

These new drains made grain farming possible in the northern part of the Reserve, but no sooner had the channel been completed than the problem of maintenance arose. Deterioration was an immediate difficulty because the sides of

Figure 27

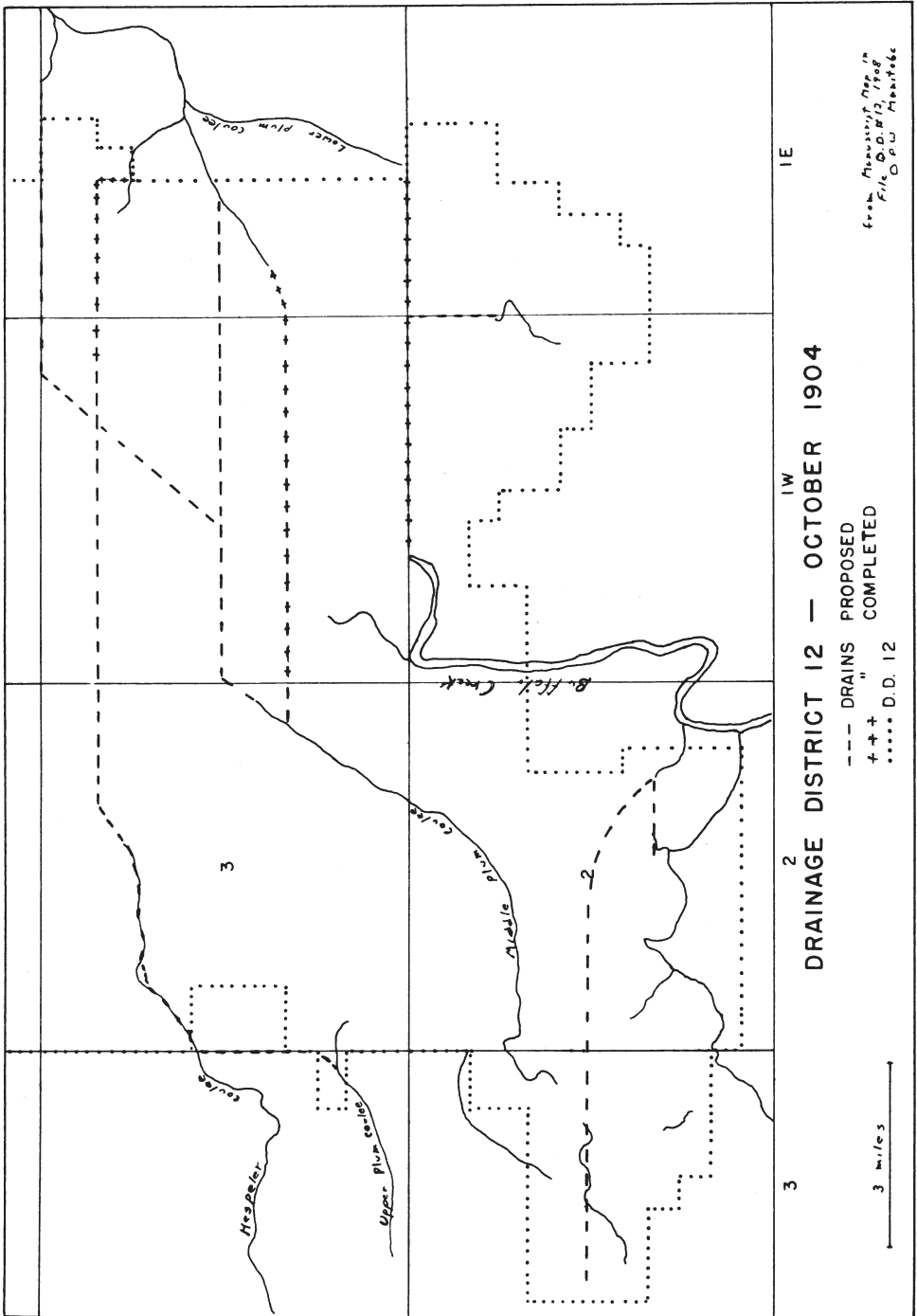
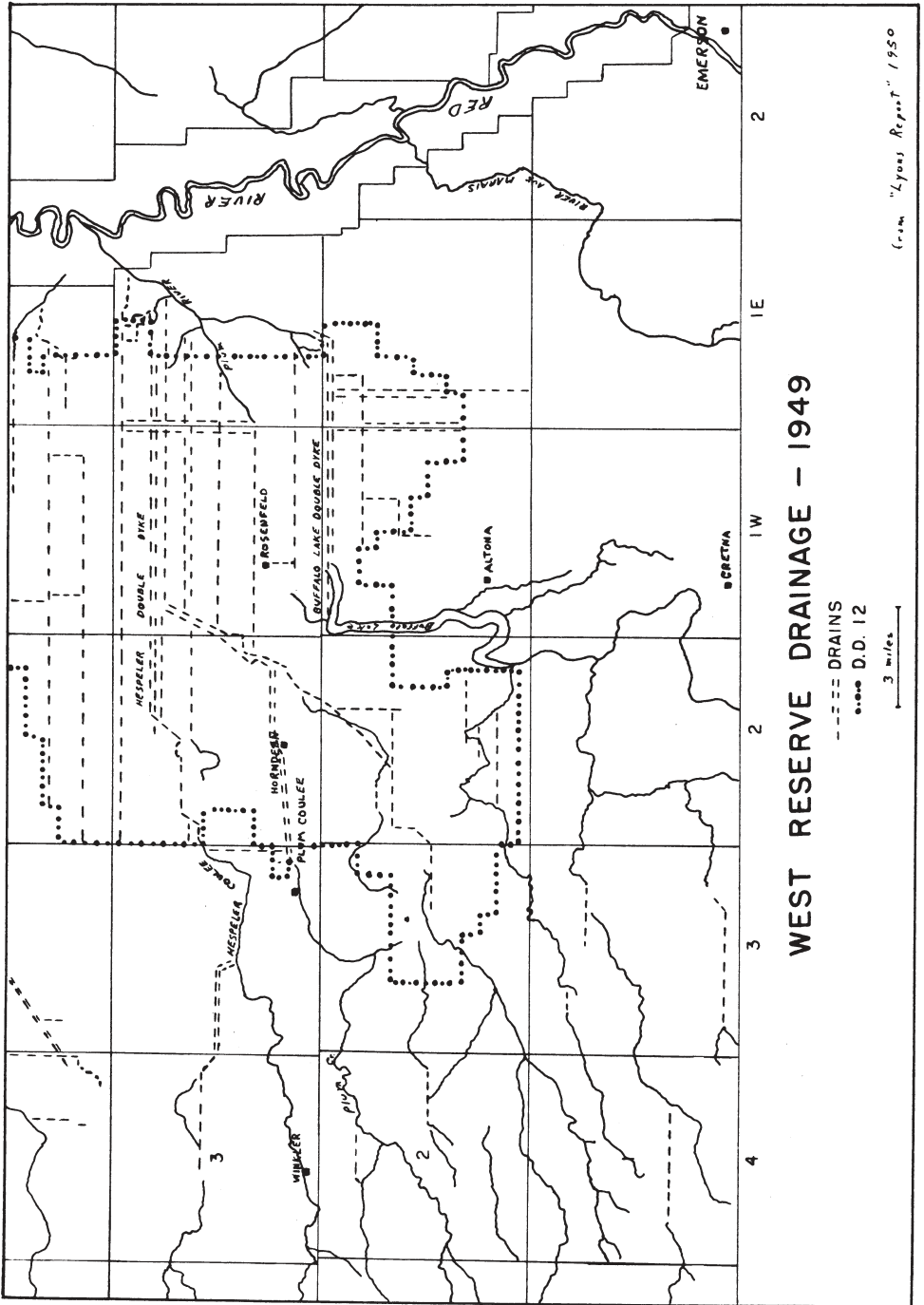


Figure 28





## PLATE 20



*1. Road in 30-2-3W. Soil is so light that farmers don't use the grade, but prefer to drive in the ditch, which can be used under all weather conditions. This would be impossible in the Red River soils further east.*



*2. Drain in 8-3-3W. Central depression is used for pasture and hay. In this area most of the creeks have been artificially enlarged and straightened.*



*3. Buffalo Lake Channel; 1 mile south of Rosenfeld. Really a double dyke, with some excavating also done between the dykes. 400' wide.*



*4. Double dyke in 33-3-1W. Asphalt on road in order to allow vehicles to cross even when there is water between the dykes. This only happens in spring when the ditch in the foreground can't hold all the run off.*

## PLATE 21



*1. A new style drain, 5 miles south of Smith Siding in 4-1W. The spoil bank has been smoothed out into a wide road bed, and the sides of the ditch have gentle slopes. No seeding as yet.*

the drains had very steep slopes and they often slumped and filled the channels. Long stretches of these channels also became choked with willows and weeds, and filling in of the channel by soil drifting was a further problem. Remedial measures were adopted by the municipalities, such as cutting the scrub periodically, but these piece-meal repairs did not halt the general deterioration and the effectiveness of the drainage system was soon seriously impaired. Accordingly Drainage Maintenance Districts were established in 1935 to provide for the orderly maintenance of the channels.<sup>10</sup> Money for carrying out the work was obtained by assessing the farmers in the District, and the drainage system was gradually restored to working order.

The basic drainage scheme devised at the turn of the century has remained unchanged; only the channels have been improved periodically. After World War II intensive improvements were made, and this time the main object was to make it easier to maintain the drains. The slopes of the channels were reduced to a gradient of about 1 to 8 so that they could be seeded with grass (which can be mowed) and thus was solved both the problem of slumping and the growth of shrubs in the channels (Plate 21).

The drainage problem in the East Reserve was similar to that in the West Reserve. Creeks from the higher areas to the east could not maintain their channels across the flat lacustrine plain and their waters spread over the prairie every spring. After the appropriate surveys had been made Drainage District No. 5 was formed in 1906 (Figure 29). Work on the dredge canals (Plate 22) and the main laterals was

Figure 29

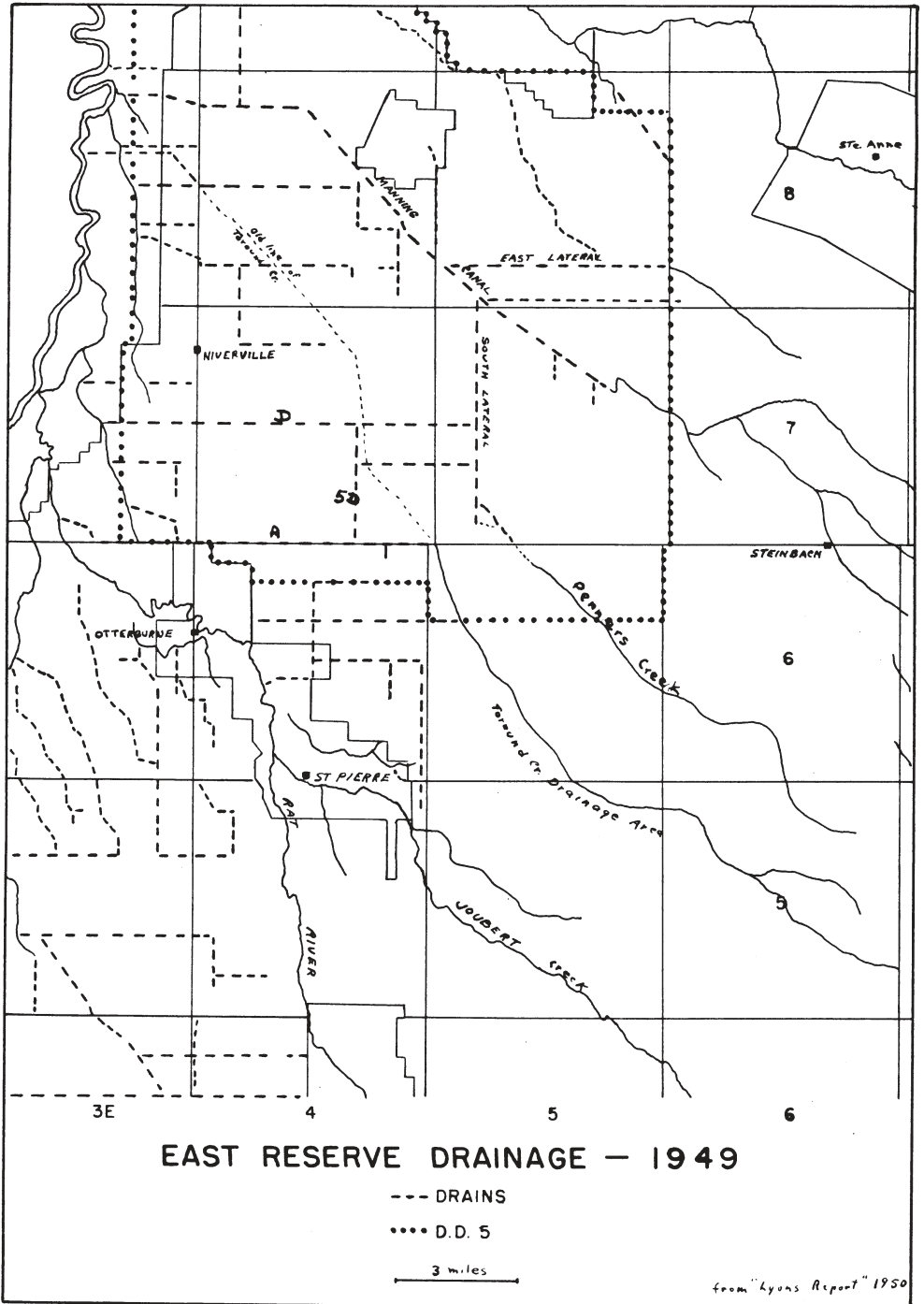


PLATE 22



*1. Beginning of Manning Canal in 23-7-5E. Small creeks formerly debouched their water on the flat land in this general area, forming swamps.*



*2. Bottom of Manning Canal in 26-7-5E, 1/4 mile from where it begins. The design of the narrow 15-20' ditch, with its steep banks is considered outmoded today because the capacity of the ditch is greatly reduced when filled with snow, and it is therefore liable to overflow in spring.*



*3. Intersection of the South Lateral with the Manning Canal in N.W. 32-7-5E.*



*4. Manning Canal in Tache Municipality (22-8-4E). Spoil banks on both sides are well above the countryside. The canal here is 15-20' deep.*

completed in 1908 (Figure 27). The improved drainage immediately attracted settlers to townships 7-4 and 7-5, as indicated in Figure 38. Unfortunately the drains were not properly maintained, and they were soon blocked by silt and slumping, and even congested by willows. One of the worst flood hazards was Tourond Creek which persisted in following its own shallow course across township 7-5 (See Figure 29), causing severe damage every spring. Yet sufficient funds have never been available to double-dyke the channel.

Hanover Municipality eventually became involved in a number of costly lawsuits when neighboring municipalities were flooded by water pouring out of the inadequate Hanover drains. Minor drainage improvements were made at intervals in the 1930's and 1940's, but Hanover simply could not finance adequate basic improvements in the drainage system, especially since the demands on the drains kept on increasing as graded roads, enabling the water to run off more quickly, were built in the southern part of the Reserve. Sometimes even the Manning Canal (Plate 22) overflowed its banks, causing extensive damage.

Renovation of all the drains in the Drainage District was finally started in 1956. Instead of double dykes, a new style of shallow drain, 200 yards wide, was to be constructed. In cross section such a drain resembles a stream valley, thus departing completely from the old type of ditches with its steep sides and unsightly waste dump that is liable to cave in. The modern drains are simple to construct with modern equipment, and easy to maintain because the gently sloped banks are sown with grass and can be mowed. Most of the winter's snow blows out of the ditch, and that which does stay is not deep and therefore melts quickly in spring. Since there was nothing wrong with the drainage scheme shown in Figure 29,<sup>11</sup> that plan was re-adopted in 1956.

<sup>1</sup> *Manitoba: Sessional Papers*, 1896, Annual Report of the Minister of Public Works, 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: 1892: 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Der Nordwesten*, June 28, 1894.

<sup>4</sup> *Manitoba Sessional Papers*, 1896, Annual Report of the Minister of Public Works: 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 1899: 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the Land Drainage Arrangement Commission Respecting Municipalities Containing Land Subject to Levies Under "The Land Drainage Act"*, Winnipeg, 1936: 39.

<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Manitoba Department of Public Works, File D.D. No. 12, 1904, F.E. Simonds to G.A. Simpson, December 30, 1903.

<sup>9</sup> *Manitoba: Sessional Papers*, 1907, Annual Report of the Minister of Public Works: 600.

<sup>10</sup> M.A. Lyons, *Report and Recommendations of "Foreign Water" and Maintenance Problems*, Winnipeg, 1949: 20.

<sup>11</sup> Work on the drains is still continuing in 1960.

## Chapter 13

### THE LAND 1900-1955

The agricultural geography of the Mennonite settlements in both Russia and Canada in the nineteenth century is a story of the struggle to establish commercial grain farming. By 1900 this was accomplished in the West Reserve, but the East Reserve had not arrived at as high a level of agricultural development. After the Mennonite farmers had learned the appropriate agricultural techniques they carried their agriculture into the twentieth century with little change. Indeed, more new implements were introduced before 1900 than after 1900; in the nineteenth century sowing by hand had given way to the broadcast seeder and the drill, the scythe to the binder, and the threshing stone to the threshing machine. But in the twentieth century, the important change was to increase in power and efficiency rather than the introduction of many new implements. Of course the change from horse to gasoline was gradually taking place, but this did not effect the potential land use of the area in the way that the innovations of the nineteenth century had, except that gasoline power did reduce labour requirements. The tractor, the combine, and the truck made farming very much easier and greatly increased efficiency, but did not lead to either a more complete or a more intelligent use of the land.

Mennonites had been quite willing to adopt new agricultural implements, but not so eager to adopt new cultural practices or new crops designed to conserve the soil and diversify farm operations. It had been difficult to convince them to adopt summerfallow to kill weeds (and subsequently keep their fields clean), and similar difficulties were encountered in persuading them to use crop rotations, to seed pastures and to diversify their operations by keeping livestock.

In the West Reserve the emphasis on grain to the exclusion of all other agricultural interests did not weaken until 1930, 90 years after the Mennonites first began to depend upon it in South Russia, and then the change was forced upon them by depression, drought, grasshoppers and rust. It was the sheer force of external circumstances that made them reconsider their agricultural practices; in the early stages it was not a matter of self education, nor was it a growing realization that they were not using the natural resources to the fullest extent. The situation in the northern townships of the East Reserve was similar to that in the West Reserve, but in the southern townships the problem was that of finding a use for the marginal land that would bring in some steady cash return. Not until after 1940 did the prospects of the whole East Reserve begin to change as the farmers found that they could profitably supply Winnipeg with diversified produce.

The great change which has taken place on the land in the 20th century is not noticeable so much in the rural settlement patterns, as it is in the crops grown, in the methods of farming, in the attitude of the Mennonite farmers to the society about them and in the central places.

**Agriculture 1900-1920**

The construction of drains finally removed the main obstacle to farming in the northern townships of the West Reserve, and made it possible to farm all parts of the Reserve. Mennonite farmers throughout the area were uncompromising wheat growers before World War I. Commercial grain growing was not without its problems, both in field operations and in financing. The problem of weed infestation had been solved, as we have seen, with the help of government officials, but the financial problems which resulted from overspecialization in grain growing, were not as painfully obvious. They were, however, apparent for a short interval at the turn of the century. In the anxiety of the 1890's to acquire wheat land in an overcrowded Reserve, land prices had been driven up beyond the true value of the land, and more people than had been anticipated migrated to the North West Territories; when there were some poor crops after 1899, a severe drop in land values followed in 1902.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore many Mennonites were near ruin because they had over-invested in horses and in grain farming equipment, as well as land. The over capitalization resulting from specialization in grain farming was thus just beginning to be felt by the Mennonite farmers in the years from 1902 to 1904. But the price of wheat rose in 1905, and kept on rising through World War I, obscuring the fact that the land was being thoughtlessly mined and that there were inherent dangers in a one-crop economy. Wheat farming continued supreme.

Since wheat prices did not go much below \$1.00 a bushel again until 1930, the Mennonites reaped great profits during this, their great wheat farming period in Manitoba. Farming practices did not go under any significant changes. Nearly all machinery remained horse-powered until the 1930's, although, of course, the steam driven thresher was used, and the gasoline tractor was introduced. The first gasoline-powered threshing outfit was used in the Morden area in 1908.<sup>2</sup>

The 1906 Census of Canada, the most detailed crop census ever published, provides a very useful township by township summary of some aspects of the agricultural geography at this critical stage. The high development of the long settled southern townships is quite apparent, although the acreage in crops falls off sharply as the Escarpment in range 5 is approached. The northern townships reflect the fact that drainage improvements were only recent, especially in the east. The acreage of crop land per farm and the number of farms per townships are even more revealing. The *Chortitza-Fürstenland* townships, 1-3, 1-4, and 2-4, were the most densely occupied, and, it follows, also had the lowest acreage of crop land per farm. Undue fragmentation had not occurred among the *Bergthal* Mennonites, and in a few townships, 1-1E for example, there had even been some consolidation of holdings, but this in no way approached that of townships 3-5 and 3-4, which were settled by both Anglo-Saxons and Mennonites.

A large amount of grain was produced annually in the Reserve. The following table gives some indication of the distribution of wheat production (See Figure 4P for locations).

The Cereals Map published by the Department of the Interior in 1915 indicate



**Table 12**  
**Selected Agricultural Statistics West Reserve 1906**

<u>Township</u>	Acres of all Field crops (acres)	Field crop/farm (acres)	<u>No. of farms</u>
1-1E	16562	184	90
1-1W	17448	162	108
1-2	13885	138	101
1-3	12167	102	119
1-4	16644	110	151
1-5	4460	65	68
1-6	3325	41	76
2-1	14961	164	91
2-2	15092	150	105
2-3	15608	140	112
2-4	16122	124	130
2-5	9643	141	68
3-1	6190	162	38
3-2	10776	118	90
3-3	14876	148	100
3-4	14788	204	71
3-5	15740	230	69

(Census of Canada)

**Table 13**  
**Elevator Capacity West Reserve 1909**

	<u>Number of Elevators</u>	<u>Capacity in Bu.</u>
Gretna	6	128000
Altona	4	131000
Rosenfeld	5	79000
Plum Coulee	6	182000
Winkler	7	276000
Morden	4	137000
Haskett	1	30000
Bergman	1	25000

(Dept. of the Interior Map, 1909)

the kinds of crops grown in the Reserve that year. Wheat was selling at only \$ .90 a bu. that year, nowhere near the \$2.00 it was to reach in a few years, so that war time high prices would not as yet have affected the distribution of crops. Acreage sown to field crops ranged from 19,000 acres in township 3-4 to 8,000 in 1-6 (exceptionally low), with an average of 15,000 to 16,000 acres per township. Of the land in crops, often 8,000 and more acres were devoted to wheat, about 3,000 to 4,000 acres to oats, slightly less to barley, and about 1,000 acres to flax. Obviously there was little room left for summer fallow when 10 out of the 19 townships had at least 15,000 acres in *grain* crops.

The 1921 Census of Canada reveals the extent to which agriculture had developed during World War I.

**Table 14**  
**Selected Agricultural Statistics West Reserve 1921**

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Proportion of Municipality</u>		<u>Improved Land in</u>	
	<u>Improved</u>	<u>Crop</u>	<u>Fallow</u>	<u>Pasture</u>
Rhineland	81 %	77 %	15 %	8 %
Stanley	65 %	77 %	15 %	8 %

(Census of Canada)

The broken land at the Escarpment account for Stanley's low proportion of improved land. Fallowing was obviously being practiced, though it was not very important in the crop rotation.

Wheat was easily the most important crop in the Reserve (Table 15); usually four to five times as much wheat was shipped as all the other grain crops combined.

**Table 15**  
**Grain Shipments by Station West Reserve 1922-23**

	<u>Wheat</u>	<u>Other Grains</u>
Gretna	188000 bu.	53000 bu.
Altona	176000	35000
Rosenfeld	216000	64000
Plum Coulee	139000	27000
Winkler	285000	51000
Morden	152000	37000
Horndean	76000	12000

(Sanford Evans Statistical Service,  
Grain Reports 1922-23)

The Rosenfeld and Plum Coulee statistics are interesting. Once drainage works were started Rosenfeld came along splendidly as a grain growing area; Plum Coulee's shipments were affected by the founding of Horndean.

The Mennonite farmers living on their own land were probably moving ahead faster than those living in the villages. Improvements were made in the buildings, even if improvement of the land was thoughtlessly neglected. The farmers always built frame houses, though experiments with other materials had been carried out in an attempt to get away from the danger of fire in the frame house, and the need for frequent repainting. In the early 1890's houses with walls of lath and plaster were built, but strong winds often twisted the buildings so that the plaster fell off, and thus they were not widely adopted. Houses of brick or "boulder stones" were considered most desirable, but they were expensive, and were by no means simple to build so that not very many were built. Even concrete structures were built in Morden in 1893, but they were too rough looking to be widely used for houses.<sup>3</sup> Hence the frame house remained the basic structure in the Red River Lowland, as elsewhere on the prairies.

The farm buildings were generally placed a considerable distance from the road. An acre or two, or even ten, comprised the farm yard, and usually the buildings were built a comfortable distance apart. A garden was planted and a pasture was always right at hand for the cows. Shelter belts were invariably planted, and sometimes the belt would surround the entire farmstead, pasture and all, enclosing a considerable area. On the yard itself the trees were planted in groves so that a pleasant farm yard was in prospect. Groves of trees, a large barn for the horses, and perched over all a windmill for pumping – these were the chief characteristics of the farms of the early 1900's, and most farmsteads have remained this way to the present.

Fruit was grown in the Morden district by A.P. Stevenson, a noted horticulturist, who grew strawberries, raspberries, cherries, plums, gooseberries, currants, grapes and crabapples. Some of these products were packed and shipped to other parts of the province. Stevenson was always experimenting with new varieties or new plants, including standard apples, and it was he who demonstrated that this area was suitable for the hardier fruits. The Mennonites at this time were trying to grow only wild varieties of these fruits, and had not yet come under the influence of horticulturists such as Stevenson.

### **Land Holdings 1921-1956**

In both Rhineland and Stanley municipalities there was little unoccupied land by 1921, but in each there was a considerable acreage of unimproved land, which was steadily reduced as drainage continued to be improved (Table 16). There was a corresponding rise in the acreage of field crops. The acreage in summerfallow, on the other hand, has changed little since 1921, and has never exceeded 16% of the occupied land. Cultivated pasture has remained of minor importance in the Reserve.

**Table 16** (This table continues across to next page)  
**Land Utilization – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover. 1921-1956**

Municipality	Year	No. of Farm Units	Land Occupied			Improved Land			Field Crops		
			Total Acres	Acres /Farm Unit	% of Total Area	Total Acres	Acres /Farm Unit	% of Land Occu.	Total Acres	Acres /Farm Unit	% of Land
Rhineland	1921	1125	220598	196	95	187105	166	85	144230	128	65
	1926	1236	223305	183	97	197403	160	88	162996	132	73
	1931	1308	228252	174	99	205394	157	90	151029	115	66
	1936	1240	225706	182	98	204904	165	91	170998	138	76
	1941	1249	228852	183	99	219829	176	96	176773	141	77
	1946	1221	224466	184	97	212091	174	94	163020	133	73
	1951	1184	228754	193	99	222639	188	98	175170	148	77
	1956	1079	226101	210	98	220146	204	97	176751	165	78
Stanley	1921	871	194560	223	94	134209	153	69	103940	119	53
	1926	966	195686	202	94	135737	141	69	112690	117	58
	1931	942	198131	210	96	142641	152	72	107447	114	54
	1936	902	198733	220	96	145671	162	74	119292	132	60
	1941	896	204689	231	98	154454	172	75	123999	138	61
	1946	984	200069	202	97	140702	143	70	110440	113	55
	1951	906	204540	226	98	167187	184	82	131949	145	65
	1956	902	206679	230	99	167346	185	81	134667	149	65
Hanover	1891	384	81884	212	45	13449	35	16	13043	34	16
	1921	629	147436	234	80	54977	87	37	40244	64	27
	1926	696	128926	186	71	52670	75	41	36517	51	28
	1931	688	152690	222	82	57297	83	37	42730	62	28
	1936	883	158174	179	85	63429	72	40	49245	56	31
	1941	1088	166614	153	90	74358	68	45	59170	54	35
	1946	1113	171360	154	93	74924	67	44	52331	47	31
	1951	976	174097	179	95	82579	85	47	60336	62	35
1956	917	175217	191	95	95624	104	55	74586	81	43	

(Census of Canada 1921-1956)

**Table 16**  
**Land Utilization – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover. 1921-1956**

Fallow		Cultivated Pasture		Unimproved Land		Natural Pasture	
Total Acres	% of <u>Land</u>	Total Acres	% of <u>Land</u>	Total Acres	% of <u>Land</u>	Total Acres	% of <u>Land</u>
<u>Occu.</u>		<u>Occu.</u>		<u>Occu.</u>		<u>Occu.</u>	
28194	13	13857	6	33493	15	31082	14
22660	10	9554	4	25902	12	23693	
37582	16	11587	5	22858	10	20656	9
21767	10	11502	5	20802	9	15378	7
19722	9	17670	8	9023	4	6444	3
23208	10	21307	9	12375	5	12067	5
26983	12	15256	7	6115	3	-	-
28311	12	8119	4	5955	3	-	-
19977	10	8570	4	60351	31		
17193	9	4894	3	59949	31	41561	
25040	13	7916	4	55490	28	33116	
17256	9	7925	4	53062	27	33139	
19886	10	7822	4	50235	25	41552	
20947	10	4956	2	59367	30	52618	
17869	9	12931	6	37353	18	-	-
21751	10	6826	3	39333	19	-	-
406						66295	83
10178	7	1665	1	92459	63	47751	32
13396	10	2033	2	76256	59	52457	
9283	7	3242	2	95393	62	49686	32
10827	7	2628	2	94745	60	58480	37
10008	6	2242	1	92256	55	70271	42
14943	9	1213	1	96436	56	82065	48
14072	8	4804	3	91518	52	-	-
13567	8	3999	2	79593	45	-	-

(Census of Canada 1921-1956)

**Table 17**  
**Selected Farm Size – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover. 1891-1946**  
**(in acres)**

Year	Rhineland					Stanley					Hanover				
	-100	percent	100+	percent	Total	-100	percent	100+	percent	Total	-100	percent	100+	percent	Total
1891	82	12	619	88	701	204	24	662	76	866	22	11	179	89	201
1921	194	17	931	83	1125	156	18	715	82	871	77	12	552	88	629
1936	348	28	892	72	1240	219	24	683	76	902	271	33	562	67	833
1941	383	31	866	69	1249	203	23	693	77	896	431	40	657	60	1088
1946	382	31	839	69	1221	302	31	682	69	984	422	38	691	62	1113

(Census of Canada 1891-1946)

**Table 18**  
**Farm Size – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover, Division II, Manitoba. 1951 and 1956**  
**(in acres)**

Municipality	Number of Farms	Farm Categories														
		3 acres	%	3-9 acres	%	10-69 acres	%	70-239 acres	%	240-399 acres	%	400-559 acres	%	560+ acres	%	
1951																
Rhineland	1184	5	-	43	4	194	16	571	48	287	24	60	5	24	2	
Stanley	90	14	1	52	6	131	14	329	36	238	26	89	10	53	6	
Hanover	976	6	-	21	2	137	14	529	54	230	23	45	4	8	1	
Division II	4981	20	-	126	3	430	9	1730	35	1607	32	590	12	468	9	
Manitoba	52383	240	-	1278	2	3160	6	16326	31	16135	31	7399	14	7845	14	
1956																
Rhineland	1079	2	-	40	4	146	13	521	48	265	25	73	7	32	3	
Stanley	902	9	1	62	7	133	15	305	34	249	28	91	10	53	6	
Hanover	917	5	-	24	3	101	11	503	55	223	24	50	6	11	1	

(Census of Canada 1951 and 1956)

**Table 19**  
**Farm Size in 1922**  
**North-South Traverse along Range 2W West Reserve**

		<b>Number of Farms</b>						
Town- ship	Non- Menn.	under 80 acres	80-160 acres	160-240 acres	240-320 acres	320-480 acres	480-640 acres	640 acres
1-2	0	400	12	12	1	1		
2-2	3	160	2	12	5	1		
3-2	2	0	4	20		1		
4-2	5	0	2	5		2	2	2
5-2	all	0		9		4	1	1
6-2	all	0		14	3	2		

(Data from Cummins Land Map  
Series, 1922)

The average size of the farms in Rhineland has varied between 174 and 210 acres from 1921 to 1956, and in Stanley from 202 to 231 acres (Table 16). However, there have always been a large number of small farms, as Table 16 shows, and social factors were very important in producing them. Land was occasionally divided among the children at the death of a parent, though if possible the head of the family would attempt to place his sons on farms of their own so that division of the home farm would not be necessary. Population pressure also played its part as long as the farmers were reluctant to move elsewhere, although the migrations to Saskatchewan, Mexico and Paraguay counteracted this to some extent. Table 18 shows how far fragmentation had progressed by 1951 and 1956, but it also reveals that there are still a considerable number of large farms. Modern farm economics is pulling the farm size in two directions. Large farms are usually more efficient because a farmer can produce his product at less cost per unit. A small farmer rarely utilizes all the farm labour available, and a large farm therefore is a better balance between land, labour and capital resources. Consequently despite diversifications of farm operations the good farmers tend to expand their holdings, and in the West Reserve a number of particularly successful large Mennonite farming enterprises are emerging, so that the trend towards larger farm size in Western Canada is also discernible in the Reserve. On the other hand, there is considerable population pressure on the farm lands of the Mennonite area, and consequently through fragmentation, small farms tend to develop. These farmers try to eke out a living by increasing the size of their farm business by more intensive farming. But even so there is rarely enough work on the small farms, so that the men have to find additional work elsewhere. This is particularly true in the Winkler area. Therefore the whole size of farm picture is not simple, and no clear trend can be seen. In all cases the farmers are trying to achieve the same end of increasing the size of business, either through more extensive or more intensive farming.



Figure 30

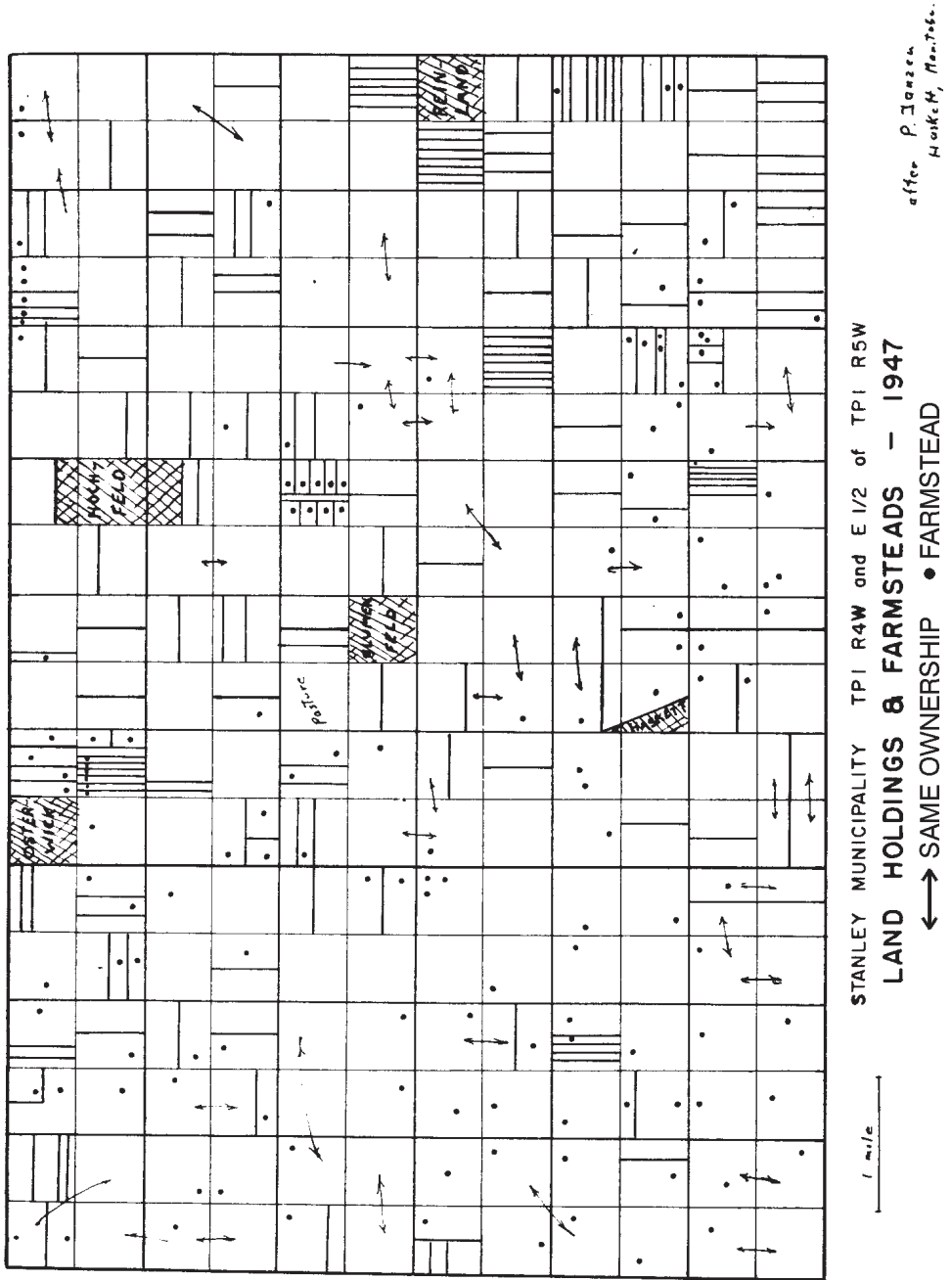
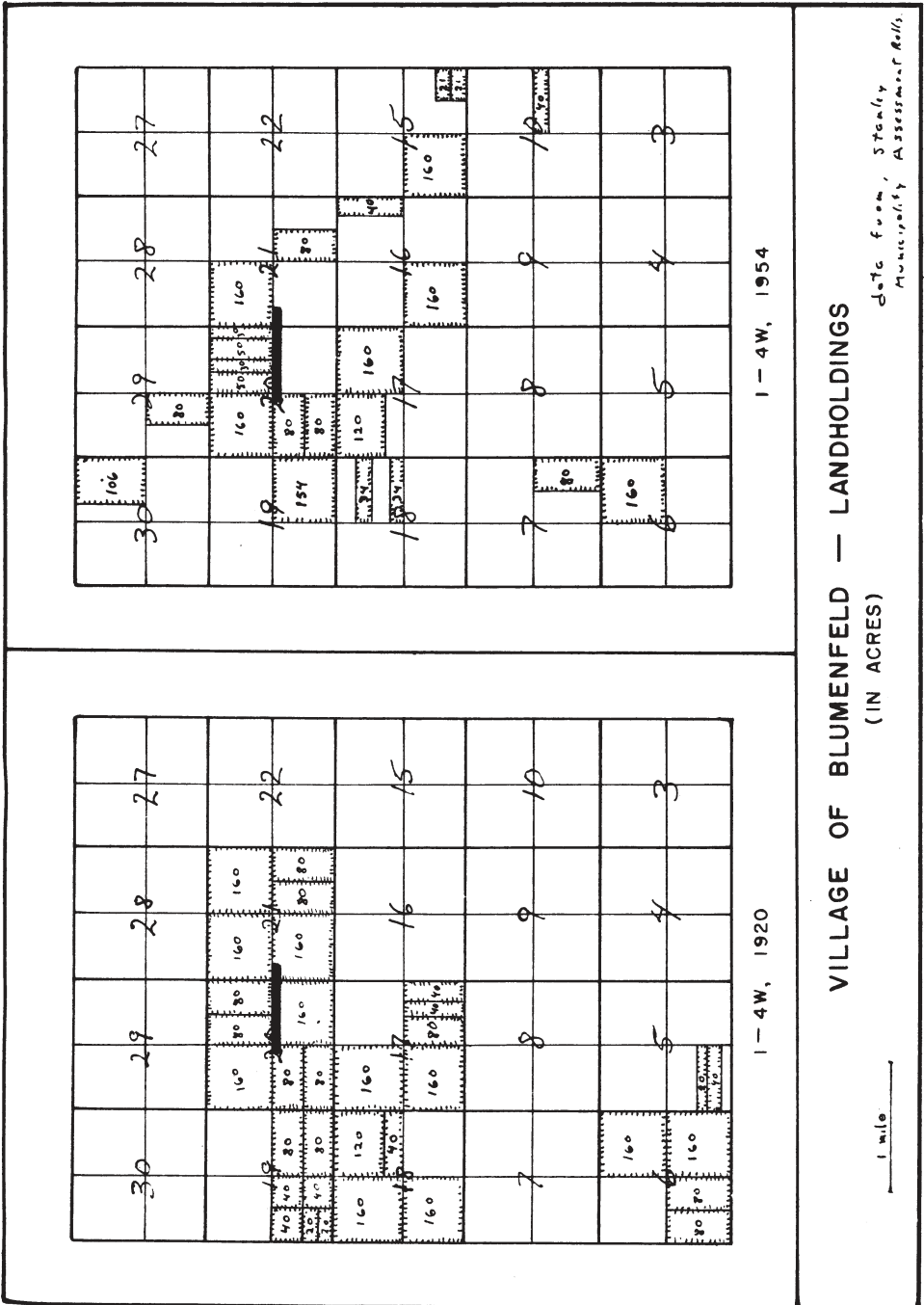


Figure 31





There is a considerable variation in the size of farms from place to place in the Reserve, and a close study of the Cummins Land Map Series reveals what the farm sizes actually were in different parts of the Reserve. Farms were smallest in the south central part of the Reserve, and increased in size towards the margins (Table 19).<sup>4</sup> (Field observations indicate that the same pattern prevailed in 1955, though with more small holdings in the south).

The most fragmented township in the Reserve, perhaps in the entire West, is township 1-4; Figure 30 shows the land holdings in 1947. The most severe fragmentation is found close to the villages, so that *Kagel* are practically recreated. Despite the fragmentation there are still many half-section farms, and in some sections the fragmentation is not as bad as it appears to be. In S.E. 15, for instance, the quarter section is divided into 20 acre fields by title, but one of the eight owners rents the other seven fields and operates a quarter section farm. Blumenfeld abandoned the *Gewanne* in 1923, and Figure 31 shows that the degree of fragmentation did not change greatly before and after the break up of the *Gewannflur*. From 1920 to 1954 the land controlled from the village decreased from approximately 3,000 acres to 2,000 acres.<sup>5</sup>

### Grain and Forage Crops 1921-1956

Until 1936 the wheat acreage of the Reserve was never less than 50% of the total field crop acreage, but by 1956 it had fallen to below 20% and was exceeded even by the acreage in oats (Table 21). Wheat suffered a sharp decline in the 1930's as a result of losses from rust infestation, and during World War II lost further ground to the coarse grain and row crops, which have maintained their improved position, because of the difficulty of marketing wheat. Oats and barley are both important as livestock feeds, and when OAC 21, a high grade malting barley, was introduced in the 1920's the farmers also began to grow malting barley.

Other small grains have gained in importance. After 1941 flax acreage rose along with the price of flax, as the demand for linseed oil continued. Buckwheat is also a valuable crop, since it can be seeded as late as July 15, which is a great boon to farmers in years when "spring is late". Since 1945 there has been a considerable market in Europe for the crop.

But the significant change in the grains, is the steadily falling proportion of land devoted to wheat, oats and barley. These three grains constituted nearly 100% of the seeded acreage in the Reserve in 1891, and still more than 80% in 1936, but fell to below 50% in 1956 (Census of Canada).

The decrease in the proportion of land devoted to cereals does not mean that there was a corresponding decrease in deliveries to elevators. New shipping facilities have even been built in recent years; in 1951, for example the Manitoba Pool built elevators in both Altona and Gretna. The Reserve is very well supplied with elevators at present (Table 20). Much of the increase in storage capacity was necessitated by the slow movement of grain during the war, and in recent years.

**Table 20**  
**Elevators and Grain Storing Capacity West Reserve 1936-1954**

Shipping Point	1936		1954	
	No. of <u>Elevators</u>	Capacity <u>bu.</u>	No. of <u>Elevators</u>	Capacity <u>bu.</u>
Gretna	4	98000	5	254000
Altona	3	111500	5	304500
Rosenfeld	3	74500	3	212500
Horndean	1	19000	1	53500
Plum Coulee	4	147000	4	324000
Winkler	4	126000	5	319000
Morden	5	131000	4	308000
Haskett	1	49000	0	
Glencross	1	23000	0	
Kronsgart	1	23000	1	85000

(Data from Canadian Wheat Board)

Until 1940 wheat was easily the dominant cash crop in the Reserve (Table 22). Even in the 1930's the Reserve continued to produce grain successfully, compared to the rest of the Prairies, because the drought was not as severe as elsewhere. Grain yields were cut drastically, however, by rust epidemics and grasshoppers, and in some years by a combination of drought and extraordinary heat waves.

Though the wheat acreage was decreasing after 1939 more wheat was delivered than ever. Most of the increase can be attributed to the higher yields that resulted from the continuously high precipitation of the 1940's and early 1950's, the disappearance of the grasshoppers and the absence of any serious outbreaks of rust. But the other grains, such as oats, barley, buckwheat, rye and flax were being delivered in increasing amounts, far exceeding the deliveries of the 1920's, until they accounted in 1947-54 for one and one half times the volume of the wheat delivered in those years.

There is a considerable variation in the distribution of wheat in the Reserve. The northeastern delivery points, relying on their wheat producing hinterlands to the north, have a higher proportion of wheat deliveries, than the southern and western centres (Table 22). Rosenfeld and Horndean continued to ship more wheat than other grains in 1947-54.

Winkler was the largest shipping point in the Reserve until 1939-46, when Morden took over because Winkler's hinterland was becoming diversified more quickly than Morden's. Gretna ranks above Altona despite the fact that its trading hinterland is dominated in all other respects by Altona. Its boundary location has made Gretna immune from all shipping points other than Altona, whereas Altona is affected by Gretna, Plum Coulee, Rosenfeld, Horndean, and Letellier, a French centre on the C.N.R. line to the east.

Forage crops are not important in the Reserve. Sweet clover and alfalfa were grown in the 1930's for fodder and in order to rehabilitate the land, but there was a shift away from them in the 1940's. Sweet clover proved a nuisance as a volunteer crop in wheat fields, and also the sweet clover weevil caused damage, so that it is in disfavour. Alfalfa is still grown, but brome grass is the most popular of the grasses because of its productivity, general reliability, cheaper seed and ease of culture.

### **Livestock and Poultry 1921-1956**

The number of horses per farm unit has continually decreased since 1916, as they have been replaced by tractors, but the change has not been rapid (Table 23). Very few gasoline tractors were in use before World War I, and then they were generally used only for belt power. Field cultivation with tractors was begun in the 1920's, but the high, almost prohibitive, price of oil and gasoline prevented many farmers from mechanizing their farms, and in the succeeding decade the tendency was to avoid the expense of gasoline for draw-bar work. Not until 1937, a good crop season, and a year when there was a scarcity of horses because of disease, did the switch to gasoline power begin. Complete mechanization was delayed during the war, but the war years ultimately finished the horse. Prosperity brought the means for mechanization, and the labour shortage and the reluctance of young people to work with animals completed the change.

The Red River Lowland is not good cattle country, unless a farmer really specializes in livestock, because the soil is well suited for crop growing, water and pasture are generally scarce and taxes are high. Stanley has approximately twice as many cattle per farm unit land as Rhineland (Table 23), because in the Pembina Country there are some large cattle farms, and in the area south of Winkler dairying had become important since World War I, as will be described later. Livestock finishing was started by a few Stanley farmers in 1953, and there are indications that this may become important, especially if more pasture is introduced into the rotation so that the enterprise can be combined with dairying. Hogs are kept by most farmers, though none specialize in them.

A feature of the landscape intimately associated with livestock raising is the dug-out. By 1955 farmers with the help of P.F.R.A. had constructed 895 dug-outs in Rhineland, and 372 in Stanley, a greater density than anywhere else in Manitoba.<sup>6</sup>

Poultry production has fluctuated, but there has been a great increase in the number of birds in the 1950's through improvements in production facilities and the use of prepared feeds, so that large flocks can be raised with minimum effort. In 1951 only two hatcheries were in operation in the Reserve, and two years later there were eight. The Winkler area has the greatest concentration of hens in Manitoba, but as yet production is on a farmstead basis, and there are few of the poultry factories that have been built in the East Reserve.

**Table 21** (table continued on following page)  
**Field Crops – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover. 1891-1956.**

Municipality	Year	All Field Crops		Wheat		Barley		Oats		Rye		Seed Flax	
		Acres	Acres	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%
Rhineland	1891	44951	34509	77	2371	5	7934	18					
Stanley		53255	39159	74	3849	7	9727	18					
Hanover		13043	7803	60	910	7	3928	30					
Rhineland	1921	144230	83937	58	22184	15	32946	23	404			1339	1
Stanley		103940	60180	58	13513	13	27565	26	1157			494	
Hanover		40244	15298	38	8321	21	13396	33	800	2		1373	3
Rhineland	1926	160996	81128	50	31603	19	28169	17	7641	5		8856	5
Stanley		112690	56572	50	21507	19	22119	20	2137	2		5784	5
Hanover		36517	5751	16	11401	31	12543	34	1847	5		2624	7
Rhineland	1931	151004	84537	56	22378	15	28055	19	471			4309	3
Stanley		107141	53789	50	17250	16	25355	24	1007	1		3521	3
Hanover		42724	8543	20	11782	28	13967	33	338			899	
Rhineland	1936	170988	89820	52	29423	17	29585	17	4722	3		1626	1
Stanley		119292	61893	52	16025	13	24002	20	3335	3		1015	1
Hanover		49245	6248	13	16642	34	13095	27	945			444	
Rhineland	1941	176648	59290	33	37861	21	25725	14	5321	3		5838	3
Stanley		123962	45015	37	21658	17	24433	20	5167	4		1678	1
Hanover		58715	7045	12	18334	31	13018	22	1824	3		1540	3
Rhineland	1946	162495	59395	36	38821	24	27738	17	377			10162	6
Stanley		109749	37313	34	24139	22	26565	24	341			6105	6
Hanover		51912	5313	10	16274	31	17063	33	110			1117	2
Rhineland	1951	175048	55615	31	43750	25	33767	19	585			18320	10
Stanley		130737	31555	24	29018	22	28803	22	1698	1		16707	13
Hanover		60003	4466	7	16280	27	22531	38	147			3683	6
Rhineland	1956	176751	32816	19	25173	14	35146	20	497			42599	24
Stanley		134667	23900	18	16265	12	30909	23	599			28423	21
Hanover		74586	5916	8	11104		30484		139			2809	

(Data from D.B.S.)



**Table 21**  
**Field Crops – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover. 1891-1956.**

Mixed or Other Grains		Cultivated Hay or Clover		Other Fodder Crops		Potatoes	Other Field Roots		Other Field Crops		
Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%
						170					
						173					
						251					
		2299	2	977	1	86		12		32	
		2065	2	264		172				8	
32		386		35		563		10			
70		5167	3			231		5		126	
80		4133	4			292		45		21	
113		398				329		83		1438	4
		5643	4			289		121		5201	3
141		4896	5			441		27		444	
997		5575	13			396		51		176	
		8935	5	4884	3	286		15		1692	1
575		8436	7	3131	3	421		15		444	
1339	3	9419	19	571		503		32		7	
33870	19	4440	3	2499	1	304		1499	1	1	
19428	16	5317	4	1024	1	206		5		31	
1870	3	10726	18	2633	4	950		754		21	
4251	3	1306	1	4707	3	262		2289	1	13187	8
6433	6	1987	2	1177	1	454		207		5028	5
3023		5650	6	1627	3	843		833		59	
6194	4	921		3176	2	229		4893	3	7598	4
13360	10	2185	2	958		450		837		5166	4
3005	6	4294	7	1622	3	698		3202	5	75	
765		3775	2	1235	1	229					
2099		5073	4	1628	1	607					
7647		9419		2330		690					

(Data from D.B.S.)

**Table 22**  
**Grain Shipments by Stations—West Reserve, 1922-1954**  
 (in '000s of bus.)

Center	1922-30		1931-38		1939-46		1947-54		Total			
	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others	Total	Wh/Others
Gretna	1788	417	1903	635	2277	1900	1722	2380	7690	5332	13022	1.4
Altona	1478	418	1692	397	1755	1562	1269	1986	6194	4363	10557	1.4
Rosenfeld	1391	674	1813	500	1883	1314	1626	1268	6713	3756	10469	1.8
Horndean	572	240	739	179	660	520	469	465	2440	1404	3844	1.7
Plum Coulee	1534	575	2125	396	2370	1740	1715	2203	7744	4914	12658	1.6
Winkler	1741	747	2024	420	3035	2519	1644	3792	8444	7478	15922	1.1
Morden	1362	780	1721	333	3409	2283	2816	3744	9308	7140	16448	1.3
Total	9866	3851	12017	2860	15389	11838	10261	15838				
Grand Total	13717		14877		27227		26099					

(Data from Sanford Evans)

### **New Attitude to Farming**

Until the 1930's the Mennonites were self assured in their agricultural practices, and disdained to ask advice from any outside source. The area had been prosperous for many years, and had never seen any need for outside help, though in fact it probably would have been more prosperous if the Mennonites had made use of the available advice. A sentence in the Rhineland Municipal Minutes for Feb. 3, 1920 is very revealing. Council could not see its way clear to participate in the offer of the Agricultural Extension Service Department to place an agricultural representative at the service of Rhineland and Stanley municipalities, because the "average attitude of the farmers in Rhineland is such as not warranting the success [of the venture]". Twenty years later the municipality was asking for an agricultural representative—the 1930's brought about the change in attitude.

One of the agencies that helped to awaken the Mennonite farmers to the new crops and new techniques was the Dominion Government Experimental Farm, established in 1914 on the outskirts of Morden. The station did not have much influence on the Mennonite farmers in the first fifteen years of its existence, but during that time much research was accomplished which was of ultimate benefit to the farmers of Stanley Municipality. Research work was done on crop rotations in an endeavour to get farmers to include grasses and clovers in their crop sequences, to add organic matter to their soils, assist in controlling soil erosion, increase the water-holding capacity of the soil, and assist generally in improving soil fertility and crop production. Considerable work was done in trying to substitute corn for black summer fallow in the crop rotation.

A summary of the climatic conditions at Morden in the 1930's indicates what conditions the farmers in the Reserve had to contend with at this time.<sup>7</sup> The annual precipitation in the 1930's was: 1930 – 19.93"; 1931 – 15.83"; 1932 – 19.64"; 1933 – 18.97"; 1934 – 13.77"; 1935 – 21.72"; 1936 – 13.78"; 1937 – 25.04". In 1931 the moisture supply was adequate until late June when prolonged heat, with a maximum temperature of 102 degrees Fahrenheit, caused premature ripening and low yields. In 1932 grasshoppers caused destruction to late maturing crops, and in the following year they were even more harmful.

In 1934 drought caused all crops to suffer. There were good crop prospects in 1935, but stem rust and parching dry winds in July were ruinous, and resulted in low yields and low grades. Morden in July, 1936, had a week of all time maximum daily temperatures; commencing July 10 temperatures 107.5, 111.2, 110.4, 106.8, 97.2, 98.3 and 104.8 degrees Fahrenheit were recorded, and cereal crops were badly burned. In 1937 a small crop was obtained though stem rust did much damage in some districts. And to add to the difficulties wheat prices had been dropping at this time (Table 24).

**Table 23** (Table 23 continues on following page)  
**Livestock – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover. 1891-1956**  
**(D.B.S.)**

Municipality	No.	Horses		Cattle			Beef	Other
		Per Farm Unit	Total	Per Farm Unit	Milk	Per Farm Unit		
Rhineland	2982	4.3	3513	5	1818	2.6		1695
Stanley	3552	4.1	4197	4.8	2186	2.5		2011
Hanover	959	4.8	5346	27	1983	8.9		3363
Rhineland	10709	7.9	8929	6.6				
Stanley	4361	8.8	6304	13				
Hanover	3265	5.2	8025	13				
Rhineland	6828	5.2	8290	6.3	3896	3		4394
Stanley	5738	6.1	9804	10	3590	3.8		6214
Hanover	3309	4.8	10923	16	5007			5916
Rhineland	6217	5	7898	6.4	4249	3.4		3649
Stanley	5121	5.7	9904	11	4816	5.3		5088
Hanover	3246	3.9	10483	12	6189	7		4294
Rhineland	4717	3.8	8760	7	5593	4.5	92	3075
Stanley	4463	5	10234	11.4	5710	6.4	416	4108
Hanover	3410	3.1	10255	9.4	7219	6.6	119	2917
Rhineland	2644	2.2	9405	7.7	5967	4.9	177	3261
Stanley	2831	2.9	11415	11.6	6048	6.1	789	4578
Hanover	2910	2.6	13000	11.7	8760	7.9	325	3915
Rhineland	1311	1.1	6477	5.5	3852	3.3	368	2357
Stanley	1400	1.5	9094	10	4650	5.1	1096	3348
Hanover	1775	1.8	10214	10.5	6634	6.8	194	3386
Rhineland	501	0.5	7049	6.5	3388	3.3		
Stanley	643	0.7	11415	11.4	3904	4.3		
Hanover	936	1	11396	12.4	6140	6.7		

**Table 23**  
**Livestock – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover. 1891-1956**  
**(D.B.S.)**

<u>Municipality</u>	<b>Sheep</b>	<b>Swine</b>		<b>Poultry</b>		<u>Year</u>
		<u>No.</u>	<u>Per Farm</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Per Farm</u>	
Rhineland	1161	2081	3	15398	22	1891
Stanley	900	2860	3.3	20539	24	
Hanover	4367	683	3.4	9729	49	
Rhineland	1140	6612	4.9			1916
Stanley	1947	3604	7.3			
Hanover	1270	2605	4.2			
Rhineland	2024	9084	7	182402	139	1931
Stanley	2932	8011	8.5	141703	150	
Hanover	6517	6906	7.3	86430	125	
Rhineland	1703	7676	6.2	164131	132	1936
Stanley	2069	5856	6.5	124379	137	
Hanover	5173	5961	6.7	92090	104	
Rhineland	1528	17344	13.8	264977	212	1941
Stanley	1434	11758	13	172118	192	
Hanover	5349	11272	10.4	178081	164	
Rhineland	1557	8343	6.8	361666	296	1946
Stanley	1139	7339	7.5	223975	228	
Hanover	2639	6610	5.9	266638	240	
Rhineland	245	8297	7	310539	262	1951
Stanley	268	8115	9	212014	234	
Hanover	927	7899	8.1	215622	220	
Rhineland	439	7956	8	293037	293	1956
Stanley	1298	7307	8.1	197641	219	
Hanover	657	7642	8.3	286825	313	

(Data from D.B.S.)

**Table 24**  
**Average Wheat Prices 1926-1943**  
 (Ten year running means based on price of  
 No. 1 Northern, Fort William)

1926	1.27	1932	0.93	1938	0.87
1927	1.20	1933	0.91	1939	0.94
1928	1.15	1934	0.85	1940	1.03
1929	1.11	1935	0.80	1941	1.10
1930	1.02	1936	0.81	1942	1.16
1931	0.95	1937	0.83	1943	1.21

(Data from H.G.L. Strange, *Prairie Agriculture*, Appendix IX. )

Mennonite farmers had been riding the crest of a wartime boom in wheat, and even though prices and conditions were not continuously favourable in the 1920's, they had still retained their faith in the crop. Then they were hit hard in the 1930's by the conditions (and prices) described above. A survey made of Rhineland Municipality during the worst of the depression revealed that out of 1,250 farmers in the municipality, 626 had lost title to their farms through foreclosures or bankruptcy proceedings; 455 were so heavily in debt that they were obliged to pay a third of their crop to mortgage companies or mortgage holders; and only 15% of the farmers had a clear title to their lands.<sup>8</sup>

Relief projects such as the construction of roads and drainage ditches were undertaken by the municipalities in order to enable farmers to work off their taxes. At the same time grain, fodder, and direct unemployment relief were being distributed throughout the Reserve by the municipalities.

Strange as it may seem, the depression and drought brought about a migration from the West to the East Reserve that was in a reverse direction to that which had taken place in the 1870's and 1880's. A considerable number of farmers from the West Reserve, but even more from the Lowe Farm district to the north, sought refuge in the wooded lands of the East Reserve where at least a subsistence living was possible. A letter in the July 25, 1934 issue of the *Steinbach Post* from a Mennonite farmer living in Haskett, explains clearly why poor farmers were moving to the East Reserve. He said that the people were very poor in the area south of Winkler and the municipality couldn't or wouldn't help; the churches were too poor to support their members, and in general there was a shortage of bread, clothes, land and work. He had gone to look for land in the Pansy district of the East Reserve (South of Sarto) where it could be obtained for paying the taxes. "A person who can accommodate himself to the area, can make a better living there than in the West Reserve." He said that wood and pasture at least were plentiful (he might have added water too), and none of these had to be paid for.

Thus two common ways of weathering the depression were direct relief and migration, but neither of these was constructive. There were, however, a small number of men who attempted to find a solution which would not only provide some relief, but also serve as a long term remedy. It was necessary to ensure that the Reserve would never be brought so close to disaster again.

In the early 1930's a group of public-spirited men, farmers, businessmen and teachers, began to come together in Altona to discuss possible solutions to the Reserve's problems. The general conclusion was that the avenue of approach should be diversified farming. This in itself was nothing new, but to provide the idea, the group in 1931 organized the Rhineland Agricultural Society, the first successful agricultural society formed among the Manitoba Mennonites. Main emphasis was to be placed upon agriculture, but since agriculture permeated all phases of community life the group intended, right from the beginning, to try and encourage a variety of community projects. The Society's first endeavour was to get assistance from the Dominion and Provincial Departments of Agriculture, and also the part time services of an agricultural representative stationed in Morden were obtained. Calling upon outside assistance was a radical change, but a very necessary one if the Mennonites were to diversify their agricultural base.

Perhaps most important for the ultimate development of the community was the publication of the *Rhineland Agricultural Society's Quarterly*, a journal that not only described new agricultural techniques, new crops and the benefits of diversification, but also emphasized the need for co-operation if the community was to survive the depression. The emphasis on education of the community and on community building, differentiated the Rhineland group from most agricultural societies in Manitoba, and was probably a result of the fact that school teachers or former school teachers took the lead in organizing the Society. These men recognized the essentially educational nature of their task and set the Society a course on which it has continued since.

Another response to the depression was the development of the cooperative movement among the Mennonites. The first Mennonite Consumers Cooperative was the Lowe Farm Consumers Co-op oil station, established in the small Mennonite village of Lowe Farm in 1930. This was the prototype for other cooperative ventures in the Reserve. The people in the Altona district also recognized the benefits of bulk buying, and organized the Rhineland Consumers Cooperative the next year, and cooperatives were established later in Plum Coulee, Gretna, Winkler, and Rhineland. Bulk oil and gasoline, fuel, binder twine and dry goods and groceries were distributed. Later processing was included and a cooperative cannery, vegetable oils plant and creamery were established.

Altona was the centre of the cooperative movement and here the major part of the educational work was done which was necessary to acquaint the people with cooperation and also with new agricultural techniques. One reason why the cooperatives were successful was that the energy which had developed strong rural farmers' organizations in other parts of Manitoba, but had been latent among the Mennonites, was finally put to work in the cooperative movement. Various writers have emphasized that the rise of the cooperatives was really a community reorganization. They maintain that the cooperatives spread so rapidly among the Mennonites because the prevailing economic institutions had broken down during the depression, leaving a vacuum that was filled by the cooperatives. They believe that the rise of the cooperatives was facilitated by the fact that the principles of cooperation bear a resemblance to the solidaristic type of peasant economy familiar to the Mennonites.<sup>9</sup>

This interpretation seeks the success of the cooperative movement too much in the past, and fails to give proper emphasis to the important positive role which education played. E. K. Francis says that:

As long as the agrarian capitalism typical of Western Canada, and especially of its wheat growing regions, proved viable, they intended to follow the examples of the host society. When its fallacies became apparent with the breakdown of world export, they readily reverted to older behaviour patterns, and, above all, to a modified form of subsistence farming.<sup>10</sup>

The Mennonites did not, as Francis suggests, turn their back on the "host society" and revert to old agricultural practices. Their old agricultural practices consisted of grain farming exclusively, and the Mennonites had spurned the frequent suggestions of the Department of Agriculture officials that they diversify. Now, under economic pressure, they did not turn to subsistence farming but to a positive form of diversification which permitted further commercial agricultural development. What a few leading Mennonites actually did during the depression was turn to the larger "host society", away from the "self-sufficient" ideas which had proved inadequate, in an attempt to learn how to produce more diversified crops to the area. Only those Mennonites who migrated to the East Reserve actually turned to subsistence farming, and they had no part in the cooperative movement.

In their drive for diversification the farm leaders thought that the solution lay in row crops. First, this would result in a more stable economy because there would be a variety of markets to serve; second, such farming practices would require a much larger labour force and thus use some of the surplus labour; and third, the land would improve as a result of the greater opportunities for crop rotation.<sup>11</sup> All this of course required expert outside advice, and this is where much opposition came from the conservative Mennonites. They viewed the cooperatives and the Rhineland Agricultural Society with their liaisons with the government and other outside institutions and organizations, as a threat to their traditional ways. Attacks were made on the leaders of the two organizations but though the opposing forces managed to get one of the cooperative leaders, a teacher, removed from his position, the organizations proved too strong to tear down, and kept on growing. Opposition has never entirely died down, but it is only desultory now.

The achievements of the cooperatives in the Reserve are really amazing. The Rhineland Consumers Co-op was established in 1931 with a membership of 81 farmers; in 1955 it had over 900. It made its first tangible contribution to community education in 1935, when it sponsored an essay contest among school children of the municipality. Since then it has spent much money on education. In 1935 the Rhineland Agricultural Society and the local Cooperative sponsored a rural training centre, the Rhineland Agricultural Institute, in Altona, which offered short courses on a wide range of subjects in agriculture and home economics. Instruction was given by local men, or staff members of the extension service of the University of Manitoba. In 1940 further expansion resulted in the establishment of a folk school with emphasis on teaching young people how to become responsible citizens in their communities. By 1939 a full time field man was employed by the Rhineland Consumers to direct community and cooperative education. An-



other of his tasks was to help organize more cooperatives.

The Altona Co-op store was established in 1937. In 1955 it had 1,700 members, and supplied the community with dry goods, groceries, hardware, clothing, home furnishings and food locker facilities. It also has a branch store in Horndean. Gretna established a store in 1938 (700 members in 1955). A bulk oil station, the Stanley Consumers, was established in Winkler in 1941, to serve the western part of the Reserve with bulk fuel. In Altona, lumber departments and agricultural repair departments were also added to the Consumers Cooperative in the war years. Credit Unions have been established in Altona, Winkler, Gretna and Plum Coulee; and Altona and Gretna have "Pool" elevators. The Federation of Southern Manitoba Cooperatives was established in 1941 to coordinate the activities of these various organizations and integrate the educational programs, and in 1955 the cooperatives had a combined membership of over 8,000 in this area of approximately 20,000 people. This included membership in the Vegetable Oils Co-op at Altona, and the Creamery Co-op at Winkler and there was some overlapping as well among the various organizations.

The cooperatives undoubtedly have benefited the Reserve financially; money has been left in the farmers' pockets as a result of the lower prices of gasoline, fuel and binder twine, or has been returned there in the form of dividends from the stores and the Pool elevators. Reduction of prices was particularly important in the years of the depression. But far more important than the monetary gains are the social gains. In the past Mennonites tended to retire into the background whenever any community project had to be undertaken. There was no sense of community responsibility apart from participating in the affairs of the church and a few of its subsidiary organizations. Few Mennonites took part in municipal affairs and provision for any recreational facilities for the young folk was unheard of. The cooperative movement was the first endeavour which really demanded civic thinking and action from the great majority of the farmers. At first it was run by strong-willed men, and there was lacking some of the group participation that might have been desired, but this situation has improved.

Many Mennonites still look askance at the way in which the cooperatives have emphasized education, but full credit must be given to the cooperatives for finally making almost the entire Mennonite community realize that it is impossible to retreat from the larger Canadian society. And the cooperatives have amply demonstrated that it is possible to participate in Canadian society without necessarily abandoning the Mennonite social traditions, as many were afraid would happen.

Agricultural improvements came about in a somewhat different way in the Winkler district. The cooperative movement had its nucleus in the Altona area, where the farms were not nearly as fragmented as near Winkler. Altona had been the centre of a progressive well-to-do farming district before the depression and drought years, and, once a few leaders had risen who could direct the organization, it proved to be an admirable rallying point for farmers to band together and form cooperatives. The farming background was different in Stanley. There were many conservative, even backward, farmers in the agricultural villages who would have nothing to do with cooperative enterprise. Then too there was a distinct division between the few large landholders and those who owned barely enough

land to make a living. Finally, no leaders capable (or interested) in starting cooperatives arose in this area in the 1930's. However, there did emerge a group of big farmers who adopted new agricultural practices, and showed by example what could be done in overcoming drought, depression, grasshoppers and rust. The farmers did not fall back on old Mennonite institutions to survive the depression, but assisted by advice from the Morden Experimental Farm, they adopted the best modern techniques and new crops.

In the course of the 1930's and 1940's, as a result of the leadership and example of a few individuals, profound changes took place in the landscape of the West Reserve, as drought ridden grain fields began to give ground to stands of corn, fields of low green sugar beets, and acres of tall brilliant sunflowers.

### **Diversification**

The first big change in the crop landscape of the Reserve in about 55 years came with the introduction of corn. This crop had been grown in the Red River Lowland since the 1870's, but never very seriously. Experiments with corn were conducted at the Morden Experimental Farm in the 1920's, and in the 1930's this work produced results. Drought conditions, together with high winds, caused severe soil drifting in the light soils of Stanley, especially on the summerfallow. Crops were poor, and grasshoppers often devoured what little there was left. Thus farmers in Stanley and Rhineland, on the advice of the Experimental Farm, turned to corn in 1932 and 1933 in an effort to secure fodder for livestock and to find a row crop alternative to ineffective summerfallow. Farmers really had no thought of it as a money making crop, yet by 1936 there was a sufficient surplus of corn to enable them to sell it for cash.

By 1937 the first large commercial seed corn drier was built near Winkler by a Mennonite farmer, and in 1939 the first corn was exported from Manitoba, 63 years after the first shipment of wheat. In the 1940's most of the corn produced was sold to Winnipeg feed dealers, where the price of corn was higher than that of other feed grains.

But the period of corn was soon over in Manitoba (Table 25). In 1942 an exceptionally early frost completely wiped out a large corn crop, as the Red River Lowland entered a cycle of wet years. The new crop of sunflowers also caused a drastic curtailment in corn acreage. As yet there are too many conditions which may affect corn adversely to make it a staple crop in the Red River Lowland. However, it was shown in the 1930's that corn is an ideal crop for the Reserve during a hot dry period, and if these conditions return there is no doubt that farmers will immediately plant corn again.

**Table 25**  
**Corn Statistics Manitoba 1937-57**

Year	Acres	Yield	Year	Acres	Yield
1937	2350	32 bu.	1948	9900	30 bu.
1938	9300	27	1949	22000	25
1939	33000	19	1950	30000	13
1940	50000	32	1951	25000	5
1941	75000	27	1952	19700	28
1942	100000	7	1953	15000	30
1943	40000	21	1954	18000	23
1944	30000	22	1955	7000	30
1945	10000	15	1956	7100	25
1946	11700	23	1957	11500	25
1947	10500	24	1958		

(Data from *Manitoba Crop Reports 1937-58*)

(Since the corn growing area in Manitoba extends from Morden to the Red River, and from the Boundary to Carman and Morris, the above table shows, in effect, the statistics for the Reserve itself.)

A new crop, sugar beets, was introduced into Manitoba in 1940 when a large modern sugar beet factory was built near Winnipeg. Very little of the first crop was grown in the West Reserve, because it was believed that beets had to be grown on the heavy soils of the Red River Lowland, and there was plenty of such soil available close to the factory. However, the Rhineland Agricultural Society had been stressing the advantages of growing sugar beets in the 1930's and had sponsored test plots, so that a few Mennonite farmers did begin to grow beets. In 1941 the sugar beet company was willing to make contracts with farmers living on lighter better drained soils, and since then the western boundary of sugar beet growing has gradually migrated to Morden, the present limit. Sugar beet acreage in the Reserve has risen rapidly, and today about two thirds (18,000 to 20,000 acres) of beets grown in the province come from Montcalm, Rhineland and the eastern part of Stanley. Mechanical harvesting was begun in 1947, and by 1955 manual harvesting was practically a thing of the past. Only thinning is still done by hand, so that sugar beets supply little work for the labourers of the West Reserve.

Since 1955 about 75% of Manitoba's sugar beets have been annually grown by Mennonites. Mennonite farmers like the crop, even though it involves sustained work for the farmers throughout the crop year, because it is extremely profitable and also because it benefits the soil if placed permanently in the crop rotation. It is a good cleaning crop, improves the physical condition of the soil by the penetrating action of the beet roots, and also the leaf remains add organic matter to the soil. There is little chance that more farmers will be growing beets, because the sugar plant's capacity is limited. At present the company is supplying one third of Manitoba's sugar requirements, the proportion of the market which officials of the

company think they can hold against imports from other sugar areas and against cane sugar.

Market potatoes are not extensively grown in the Reserve because the farmers are too far from the main market in Winnipeg.<sup>12</sup> A few farmers began to grow certified seed potatoes in 1944, and one Winkler farmer in particular has gained such a high reputation that the demand for his product extends from coast to coast, and he is now the largest grower of seed potatoes in Western Canada, and one of the largest in Canada. Soil in the Winkler area is better adapted to growing potatoes than some of the Red River clays, because there is less danger of the potatoes being deformed in the lighter soils.

In the 1940's a new local industry, vegetable canning, was introduced into that part of the Reserve known as the "Pembina Triangle". The boundary of the Pembina Triangle extends along the base of the Escarpment from the International Boundary to Morden, and then curves northeastward to about six miles north of Winkler, from where it goes in a straight line through Plum Coulee and Altona to the United States Boundary again, a few miles east of Gretna (Figure 32). Horticulture is favoured by light warm soils, an early spring, shelter from the west winds, moderate yet adequate precipitation, a hot summer, long frost-free growing period and a plentiful labour supply.

Fruit growers made the first use of these favourable conditions and several non-Mennonite farmers still depend upon fruit for their livelihood. The best site is about two-thirds of the way up the slope of the Escarpment. Apples, crabapples, cherries and plums are grown. Of the small fruits, strawberries, raspberries, black currants, red currants, and gooseberries are in demand. But vegetables have turned out to be far more important. Experiments in vegetable growing were conducted at the Morden Experimental Farm and the results indicated that it was possible to grow vegetable crops commercially in the Pembina Triangle. Since there was no sufficient local market for fresh vegetables, the only alternative was to can them.

Farmers in the vicinity of the village of Rhineland were the first to try this. Their farms were small (Figure 30) and their land was suitable for crops such as corn, peas, and tomatoes, so that vegetables appeared to be the ideal crop to supply the area with an additional income. Accordingly a group of Reinland and vicinity farmers formed the Pembina Co-op Cannery in 1945, and that year 30 acres of corn were grown and processed. It proved easy to sell the product, and the venture seemed justified, so the next year 100 acres of corn were grown. But the canning equipment was inadequate to enable the cannery to compete with canning companies having nation wide operations, and when the wholesale price of canned goods was reduced during a price war in 1948, the cannery ran into financial difficulties and operations were suspended the next year.

Meanwhile in 1946 another cannery, the Prairie Cannery of Winkler, had been started. This was a privately owned firm, financed partly by Winkler and partly by Winnipeg capital. The \$180,000 plant was completed in 1947, and corn, peas, green beans, carrots and beets were processed that autumn. In 1955, 500 acres of corn, 325 acres of peas, 25 acres of beans, 8 acres of beets and 8 acres of carrots were processed. Packing starts about July 4, with peas, followed by beans and the other crops, and ends about October 20 with corn. The acreage remained more or

less the same in all the years of operation, not because of inadequate facilities, but because the company's products are not nationally advertised and it is difficult to increase sales. Most of the crops are grown within a five mile radius of Winkler. Acreage used to be more spread out, but the company had been encouraging more planting close to Winkler, so that the progress of the crop can be more closely observed. Vegetable farming is popular with local farmers, and many more would be doing it if the cannery could offer them contracts. Many of the farmers who grow vegetables have only small holdings, and the crop forms a significant part of their income.

A large cannery was built by the Aylmer Company in Morden in 1952, and the area that supplies it with produce is considerably larger than that of the Winkler plant. Near the Escarpment vegetables are grown up to six miles north and south of Morden. Beans are grown as far east as Rosenfeld, and corn, peas and tomatoes come from as far as Plum Coulee. In 1956 there was a tendency to move more of the production into the lighter soils south of Winkler. The abundant labour supply in that area also had something to do with this shift. In 1955 the following acreages were grown: corn – 850 acres, peas – 650, beans – 188, tomatoes – 15, and carrots – 4. The list of farmers who want to grow vegetables was long enough in 1956 to keep another five factories going. Growers realize that they hold valuable contacts and are conscientious about their methods of vegetable farming.

The expansion of vegetable growing in the Reserve is sharply limited by the markets. The market for corn in the Reserve is practically saturated at the present, and therefore the canneries are trying to can products such as asparagus, pork and beans and chili con carne. Though the two canneries now in operation have stimulated agriculture in the Reserve, they can by no means turn the Pembina Triangle into a vegetable growing area.

Manitoba farmers were encouraged by the government to plant oil-bearing crops in the spring of 1943, with a view to increasing the supply of certain necessary vegetable oils that were in short supply because of the war. Fourteen thousand acres of sunflowers, 2,500 of soya beans, and 1,500 of Argentine rape were planted that year. Much of this was grown in Rhineland and Stanley, the Manitoba districts most suited to the crops. Soya beans did not prove satisfactory due to poor returns, and none were grown after 1945, and Argentine rape was grown only by a limited number of farmers in widely scattered districts in the province. The sunflower, however, was to become an important crop for the Mennonites.

The 1943 sunflower crop was shipped to Hamilton, Ontario for processing. Freight rates from Altona, the centre of the sunflower growing area, to Toronto were \$1.14 per 100 lbs., and since 50% of the sunflower was hull, this meant that it cost \$2.28 to ship 100 lbs. of oil bearing seed to the crusher. Soon farmers examined the possibilities of establishing a crushing plant in Rhineland Municipality in the hope that the primary producers would receive more money if the processing was carried out locally. Besides this the new plant would provide a local industry with labour opportunities for local people.

In cooperative-minded Rhineland the construction of a new plant was approached through the cooperative movement. In 1943 the Cooperative Vegetable Oils Ltd. (C.V.O.) was established, a plant was constructed in Altona, and the extrac-

tion of oil started in March, 1946. Altona was the logical site for the plant, not because it had any natural advantages, but simply because most of the leadership came from the farmers of that area, although support for the project came from throughout the Reserve and as far north as Lowe Farm. The 2,600 members (1955) of the C.V.O. come mainly from the Mennonite areas, but there are also members in Portage la Prairie and some even in the United States. The plant has been considerably enlarged and improved since it was first completed in 1946, and in 1955 it represented an investment of over \$800,000.

Sunflower seed oil is the most important single product produced by the plant. Until 1949 the total production was sold as crude sunflower oil to packing house companies, but since 1950 C.V.O. has produced a refined sunflower oil for cooking, retailed across the country under the name "Safflo". Other products include sunflower meal, now used as a livestock feed, and "Press-to-Logs", a pressed fuel log made from sunflower hulls.

The extreme variations in the acres of sunflowers grown from year to year (See Table 26), are the result of the variations in yield. Drought, frost and wind damage have affected the crop, and rust nearly wiped out the 1951 crop. New rust resistant varieties have been developed, and the farmers' confidence in the crop has been restored so that sunflowers are now well on their way to becoming a staple crop of the area.

**Table 26**  
**Sunflower Production in Manitoba 1943-58**

Year	Acres '000's	Yield per acre lbs. '00's	Total Yield lbs. '000's	Processed by the Altona Plant		
				Seed Processed lbs. '000's	Oil Obtained lbs. '000's	Meal Obtained lbs. '000's
1943	4.3	650	2775			
1944	11.3	500	5650			
1945	8.5	300	2550	2980	573	830
1946	23	565	13000	10885	2338	2828
1947	23	700	16200	14000	3535	4217
1948	29	800	23200	22606	6443	7008
1949	60	435	26100	24984	6845	7468
1950	26	380	9880	10791	2673	3945
1951	21.5	325	7000	7200	1706	2430
1952	3	632	1896	1636	409	545
1953	5.2	880	4596	4478	1164	1477
1954	20	700	14000	12735	3552	4871
1955	15	800	12350	11285	3090	3332
1956	25	532	13293	12884	3271	3939
1957	30	400	12000	6767	1644	2129
1958	45	430	19350	7500	1800	2300

(Data from *Manitoba Crop Reports*. 1943-58)

At present sunflowers are grown over a considerable district extending from 20 miles east of Emerson to north of Winnipeg, west to Portage la Prairie and Westbourne, southwest to Carberry and Minto, and south to the United States Boundary. There are many advantages to this crop which deserve notice, for the sunflowers have been important in changing the economic geography of the area. It is a row crop and serves as a partial summerfallow, thus extending the rotation, and is often grown on land which would simply be used for summerfallow. It has greater spring frost and drought resistance than corn, previously the most common row crop in the area. It is a good competitor to weeds, and its shade inhibits the growth of late germinating weeds. Sunflowers aid in distributing labour uniformly through the harvest season, since the crop is harvested late. Also it is a domestically marketed crop. The growers no longer have to depend on exports, nor will they in the foreseeable future. The crop is not subject to quota restrictions. Finally it is yet another crop to reduce the hazards of one-crop farming.

There are some disadvantages; sunflowers, for example, are susceptible to rust. Their late maturity brings the harvest time close to the fall frost. Sunflowers also draw heavily on the soil moisture. Costs of production are high, since this is a new crop. Freight is expensive, and the maximum distance the harvest can profitably be hauled is about 150 miles. The problems of rust and late maturity are being overcome by plant breeding, and the cost of production and return per acre compare favourably with any other crop available to Western farmers. Thus the permanency of sunflowers in the Red River Lowland appears assured.

It is of great significance that the crop has been the means of developing a local industry. The 1955 Annual Report of the C.V.O. stated:

During the past 10 years our plant has purchased \$10,352,000.00 worth of oilseed; by processing the seed in our plant its value has been raised to \$13,891,000.00 at a cost of \$2,710,00.00, leaving a surplus of \$928,855.00. This has paid for the plant, and it has provided \$250,000.00 as working capital and above all that \$288,229.33 has been returned to shareholders as cash dividends.<sup>15</sup>

About 60 persons are employed in the plant, and when their families are counted as well, this means about 200 people are dependent upon the industry in Altona alone.

### **New Interest in Dairy Cattle**

Recently there has been considerable improvement in the local cattle situation, though not so much in the number of cattle as in the quality of the herds. Creameries had been established for many years in Morden (1913) and Winkler (1918) but they did not greatly affect the agricultural picture. Farmers brought in only the surplus milk from the few cows they kept for their own use. Some dairying was undertaken in the drought years, and a cheese factory was even built at Reinland in 1937. It operated until 1949, by which time another market for milk had emerged.

The present improved dairying situation must be largely attributed to the Winkler Cooperative Creamery, established in 1939. A herd improvement program was started among the farmers in 1947, calf clubs were established, and artificial insemination was introduced in an effort to build up the quality of the herds. Departments to



manufacture ice cream (1948) and fresh pasteurized milk and cheese (1952) were added to the butter and egg operations already in existence in a continuing program of expansion. In 1940 the Society had 120 members and a sizable debt; in 1955 the membership was over 3,000, and well over \$70,000 had been paid out in dividends to the members since 1940.

The Creamery collects raw materials from an area bounded to the north and east by Roland, Kane, Plum Coulee, St. Joseph, and Neuberghal, the United States Boundary to the south and one mile east of Morden to the west. The greatest concentration of milk is south of Winkler, and the Winkler Creamery shares this territory with a privately owned Morden firm. Their combined activities have enabled the farmers to begin to specialize in dairy herds and poultry, instead of treating them only as sidelines to grain farming. Two-thirds of the Winkler Creamery's products (mostly butter and eggs) is delivered to Winnipeg, but the products are also distributed in 54 towns and villages in an area extending from Boissevain in the west to Steinbach in the east. Milk for house to house delivery is also supplied to a number of nearby towns.

### **Trends and Problems**

Agricultural techniques have changed considerably along with the crops and livestock, in the Reserve since 1930. There is an increased interest in soil conservation and soil improvement, though much still has to be done to educate the farmer, and a beginning is being made in introducing forage crops into the crop sequences. New and improved varieties of cereal, forage and row crops will reduce the acreage in summerfallow but so far they have had little effect (Table 16). Weeds are controlled and eradicated by the use of chemicals such as 2 4-D. Mineral fertilizers are employed extensively and giving improved yields. Farm equipment is entirely mechanized, and electricity is widely used. Rural electrification has produced immense changes in farm life since it was introduced right after World War II. Roland Municipality, to the north of the Reserve, was a test area for Manitoba rural electrification after the war, and by 1946, three quarters of the farms in the municipality were wired. Electrification proceeded very rapidly after that in the Reserve, and by 1950 all Mennonite farmers, including even those in the agricultural villages, were receiving electricity.

Though considerable diversification has occurred, there is still much room for improvement. Probably the most diversified area in the Reserve lies south of Winkler, where small grains, row crops, dairy cattle and poultry all form part of the farm enterprise. Since the soil is light, seeds germinate faster than in the soils about Rosenfeld, and this gives some of the row crops, especially corn, an advantage in this area. And a crop such as sunflowers will have relatively a better chance of competing against other crops on the light soils than on the heavier soils, even though absolute sunflower yields will be higher on the heavy soils. As a result more row crops are grown in Stanley than in Rhineland. It has been estimated by Department of Agriculture officials that 85-90% of the Stanley farmers grow some row crops.<sup>14</sup> But this district has its special problems.

Some of the small farmers are actually reduced to share cropping for the larger farmers. And even then they often can't eke out a living by farming, so they take



outside jobs for a number of months of the year and return to their farms only in the summer months. Some of the houses are very poor; dirt-floored hovels still exist, with correspondingly low hygienic and moral conditions. The situation is getting worse because these Mennonites are uneducated, have no skills beyond farming, and do not want to leave this area where they are among their people. Consequently farms have been getting smaller and smaller, until a low of 20 acres has been reached (Plate 31-2). (These farms do not show up in the municipal averages because they are offset by consolidation elsewhere). In 1955 Stanley municipality was directing \$15,000.00 relief into this district south of Winkler, and absolutely none to the area north of Winkler. No solution seems to be at hand; the limit for the demand of the vegetable row crops, such as sugar beets, are almost completely mechanized. Perhaps a greater concentration on poultry farming may alleviate the problem to some extent.

Rhineland does not have the same serious problems that are found in Stanley, and the whole area is more like the district north of Winkler. Most of the farms are under 160 acres, although the average is higher because there are a few 600 and 800 acre farms.

The land in both municipalities is generally in poor condition, because the farmers have abused it for years without putting anything back into it. The "B" soil horizon is visible at the surface in spots, and at various places the texture of the soil has been ruined to such an extent that the water won't penetrate into the soil. Farmers have been misusing their farm power, because they have been working and reworking their summerfallow to such an extent that the weeds they want to kill won't germinate in the loose soil and subsequently they come up with the crop next year. But in the meantime the soil has been pulverized, is susceptible to blowing, and the organic matter begins to oxidize under exposure to the sun. With horses a farmer worked his fallow three times a year, with tractors he may do it up to seven times. More organic matter is needed in the soil, but this means that grasses must be added to the rotation. Few farmers are doing this; they don't want livestock, especially in Rhineland, and therefore cannot see the need for grass in the rotation. But if dairying should become more widespread in both Stanley and Rhineland, as important a revolution as resulted from the introduction of row crops may take place in the Mennonite farming areas.

### **East Reserve**

In the period from 1874 to 1940 there were few agricultural changes in some parts of the East Reserve. Pioneer conditions lasted far longer than in the West Reserve, and over much of the area many years passed before commercial farming developed. At no time was incorrect utilization of the land widespread, though of course much land was occupied that should never have been farmed. It goes without saying that the methods employed were often inappropriate or inefficient, yet the mixed farming that was carried on was essentially the correct land use. Unfortunately, in an environment such as the East Reserve, commercial success could not be attained until the demands of Winnipeg provided a sufficient market to stimulate a movement towards efficient, commercialized dairying, poultry raising and market gardening.

### New Influences

A number of factors caused changes in the landscape of the East Reserve at the turn of the century – a new railway, new migrations and land drainage.

The Manitoba and South Eastern railway, built in 1898, did not create much of a change in the farm economy of most of the Reserve, though grain growing did become more important in township 7-6. Many of the Clearsprings' settlers disposed of their lands at this time, because the railway raised the value of their farm land, to Mennonites who gradually took over the area.

A far more important factor in the future development of the Reserve than the building of the railway was the migration of about 500 Ukrainians to the southern part of the Reserve in the early 1900's. Mennonites had scorned this area, and it had remained virtually unoccupied for 25 years. The migrations into the West Reserve which also occurred at this time were not as significant because that Reserve's empty area were smaller and also the Icelandic migration into township 1-6 did not really affect the Mennonite settlements.

This Ukrainian settlement was very significant because these people developed a part of the Reserve which would probably have otherwise remained unoccupied to the present day. They now comprise the most important non-Mennonite element in the Reserve (See Appendix J). The Ukrainians were far more important neighbours to the Mennonites than the French, because they had no trading centres of their own, and were dependent upon the Mennonite trading centres. Table 27 shows the scale of farming operations in various parts of the Reserve at the turn of the century. The increase in area of field crops in townships 5-6 and 5-5 is the result of the Ukrainian colonization. But the full effect of their settlements was not felt in the trading centres until about 1945, when the Ukrainian farmers finally managed to find a regular market for their produce that would sustain them.

**Table 27**  
**Selected Agricultural Statistics East Reserve 1905 & 1906**

Township	Acres in Field Crops		No. of Farms 1906	Acres/Farm 1906
7-4	3701	3846	57	68
7-5	2642	2693	59	45
7-6	6104	6939	107	65
6-5	1691	1823	47	39
6-6	2959	3262	74	44
5-5	2930	3460	70	49
5-6	1092	1705	82	21
4-6	381	451	11	41

(Census of Canada, 1906)

The low acreages in field crops in townships 7-4 and 7-5 compared to township 7-6, that are shown in Table 27, are obvious anomalies caused by poor drainage. Steps were taken after 1907 to remedy the situation in these townships by constructing drains as described in Chapter 11, so that closer settlement was made possible in the northwestern townships a few years after the Ukrainians started to occupy the southern townships.

### **Arable**

In 1951 the proportion of the land occupied by farms in the East Reserve finally reached the level attained in the West Reserve by 1891. A more or less steady increase in the acreage of occupied land was maintained after 1891 (Table 16), with the greatest changes taking place between 1891 and 1921, as a result of the influx of Ukrainians and Lutherans.

There was a steady increase in the number of farms in the East Reserve from 1921 to 1946. Farmers fleeing from the drought stricken West Reserve accounted for most of the increase in the number of farms before 1941, but in recent years farms have again decreased in number, as more and more young people leave the farms for other jobs. Farms have tended to become smaller through the years, as more and more specialty crops are grown ( Tables 17 and 18).

Not until 1956 was more than 50% of the occupied land in the Reserve improved (Table 16). At present about 75% of the improved land is generally devoted to field crops; most of the rest is left in fallow. Cultivated pasture is generally not required because natural pasture is still sufficiently abundant, especially in the southern townships.

There has been a striking change in field crops in the East Reserve (Table 21). In 1891 wheat, barley and oats comprised 97% of the field crops grown, with 60% of the acreage in wheat. By 1921, only 38% of the acreage was devoted to wheat, and since then it has remained at 20% or less (Table 21). Flax has occasionally been popular, with the acreage sown closely related to the prevailing price for flax. Similarly, during the drought years and even into the 1940's when grain prices were low, and livestock and milk were relatively more valuable, considerable acreages were devoted to cultivated hay and clover for fodder.

The Department of the Interior Cereals Maps for 1909, 1913 and 1915 show that for each of those years well over half of the cereal acreage of the Reserve was in the three northern townships. The differences in land use that developed in the Reserve after drainage works made grain farming possible in townships 7-4 and 7-5 are well reflected in the farm homes. During the wheat bonanza of the first quarter of the century farmers were prosperous in townships 7-4 and 7-5 and many built large substantial farm homes, quite similar to structures built in the grain farming areas of western Manitoba at this time (Plate 15-4). Most of the homes are two storey cottage style frame structures, placed within shelter belts near the centres of the sections, or where the land is locally high as on a beach ridge. Most of these homes are found in township 7-4. They are not as common in township 7-5 and there are none south of that township where large scale grain farming was simply impossible. In township 7-6 many large farm homes had been constructed in the 1890's because there the land owners did not have to wait for drainage

projects before they could grow grain and thus many accumulated sufficient money to build commodious homes somewhat earlier (Plate 11-3). In the south small frame structures gradually replaced most of the original log houses, but some of the latter with house and barn together are still found on a few lots, though very few are still lived in. The Ukrainians revived log structures, however, in townships 5-6 and 4-6, with the walls generally plastered and whitewashed (Plate 11-2). Small frame houses also appeared in the same yards as the whitewashed houses as soon as they could be afforded (Plate 39-2). Naturally there is no sharp regional boundary line drawn between the various areas on the basis of house type, but anyone driving throughout the Reserve today can still pick out these different styles that date from the first quarter of the century and earlier.

Table 28 shows the grain deliveries for the three elevator points serving the Reserve. Coarse grains were more popular in the northeastern area until the war drove wheat prices up and made that the profitable crop. The Giroux elevator burned in 1944, and the company did not think it worthwhile to replace it. After that, grain deliveries from that district were made to Ste. Anne, accounting for that centre's great increase in deliveries from 1947 to 1954. In the Niverville area wheat was always more popular than the coarse grains as a cash crop. The Niverville farmers did not revert to subsistence farming during the depression years, but kept on growing grain as a cash crop, because even in the drought years the district always had adequate rainfall.

**Table 28**  
**Grain Shipments by Stations – East Reserve 1922-54**  
**Grain Deliveries in 1000's of bu.**

	<u>1922-30</u>		<u>1931-38</u>		<u>1939-46</u>		<u>1947-54</u>		<u>Total</u>		<u>Ratio</u> wh/oth.	<u>Total</u>
	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others	Wheat	Others		
Giroux	376	711	101	240	726	128			1203	1079	1.2	2282
Ste. Anne	104	205	86	170	561	277	873	466	1624	1118	1.4	2742
Niverville	524	434	625	197	605	304	501	362	2300	1297	1.8	3597

(Sanford Evans Statistical Service)

In recent years some other cash crops have become significant. Immediately south of Steinbach potatoes are grown on a large scale by *Russländer* Mennonites. About 600 to 700 acres are grown annually in this district, and three growers account for 300 acres. Potato growing for the Winnipeg market was started by a *Russländer* immigrant in the early 1930's. Since these farmers are only one hour's drive from Winnipeg they have no difficulty getting their product into the city early in the morning to catch the highest prices. Most farms were highly mechanized by 1955, though all potatoes were still hand-dug only seven years earlier. There is no commercial potato growing elsewhere in Hanover, not because the soil isn't suitable, but just because no one has bothered to take up this crop specialty.

Sugar beets have become popular in the northern townships, though small grains, of course, are still the principal crop in the area. About 3,400 acres of the 27,000 acres of sugar beets grown annually in Manitoba are grown in the area extending from St. Pierre to Isles des Chenes and from the C.P.R. tracks to Steinbach and Giroux (Figure 32). Very few beets are grown at Kleefeld. The centre of the sugar beet district in the Reserve is really the western half township 7-4.

There was always a long time lag before new labour saving devices that were used elsewhere in Manitoba, were adopted in the Reserve. Even today, for instance, horses are an important source of power. Similarly, the binder and the threshing machines are still commonly used in the Reserve, except in Niverville where the combine has been widely introduced. In the past the poorer East Reserve farmer frequently bought equipment discarded by his more prosperous fellow Mennonites in the West Reserve, and in the 1930's and early 1940's especially, there was considerable traffic in second hand machinery between the two Reserves.

### **Livestock and Poultry**

Cattle have always provided a very important portion of the farmers' income in the Reserve. The number of milk cattle more than doubled between 1891 and 1931 as a result of the emphasis on cheese factories at the turn of the century (Table 23). Since 1931 the number of cattle has remained at approximately 11,000 head; but there has been a tendency towards a higher proportion of milk cattle.

Sheep have fluctuated in number. During the 1930's and early 1940's there were a total of about five to six thousand sheep in the Reserve, in response to a demand for wool and meat products. Since then the number of sheep has fallen drastically. By 1944 and 1945 herds were being liquidated, because of inroads made by sheep parasites and predatory animals on one hand, and the greater profit to be obtained from cattle on the other. The hog population has been more stable than the sheep population, although there is a close association with the demand. No farmers specialize in hogs, but every farmer has a few.

Since 1936 increasing emphasis has been placed upon the poultry industry (Table 23). Formerly only a few chickens were kept on each farm yard to provide extra income, but now specialization has become significant, and many farmers are concentrating exclusively on poultry farming. The highly specialized poultry areas are in townships 7-5 and 7-6. Blumenort and Greenland are the centres of the district (Figure 33). Many farms are now so small in this area that it is impossible to grow the feed for poultry flocks on the farm, and it has to be obtained elsewhere. An average sized flock in the poultry district consist of about 700 to 800 birds. A cooperative poultry slaughtering plant was established at Blumenort in 1953, but this was not the first slaughtering plant in the municipality. A private plant was established some years previously just north of Steinbach, an area which is usually in the van of agricultural progress in Hanover, but the project was abandoned. In Blumenort, poultry raising was a different story. By 1955, this centre had the largest killing plant in rural Manitoba. In 1954, there were 80,000 hens and roosters and 28,000 turkeys killed and dressed in the plant. The business is owned and operated by the local farmers, and they run an egg grading station and a poultry supply store in conjunction with the killing plant.

Further west, in the Linden district (Figure 33) just north of the municipal boundary, the Mennonite farmers have specialized in producing turkeys on a large scale since World War II. Turkey and poultry farming never go together because of disease problems so the Blumenort and Linden districts have their different specialties, though the Blumenort plant still does most of the turkey killing for the Linden farmers. There were about 20,000 turkeys in the Linden district in 1955, with a maximum of up to 3,000 birds on a farm. There is no dairying at all in this district because there just is not enough land available. Some farms are under 20 acres, so that usually the feed is not grown locally. Poultry raising is also becoming important in the midst of the grain growing district in township 7-4, where diversification is becoming popular. In 1953 a poultry slaughtering and packing plant was opened in Niverville, and the next year 110,000 chickens and 16,000 turkeys were processed at this plant.

### **Dairying**

Until cheese factories were introduced into the East Reserve in the 1890's, the southern farmers had had no dependable agricultural staple. Grain was sold, but not in great amounts, and livestock products were marketed only in the form of beef and butter. Cheese factories helped out considerably, and the farmers patronized them enthusiastically.

In 1900 there were eight cheese factories serving the farmers of the Reserve.<sup>15</sup> All were located in the area from Giroux to Grunthal, away from the specialized grain growing area in townships 7-4 and 7-5. The number of cheese factories fluctuated. Most of them were small enterprises formed on a cooperative basis by a group of local farmers. Some operated only for a year or so because the knowledge of cheese making amongst the group was too limited, or the organization was too casual. By 1913 there were only four cheese factories in operation. It is difficult to determine why the cheese factories closed down, since it would appear that the higher grain prices prevailing at this time would hardly affect most of the farmers in the Reserve. Interviews indicate that one reason may have been the high price of meat during these years, so that instead of keeping livestock for dairying, many farmers raised them for beef, and so the large steady supply of milk which a cheese factory requires was lacking. In 1920 there were only five cheese factories in the Province, and only one in the Reserve.

The growth of the city of Winnipeg also had an important effect upon the livestock industry of the Reserve. The 1906 Annual Report of the Manitoba Farmers Institute states that: "Winnipeg is growing rapidly and the supply [of milk] is decreasing owing to the land adjacent to the city becoming too valuable to be used for dairying purposes. Whether milk can be bought from a distance remains to be proved."<sup>16</sup>

There was a definite change in the milk situation in Manitoba by 1914; winter dairying was increasing and Winnipeg dairies for the first time were able to obtain sufficient milk in winter without having to import large quantities from the United States.<sup>17</sup> In 1914 Blumenort had a skimming station tributary to a Winnipeg creamery. At a skimming station the milk was separated, and the sweet cream shipped to the city. The skim milk was returned to the farmer who found it a valuable feed for calves.

By 1920 the effects of Winnipeg's milk demands were being felt more definitely in the Reserve. That year there were seven milk receiving stations in rural Manitoba of which five, Isles des Chenes, Giroux, La Broquerie, Otterburne, and St. Pierre were close to the Reserve, within reach of the Mennonite farmers (Figure 4P). Milk was received at the station, tested, weighed, cooled and then shipped to the city. The Grunthal area was particularly stimulated; the farmers began to deliver milk to St. Pierre and Otterburne in 1927. Some milk receiving stations supplied Winnipeg for only part of the year; when the milk supply near Winnipeg was adequate they would revert to skimming stations. Since Hanover had no railway, no stations were established within it during the decade from 1920 to 1930, but the situation changed when trucking became important. By 1931, for instance, the Giroux plant was closed, and a plant at Steinbach took over its functions. (In 1934 the Steinbach plant became a creamery.) In 1937 when the Piney Highway was completed the milk from the Grunthal area was trucked directly to Winnipeg.

Cheese factories had been eliminated even before the day of the milk receiving station, but the establishment of the latter ensured that they would not be re-established as long as there was a market for milk in Winnipeg, and as a result there were no cheese factories in the Reserve from 1922 to 1932. Naturally the southern townships suffered because they did not benefit as greatly from the Winnipeg market – yet they also no longer had cheese factories. The reason for their absence seems to have been a lack of organizing ability among the farmers, so that they were not able to bring together enough milk to keep a factory going. But during the depression farmers had to fall back on their own resources, and as a result locally organized cheese factories were started again. In 1932, Blumenort and Landmark, in the northern part of the Reserve, re-opened their factories. (It is instructive that both are located in an area where grain growing is possible.) These parts were probably more severely hit by the depression than the subsistence area to the south, and therefore these farmers had to fall back on “self help” first. Through the 1930's more and more cheese factories were established until the peak of twelve was reached in the early 1940's. A cheese factory was even built in Niverville. Table 29 shows the cheese production in the Mennonite areas in 1939.

**Table 29**  
**Cheese Production – Mennonite Reserves, 1939**

	lbs. cheese	value
Kleefeld	215000	\$ 28760
New Bothwell	232000	31260
Hanover	192000	25920
Steinbach	175000	23470
Blumenort	269000	36304
Landmark	465000	63565 (highest in Man.)
Reinland	142000	18700 (West Reserve)

Annual Report of the Manitoba Dept. of  
Agriculture, 1939.)



Fluid milk production for the Winnipeg market became important again in the Reserve during World War II, especially after 1943 when the Dominion government started paying attractive bonuses for milk and cream. Many producers started sending milk and cream to the city creameries and the decrease in cheese production began again. From 1943 to the present there has been a steady decrease in cheese production, due to this diversion of milk. (Furthermore, farmers in the northern townships tended to reduce their herds in order to go into more profitable endeavours such as poultry and turkeys, which are also strongly dependent upon the Winnipeg market.) Even a large outside firm could not stem the trend. In 1948 a new large factory was built at Grunthal by the Kraft Cheese Company, which was hoping to draw on the dairy farmers in the area, but exactly one decade later the plant was sold to a Winnipeg dairy which has converted it into a powdered milk factory – the first in the province.

Since 1958 the only cheese factory in the Reserve has been at New Bothwell. The factory was established in 1936, and collects milk from an area by Landmark on the north, Niverville and Otterburne in the west, and Piney and No. 12 Highways on the south and east respectively. Selling the cheese is not difficult because the factory produces a high quality product, and Canada Packers, Swifts and the T. Eaton Co. take most of it. Little milk is shipped to Winnipeg from this area, since most of it goes to the cheese factory.

**Table 30**  
**Milk Shipments to Winnipeg by Centres. East Reserve – 1955**

	No. of Shippers	Lbs. Shipped	Lbs. /Shipper
Niverville	13	91000	7000
Chortitz	14	106400	7600
Kleefeld	17	138500	8100
New Bothwell	3	23500	7800
Barkfield	3	15500	5200
Giroux	85	626300	7400
Grunthal	29	232800	8000
La Broquerie	74	526000	7100
Lorette	49	354900	7300
Steinbach	72	460900	6400
Trentham	0	(intermittently only)	
Tourond	2	14000	7000
Marchand	4	32600	8100
Pansy	8	41000	5100
Sarto	4	14000	3500
	241	2677400	

(Data supplied by Winnipeg Milk Board)



The area from which milk is shipped to the Winnipeg dairies has been gradually expanding. Before the War, milk was shipped from north and east of Steinbach, Grunthal started shipping during the war, the Ukrainian areas in 1953, and in 1955 milk was shipped daily by truck from places as far away as Marchand.<sup>18</sup> Southeastern Manitoba, that is the area in the sector between P.T.H. No. 1 and the Red River, contained 606 of the 1,256 farmers shipping milk to Winnipeg in 1955. Of these shippers 241 were from Hanover or the immediate vicinity (Table 30). Of the 11,431,900 lbs. of milk shipped to Winnipeg in 1955, 2,677,400 lbs. came from the Hanover area.

### **Trends and Problems**

Today the farms in the East Reserve are adjusted in large part to the physical conditions first perceived by the surveyors in 1872. The differences in the quality of the land from place to place are further emphasized by the proximity of the best land to Winnipeg, the new market for Hanover products. Nowadays farmers are not solely involved in producing for a distant, largely unknown market. They are becoming interested in local markets, in growing crops appropriate to their land, and they study how to improve yields. As a result they are beginning to support the extension of potato and sugar beet growers, and also 4H Clubs for the farm children. Expert advice is finally being followed. Thus balanced feeds are being fed to specially bred chickens, and broiler factories and killing plants have been established. Strawberries and raspberries are grown for the Winnipeg market.

One great stimulus to improved farming in recent years has been rural electrification. This has tended to put more ambition into many otherwise shiftless farmers, because before any farmer receives electricity he has to agree to buy at least five small appliances and one large one (such as a refrigerator or range). Since all Mennonite farmers wanted electricity in their homes this meant that they had to start farming in earnest to pay for these appliances. Electrification started in the Reserve in 1945 and by 1947, townships 7-6 and 6-5 were serviced by electricity.<sup>19</sup> In 1950 townships 6-6 and 5-5 were being served, and by 1952 every township, including 4-6, had electricity. In the following years more isolated farms were connected, and by 1955 practically every farm in Hanover was receiving electric power.

It will take many years before all areas in the East Reserve will reach a high standard of farming. Only a few farms approach their potential productivity, and whole districts are still extremely backward agriculturally. Most farmers have not yet learned how to plan a fully integrated scheme of operation over a period of years. At present they plan carefully only a part of their farm program. Pasture is the great need on most of the farms, but as yet very few farmers are willing to go to the effort of maintaining a good pasture on their farms. At times agricultural experts tend to be critical of the farming practices in this area, but their comments are not always entirely justified because farming in the East Reserve is not simple. Attention has been given to extremely varied terrain, soil and drainage conditions, as well as to a changeable market. With so many variables, farming clearly is a complex enterprise with never ending problems. Intensive farming is being adopted and it is true to say that the East Reserve is just on the threshold of scientific farming.

One important form of organization that will probably continue to contribute towards an improving agriculture is the cooperative movement, which is really just making its appearance in the Reserve. Until recently the cheese factories were the only organizations comparable to the cooperatives of the West Reserve. It would appear that the cooperatives were of relative insignificance in the East Reserve in the 1930's, because agriculture was more diversified than in the West Reserve and therefore not so crippled by the depression, and also because no "co-op minded" leaders emerged in the area. With regard to the latter point the East Reserve was quite similar to Stanley Municipality. However the potential Winnipeg market has stimulated the Blumenort cooperative poultry enterprise, which is very similar to the producers' cooperative of the West Reserve started over a decade earlier. Farmers in both Reserves are now taking an active part in the cooperative movement in order to improve agriculture, although the West Reserve is much farther advanced.

### **Farm Income 1936 to 1951**

The general increase in prosperity in both the West and East Reserves from 1936 to 1951 is shown in Table 31. From 1936 to 1951 the total farm income increased eight fold in Hanover, and almost six fold in Rhineland and Stanley. The increase in income cannot be solely attributed to better farming practices. Climatic conditions were favourable in the 1940's in contrast to the 1930's, and also prices were steadily rising, thus accounting for an important part of the increase in income.

Table 31 also shows the increasing importance of diversification. It points up the fact that Hanover has a far wider agricultural base than Rhineland and Stanley, where grain was still very important in 1951. Later statistics, if they were available, would probably indicate even more diversification in the West Reserve municipalities. The percentages by themselves are deceptive. Dairying did not decrease in absolute importance in Rhineland from 1946 to 1951, but it did not provide as high a proportion of the total farm income. Similarly, the prices current at the time affect the statistics, since the data is based on prices received by the farmers, and has not been adjusted for changes in the cost of living.

The improvements in productivity are well shown in Table 32. Rhineland and Stanley are in a class apart from Hanover in all respects when measured in terms of absolute figures, and Rhineland is just ahead of Stanley.

**Table 31**  
**Farm Production Values and Indices – Rhineland, Stanley, Hanover, 1936-1951**

Year	Grain		Other Field Crops		Dairy		Livestock		Poultry and Eggs		Other		Total	
	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	%	\$	
1936	482868	66			104214	16	122693	18			382		710157	Rhineland
1941	1118730	63	32830	2	102580	6	274290	15	126560	7	108830	7	1763820	
1946	1166100	42	136250	5	216710	8	421200	15	322370	12	498680	18	2761310	
1951	2495422	60	560496	14	215111	5	456870	11	395628	10	2178		4125705	
1936	297736	56			111206	21	121409	23			4808		535159	Stanley
1941	680664	57	5570		108560	9	248340	21	90980	8	61730	5	1195844	
1946	1012260	45	32330	1	225070	10	417580	18	180970	8	384510	18	2252720	
1951	1654181	54	283403	9	234549	8	624832	20	248013	8	9242	1	3054220	
1936	—	—	—	-	—	-	—	-	—	-	—	-	300000	Hanover
1941	96270	13	43390	6	235810	32	255300	36	76260	10	22740	3	727770	
1946	160670	9	88820	5	517450	28	350710	19	308470	17	402580	22	1828700	
1951	461185	18	428129	17	642035	25	636923	25	355069	13	45490	2	2568831	

(Statistics supplied by D.B.S.)

**Table 32**  
**Farm Income Indices 1936-1951**

		<u>Farm Income Per</u>		
		Farm	Person of	100 acres of
		Unit	Farm Population	Farm Land
Hanover	1936	\$ 340	\$ 51	\$ 190
	1941	670	120	428
	1946	1615	317	1056
	1951	2640	513	1473
Rhineland	1936	570	106	314
	1941	1440	257	783
	1946	2480	437	1230
	1951	3480	708	1800
Stanley	1936	594	109	267
	1941	1333	250	589
	1946	2291	462	1125
	1951	3370	632	1490

(Statistics supplied by D.B.S.)

<sup>1</sup>*Der Nordwesten*, May 8, 1902.

<sup>2</sup>*Morden Empire*, September 17, 1908.

<sup>3</sup>*Morden Monitor*, July 13, 1895.

<sup>4</sup>A detailed map of all of Stanley Municipality prepared by P. Janzen of that Municipality in 1947, shows the same pattern. Both townships 1-4 and 2-4 had 82 subdivided quarter sections, whereas 3-4 had only 35. (There is a blue print copy of this map in the Winkler Town Office. Part of it is reproduced in Figure 28.)

<sup>5</sup>Data from *Stanley Municipality Assessment Rolls*, Morden, Manitoba.

<sup>6</sup>Personal communication from H.H. McIntyre, Irrigation Supervisor, P.F.R.A., December, 1955.

<sup>7</sup>The data in this paragraph has been obtained from the *Annual Reports of the Morden Experimental Station, 1931-37*, Department of Agriculture, Ottawa.

<sup>8</sup>Robert Meyers, *Spirit of the Post Road*, Altona, 1955: 11.

<sup>9</sup>In particular see E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia*: 228.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*: 226.

<sup>11</sup>Meyers, *Spirit*: 18.

<sup>12</sup>This situation is changing in 1959, and now some table potatoes are beginning to be shipped to Winnipeg.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted in the *Altona Echo*., November 9, 1955.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Eric Putt, Morden Experimental Farm, September, 1955.

<sup>15</sup>*Manitoba Crop Bulletin*, Winnipeg, 1900. The number of cheese factories in the Reserve for other years is also shown in these Annual Reports.

<sup>16</sup>Manitoba Farmer's Institute, *Annual Report*, Winnipeg, 1906: 87.

<sup>17</sup>*Manitoba Crop Bulletin*., Winnipeg, 1914.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with officials of the Winnipeg Milk Board. December, 1955.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with the Steinbach representative of the Manitoba Power Commission, September, 1955.

## Chapter 14

### CENTRAL PLACES 1940-1955

#### East Reserve

#### Steinbach – the Centre of Southeastern Manitoba

An economic transformation began to take place in Southeastern Manitoba in 1940, and it continued to gather force past the middle of the decade. This was the first boom, the first widespread and sustained prosperity that had touched this area. At the same time new roads were built and improved. After 1940 the tempo of development of the centres changed, in response to prosperity and the advantages the new roads brought. In 1931 the total value of retail sales in Census Division I of Manitoba (Southeastern Manitoba) was \$1,172,500; in 1941 \$2,078,000; and in 1951 \$13,334,000 (Census of Canada). In 1951 (the only year for which the figure is available) Steinbach itself took in \$6,883,100 in retail sales, or over 50% of the total. In 1940, Steinbach was the centre of the Mennonite settlements of Southeastern Manitoba, but by 1955 it was the centre of Southeastern Manitoba.

Steinbach had been the largest village in Southeastern Manitoba since the 1890's, but such complete dominance of the larger area was new, and various factors contributed to it. It had been impossible under the previous conditions because the people had very little to spend, there were no good roads in the area, and horse and buggy transportation made it impossible to go a long distance for services. Hence a number of small centres, such as Grunthal and Sarto, were scattered through Southeastern Manitoba. In 1946 and succeeding years new-found prosperity provided the means to buy cars, and new roads opened the way to larger centres where the new buying power could be utilized. But there was only one large existing centre to take care of this trade – Steinbach; its merchants and businessmen proved fully capable of meeting the demand for goods and exploited the trade to the fullest extent. No other centre was required because Steinbach's "Main Street" provided the efficiency, the courtesy, and the service demanded by the farmers. Indeed, instead of finding another centre of similar size in Southeastern Manitoba as its rival, Steinbach found its main competitor to be Winnipeg.

Trade with Southeastern Manitoba was not entirely new to Steinbach. It had been catering to this area to a limited extent for some years. Farmers' orders from the Ukrainian districts were brought into Steinbach by transfer operators each morning, and the goods ordered were shipped back that same day. But by the late 1940's the people could come in by themselves, and as the years went by, and as the road network was extended, they came to Steinbach from farther and farther away, especially after the new P.T.H. No. 12 was pushed south in the 1950's (Figures 24 and 33).

Steinbach businessmen had matured during the 1930's and 1940's and were extremely active in seeking out this business. A Chamber of Commerce was founded, and became very active erecting bill boards advertising Steinbach, and in promoting good farm-town relations by sponsoring organizations such as the Hanover Agricultural Fair. Customers were enticed by loss leaders, "give-away gimmicks",

lucky draws and merchant days. Businessmen renovated their premises and put up new fronts including neon signs: Main Street was asphalted for the first time in 1947, and in general, the whole town was spruced up (Plates 4-3, 6-2, 23).

Probably the most effective force in making Steinbach the centre of Southeastern Manitoba was the local newspaper, the *Carillon News*, established in 1945. It was the first journal that attempted to cover Southeastern Manitoba, and as a result it became a regional rather than a local newspaper. The Southeast is still made up of isolated communities, some hardly out of the pioneer stage, and the *Carillon News* provided the first indication to many of these people that they were living in a distinctive section of Manitoba. It drew them away from their parochialism into a larger sphere, and in doing this it performed an incalculable service for the area. But at the same time the *News*, both consciously and unconsciously, made Southeastern Manitoba Steinbach conscious. Many Steinbach merchants immediately took advantage of the newspaper by starting heavy advertising campaigns, which brought customers streaming into Steinbach. By 1955 most Steinbach businessmen had become educated in the ways of advertising, and considered it a necessary and routine part of their business.

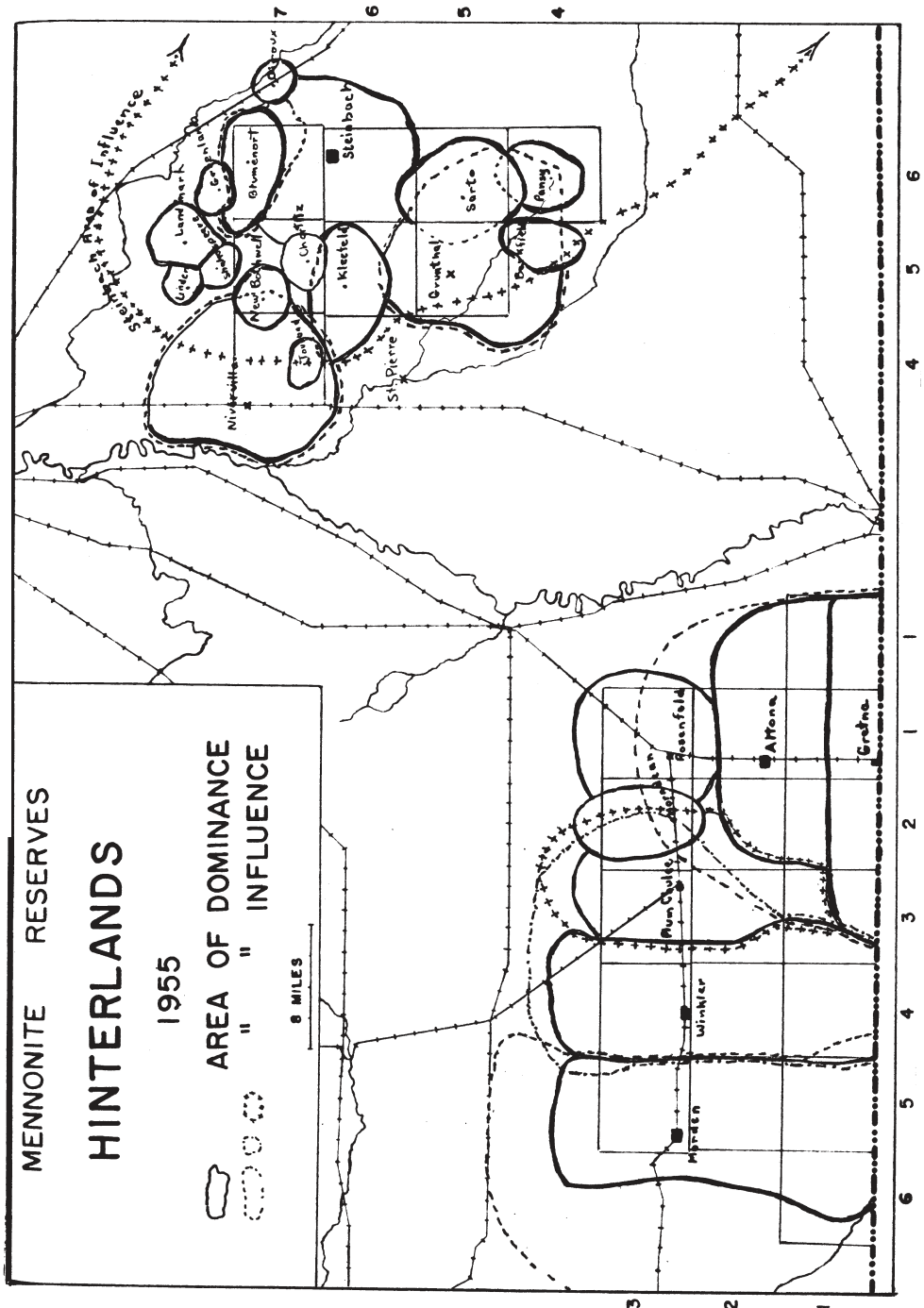
By 1950 Steinbach (population 2,155 in 1951) was established as the centre of Southeastern Manitoba. At first the new trade had come from the backwoods regions in the south and east, but as Steinbach's businessmen expanded their services to accommodate their customers, other areas to the north and west came to realize that Steinbach was a good place to trade. Gradually Steinbach's hinterland spread out in all directions, and paradoxical as it may seem, some Steinbach business firms even received extensive trade from Winnipeg. It appears then, that the formerly untapped hinterland to the southeast proved the key to Steinbach's success and once merchants satisfied that area the rest followed. Steinbach provided what hard working Southeastern Manitoba required – a business centre, not a recreation centre. The various ethnic groups in Southeastern Manitoba still have their own community centres, but if the people want to do anything out of the ordinary: to buy a car, visit the tailor, buy furniture, obtain watermelons cheaply, visit the doctor or dentist, off they go to Steinbach.

By 1955, Steinbach had three different hinterlands. Two were in existence since the 1880's, and one has developed since 1946.

Figure 33 showing the trading hinterlands of every trading centre in both Reserves is based on a series of interviews conducted in 1955 with representatives from every kind of business in each of the centres. The area of dominance of a centre comprises that territory from which most of the retail business and the grain shipments are obtained. (It is not necessarily the social centre, however, because the agricultural villages, for instance, still have that function.) Special services supplied by bankers, veterinarians, automobile body mechanics, dentists, theatre proprietors, tailors, plumbers and undertakers give a centre a wider influence and enable it to attract trade from other smaller centres. A good example of how this effect works in favour of the larger centres is the preferences of machinery distributors for Steinbach over Niverville and Grunthal as machinery outlets.

A boundary of a radius of about six miles from Steinbach circumscribes its *umland*, inhabited by about 4,000 people who are completely dependent on Steinbach for all their social and economic needs (Figure 33). The churches, the

Figure 33



sports facilities (the few that there are), the schools, and a few industries like the feed mills, exist only to serve this *umland*. In turn the residents of Steinbach also obtain some products from this area; the most important is milk, all of which comes from farmers residing within three miles of Steinbach. This then is really the community of Steinbach, and differs little in size from the communities about Niverville and Grunthal. Steinbach, however, has two wider spheres of influence that the others do not possess.

Steinbach is the centre of an administrative hinterland that roughly approximates Hanover Municipality, though in some instances the jurisdiction of a particular agency extends beyond the municipal boundaries. Steinbach is the municipal seat, and the R.C.M.P., the Department of Education, the Manitoba Power Commission, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health have regional offices here. Other services are provided for this region by various insurance agents, the T. Eaton Co. Ltd., Simpson Sears Co. Ltd. and the Manitoba Sugar Company. Besides this there is a law office, established in 1952, bank, and a Credit Union.

The Credit Union deserves special mention. Since 1950 it has played an important role in the upward surge of business in Steinbach, because it has introduced the element of competition into Steinbach financing. It has become easier to borrow money from the two chartered banks and thus the Steinbach businessmen are enabled to finance improvements more rapidly. Much automobile financing is also done by the Credit Union. Business is so brisk that in 1955 the Credit Union had a staff of six, very large for a rural Credit Union.

Finally we come to the largest of Steinbach's hinterlands—Southeastern Manitoba (Figure 33). Since 1950 it has included all of the area lying southeast of Steinbach, right to the Ontario and United States Boundaries. This is an area which had no large centre until 1945, and then turned to Steinbach for its commercial needs when it acquired some purchasing power. Figure 33 illustrates how Steinbach advanced into territories already served by smaller centres.

La Broquerie had always really been in Steinbach's hinterland, but it turned to Steinbach for everyday supplies after World War II. More significant was a shift of French Canadian trade farther north of Steinbach, because that was a district which until 1940 had found an adequate trading centre in Ste. Anne. But after the war Ste. Anne merchants did not keep pace with the new merchandising techniques and services which were being offered in Steinbach. After P.T.H. No. 12 was completed the Ste. Anne district was securely drawn into Steinbach's hinterland. Niverville suffered a similar fate in the late 1940's, but by 1955 the Niverville merchants were starting to hold their own again.

The view that Steinbach's trading strength lies in the southeast is supported by the position of the boundary of the Steinbach hinterland at St. Pierre. It is definitely bent in towards Steinbach (Figure 33). After 1880 St. Pierre was a centre of the same status as Steinbach, but serving a French Canadian instead of a Mennonite population. At times it even had influence in the Reserve. Until 1919 Hanover Municipality's bank account was in a St. Pierre bank. St. Pierre also has always drawn some trade from townships 5-5 and 6-5. Steinbach's growth since 1945 has not been aided by trade from St. Pierre. In fact, a cordial hostility developed be-



tween the two centres after Steinbach eclipsed St. Pierre, even though St. Pierre did not suffer economically. La Broquerie and Ste. Anne are resigned to being incorporated into Steinbach's hinterland, but St. Pierre has resisted fiercely and successfully. These statements are borne out by a glance at the *Carillon News* 1955 circulation figures. Out of a circulation of over 4,000, Steinbach had 679 subscribers to the *News*, Ste. Anne with a population of 720 in 1956 had 151, and St. Pierre, population 833 in 1956, had 42.

The people of Southeastern Manitoba trade in Steinbach for a number of reasons. In the first place it is the nearest large town, and this acts as an attraction in itself. Then too, the price in the stores are competitive – sometimes lower than in Winnipeg. The selection is wide, and the service is excellent.

A few select business firms had much to do with bringing customers to Steinbach. One is a large supermarket, built in 1945, which has all the latest devices found in the city stores, right down to automatic doors. This store often buys goods in carload lots, which enables it to undersell even the Winnipeg stores at times. It also maintains an expensive advertising campaign, that includes French radio broadcasts, and which has done much to acquaint the region with Steinbach. The automobile dealers have made all of Manitoba conscious of Steinbach. In 1911 Steinbach's first garage fixed the town's position as the trading centre of the East Reserve, in the 1920's the truck saved it from Giroux. And in the 1940's and 1950's the town's dealers introduced the people of Southeastern Manitoba to the family automobile, which enabled them to do their shopping in Steinbach. Steinbach thus owes much to the motor vehicle. Two of the garages in the town are the most modern in Manitoba outside of Winnipeg, and between them the three largest dealers sold approximately 1,000 units in 1955 (over 5,000 in 1959); in some years individual dealers have set national sale records for Canadian rural dealers. In 1955 about 60% of the buyers came from the Southeast, and the rest from Winnipeg. Customers are attracted by good trade-ins and by excellent service. Steinbach dealers had an advantage on trade-ins over Winnipeg dealers for some years, because they could sell the used cars to the farmers of Southeastern Manitoba. These people had no vehicles for many years, and they bought the used cars eagerly as soon as their standard of living began to rise. Today they are slowly moving up to more recent models as their prosperity continues.

Besides these main business attractions Steinbach has many specialty shops. There are furniture stores, tailor's shops, dress shops, electrical appliance stores, hardware stores and drug stores, most of which cannot be found in other Southeastern centres. Other services include large, well stocked lumber yards, electrical contractors, heating and plumbing contractors, body shops, machine shops, hatcheries and feed mills, so that any demand can usually be filled.

To the great benefit of the customer, there is competition in all these businesses. In the first place the Steinbach merchants have to meet the competition of Winnipeg, and secondly there are almost without exception two representatives of each type of business in Steinbach itself so that prices are low, the choice of goods is wide and the service excellent.

Steinbach's hospital also serves all of Southeastern Manitoba. Patients come in from an area extending from Niverville and Rosewood on the west and north to

the Ontario and United States Boundaries to the east and south. Steinbach has the only funeral director in Southeastern Manitoba. New roads have opened up more territory for him, and many formerly isolated communities are now using his service for the first time.

Steinbach has a number of sustaining industries which manufacture products for a wider area than its trading hinterland. By 1955 they had raised Steinbach well above the level of a rural trading venture. Various factors have contributed towards this development. The past isolation which encouraged native ingenuity had produced some excellent craftsmen, and low wages have lowered the cost of production. The owners are extremely aggressive and dedicated to hard work to the exclusion of every other activity but church work.

Among the industries, flour milling deserves mention since it was the original basis for Steinbach's growth. The Steinbach flour mill (Plate 23-2) is one of the three rural mills still in operation in Manitoba. It produced about 600-700 bags of flour a month in 1955. Half of this was gristed for Ukrainian farmers who came from as far as Dominion City to get their flour, and the rest was retailed in the stores of Southeastern Manitoba. The flour mill can survive only because it is opened in conjunction with a feed business, so that many economies can be effected.

The bee keepers' supplies factory, established during the depression, is still the largest firm of its kind in the West, but it is now manufacturing sashes and doors, church pews and pre-fabricated houses as well. Mill work is sold from the Lakehead to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and the church pews from Ontario to British Columbia. Sixty five men were employed full time in 1955; competition from other places could easily be met because the average wage was less than in Winnipeg.

Steinbach boasts one of the most important enterprising printing firms in rural Manitoba. It receives work from as far away as Vancouver in Canada, and from Minnesota and North Dakota in the United States. The firm employed 30 people in 1955 which included the staff of a commercial engraving department that services many rural Manitoba newspapers.

Steinbach is also the home of a tire retailing firm that conducts business on a nation wide basis, and has a turn-over of approximately \$1,000,000.00 a year. The company was established right after World War II to manufacture special wheels to enable farmers to switch from wheels with metal lugs to tires. After this trade had been exhausted in 1954, the company went into the retail tire business. As a result of advertising placed in national farmers' papers, 20,000 tires were sold every month in 1955: 40% went to Saskatchewan, 35% to Manitoba, 20% to Alberta, and 5% elsewhere. In 1957 a large branch office was opened in Winnipeg.

Besides these larger companies a number of other enterprises bring revenue into Steinbach. A pottery was established in 1944, but it has been operating only occasionally since then. A Steinbach bakery supplied a Winnipeg grocery chain with 4,000 loaves of bread a day in 1955. Two large road construction firms, which do business on a prairie-wide basis, and one of Manitoba's largest house movers, operate out of Steinbach.

Steinbach is one of the pleasantest towns in rural Canada, not because of its setting, but because of its neat, immaculate appearance. All the shops are on the

mile long, 100 foot wide Main Street (Plate 23-1 and Figure 34). Many of them are as smartly finished inside and out as any stores in Canada that cater to general trade. The fact that the businesses are all on one street is one of Steinbach's major advantages as a trading centre, because farmers like the convenience of having everything close at hand. Many farmers who are closer to Winnipeg than to Steinbach prefer to shop in Steinbach for that reason. Unlike most small railway towns, including Niverville, there has been no migration of business from the main street. The original long, wide village street has proved quite adaptable to the needs of modern business establishments, and even in 1955 there was still ample room for expansion on Main Street. Many beautiful homes have been built in Steinbach in recent years, all of wood, all modern and all tastefully decorated. Many of the streets are tree-lined, giving a mature and comfortable appearance to the town.

With the passage of years, the creek, along which the village was originally laid out, has ceased to flow; the ditches have robbed it of its water, and all that remains is a depression, alongside which a boulevard residential street is being constructed (Plate 3-1). A steady growth in population since 1945 has filled in many of the empty lots in the town plan, but settlements established in the depression years by people hoping to find work or relief still remain on the outskirts of Steinbach (Figure 8P). Local names characterizing them have been used for many years. *Moscow* to the south, was settled by *Russländer* Mennonites, and *Hungawebde* (Hunger-Stay-Away) to the east, was occupied by a group of very poor people during the depression. These suburbs have been filling up in recent years because taxes are lower than in Steinbach. Fortunately these districts are improving in appearance.

Steinbach businessmen are reasonably satisfied with their highway connections (the town is located at the junction of P.T.H. No. 12 and the Piney Highway), and rarely think about obtaining rail connections anymore. One last effort to obtain a railway connection for Steinbach was made in 1946 when the proprietor of a feed mill, who was shipping enormous quantities of feed overseas, and a large lumber and fuel dealer, made a request to the C.N.R. for a spur line. But even the local businessmen could not agree where it was to go, and since it appeared that it could not be brought into town without disrupting all existing transportation facilities, the whole proposal was dropped.

Steinbach has been installing the latest amenities in the 1950's. A sewage and water works project was approved in 1955, and was installed during the period from 1956 to 1959. Steinbach thus has all the strictly functional comforts that can be desired. But some "advantages" that are generally accepted in Canada are still regarded as incidental or even undesirable by the Mennonite population, particularly in what would be considered recreation facilities. The first theatre was not opened until the 1940's, and it was moved to Ste. Anne in 1957 because it was not generally patronized by local Mennonites.

Along with all the other Mennonite centres in both Reserves, Steinbach has no public park. Even more serious is the lack of athletic recreational facilities for the young people. Much smaller non-Mennonite centres, including La Broquerie, have put Steinbach to shame by constructing indoor skating rinks, but Steinbach still does not have one, the diehards often maintaining that it is preferable to have the children attend prayer meetings.

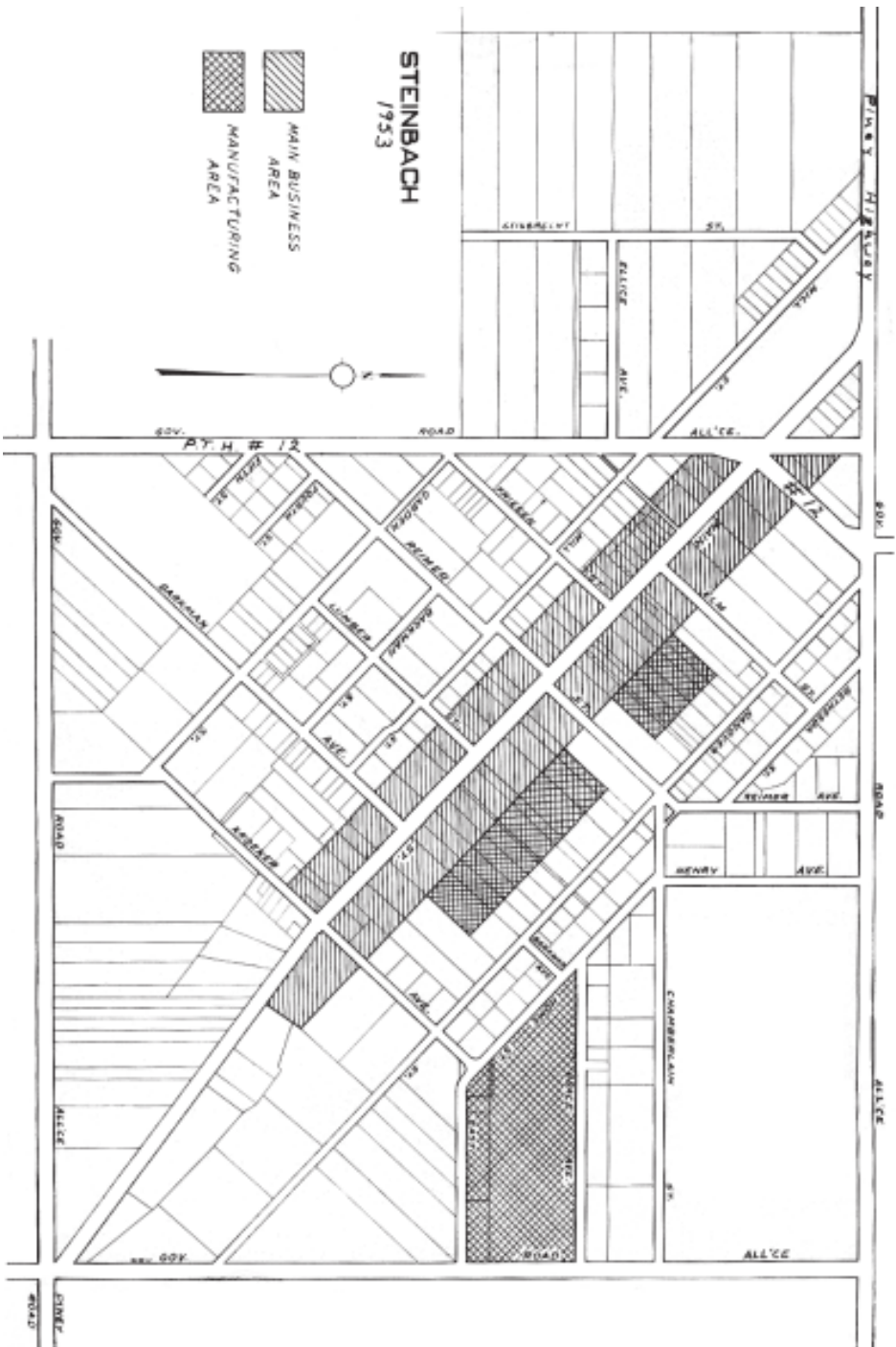
Plate 23

STEINBACH



*One of Manitoba's oldest independent flour mills is located in Steinbach. The mill produces its own line of feeds. The bulk of the flour is sold in the district.*

Figure 34





### **Niverville**

Niverville had a population of 456 in 1956, a good increase over its pre-war population of about 200. The recent change to more diversified farming in its hinterland has had a great effect upon Niverville's development, and it has expanded its services to the farmers. A hatchery opened in the late 1940's; there is a new poultry slaughtering plant and egg grading station; and a new large feed mill and seed cleaning plant was opened in 1955.

Immediately after World War II, and until about 1951, Niverville and the other centres close to Steinbach were strongly affected by the aggressive business techniques of Steinbach merchants. But now Niverville is beginning to hold its own again as the first impact of the Steinbach drive for business is wearing off. The Niverville merchants are beginning to employ the same display and merchandising techniques, and they have modernized their premises, so that they have regained the dry goods trade. Niverville merchants in 1955 considered Winnipeg a more formidable business rival than Steinbach.

Niverville's town plan of 1878 has never been built up to the extent envisaged, but the street pattern has remained unchanged (Figure 8P). However, as I have already noted, nearly all the businesses have migrated to Main Street. Only a few run-down stores remain on the original business street and now they are hardly noticeable, so complete is the evacuation. The entire village gives a very new, freshly painted impression; something to be expected in a place that has more than doubled in population since the depression.

Niverville is predominantly Mennonite, but its hinterland includes Anglo-Saxons, Lutherans, and French Canadians, as well as Mennonites. Businessmen are agreed that one English customer is worth three or four Mennonites. Mennonites are inclined to "shop around", and in Steinbach if necessary! This mixed population is reflected in the life of the village because it has never been quite so insular and self sufficient as Steinbach. A Women's Institute functioned for years, and the non-Mennonite influence is also seen in the fact that there is a Community Hall, something never found in completely Mennonite communities.

### **Grunthal and Other Centres**

Grunthal is still the leading centre of the southern part of the Reserve, but it has been drastically affected by the growth of Steinbach since World War II. Part of Grunthal's importance in the 1930's and 1940's stemmed from the fact that for years its milk receiving station kept it in intimate contact with many Mennonite and Ukrainian farmers. Many of these contacts were lost (just at the time they were most needed to stave off Steinbach) when the milk station was closed in 1943 and converted into a cheese factory by the Kraft Company, which collected milk with public service vehicles. As a result Steinbach lopped off a good part of Grunthal's Ukrainian trade in the Sarto and 4-6 districts (a trade estimated by Grunthal businessmen to be about 35% of their business) just when that trade was becoming worthwhile. The cheese factory ceased operations in 1957 and machinery was installed for the manufacture of powered milk in 1958, but this alone will not enable Grunthal to retrieve her former trade. Grunthal is now beginning to develop a new Ukrainian hinterland in the Rosa area where it will not have to fear

competition from Steinbach, but as yet the communications are too poor south of Grunthal to bring in many people.

Despite its losses to Steinbach, Grunthal has prospered and grown from local trade, as the income of the farmers increased. Besides the usual merchandising and garage services, Grunthal also has a bakery, an egg grading station, a feed mill, and of course the powdered milk factory. Grunthal's location in the midst of bush country and away from through highways has definitely given it the qualities of an independent regional capital, as it has risen above the stereotyped pattern of the usual prairie trading town in both appearance and atmosphere. It has a fresh naiveté which is never found in even the smallest centre located on a railway. The business places are all on the main street (Figure 8P), but they are interspersed with houses, a church, and many vacant areas giving the centre a casual rural atmosphere (Plate 24-1). Trails on the north side of the main street lead to a haphazard collection of houses built in the 1930's, but a more formal residential area has been laid out since the war on the other side. Bush presses in on both sides of these developments. On one end of the main street farms are laid out, on the other the remnants of the original agricultural village can be seen ( Figure 8P).

Sarto is still the centre of the Ukrainian area of the Reserve, even though it consists of only a few buildings on either side of the highway (Plate 24-4). It has a church, community hall and a school, as well as three small shops. A transfer operator also has his headquarters here. Business in Sarto is insignificant and one can hardly call it a trading centre. None of the shops is a general store, in the manner of the classic general store of the 1900's. Each has some provisions and such other staples as jars rings, fly swatters and shoe polish as may be in demand. The rise of Steinbach has not affected the Sarto merchants at all, because they had no trade to lose. Instead of going to Grunthal the people now go to Steinbach. Nevertheless, better transportation has drawn some business away from the district because the store at Trentham, four miles west of Sarto, was closed in 1949. The two stores south of Sarto, at Pansy and Barkfield (Figure 33) are cross roads centres, lingering on from the days of horse and buggy transportation. The store at Pansy remains in the old tradition. It stocks nuts and bolts, braces and bits, lengths of cloth, furniture, mittens, cigarettes and so on. These southern centres reflect the farming community they serve. As yet the farmers in this area have not developed beyond the stage of keeping livestock for general purposes. It is too much to say that they are engaged in commercial dairying or poultry production. Most of these farms are not yet sufficiently mechanized to require garages or machine shops, nor do they need the services of an egg grading station or a feed mill – those farmers who do go either to Steinbach or to Grunthal. Sarto did have a small garage, but it burned down in 1954 and there has been no need, even in 1959, to replace it.

Small centres are absent between the Ukrainian district and Steinbach because farming is still backward in most of the area (Plate 31-1), and because of the dominance of Steinbach.

The diversified Kleefeld district, however, has developed at a rapid rate in the post war years. The old village, a half mile from the Piney Highway, is at the northern end of the new development, and all the expansion has been southward for two miles along the road leading to Grunthal. Along its length there are two gen-

## Plate 24



*1. Grunthal in mid-summer, when the temperature was in the high 90's. This Main Street is even more undifferentiated than that of most prairie villages – residences and businesses alternate the length of the street with no semblance of a core anywhere. Even a church and school are on this street.*



*2. (Neu) Blumenort, a modern farmers' trading centre on a Tuesday morning. When this picture was taken, 28 farm vehicles were in the centre, patronizing the feed and poultry establishments and the general store.*



*3. Village of Chortitz, a typical modern farm supply centre – stretches along the road allowance for 1/2 a mile. This is just north of the bush country and shows the bleak, treeless prairie, without any shelter belts. Road in foreground is a good, gravelled, all-weather market road.*



*4. Sarto, the "capital" of the Ukrainian settlement in the East Reserve. Only buildings not visible are a small store, a school, and a hall on the opposite side of the highway.*



eral stores, an egg grading station, a feed mill, garage, blacksmith shop, tinsmith's shop and two churches. These buildings are not concentrated; each business establishment is set on its own large lot, and may be separated from the next business by a few farms, so that the community resembles nothing so much as a French lot settlement. The farms and the businesses are part of the same general community development, and thus there is an intimate association between the two which is not characteristic of the usual trading centre. A closely-knit farm-business community has developed in which the two components cannot be dissociated in the landscape. Some Kleefeld businessmen even farm the back part of the lots on which their business premises are located.

Chortitz is the oldest of the centres that serve the farmers in the northern townships, and is still the centre of one of the most conservative Mennonite groups remaining in Manitoba. Besides a church, Chortitz has a school, transfer, garage and a store, all arranged along a high, graded road where there are no trees (Plate 24-3). Farmers here still continue their conservative farming practices, growing grain and keeping livestock, and they have not specialized in dairying like the districts to the south, in beets or potatoes as have the areas to the west and east respectively, or in poultry like the farmers of the area to the north and northeast. Chortitz farmers are passive, and no one here has cast about for new ways of building up farm prosperity. Hence there as yet is no feed mill or egg grading station here. Southeast of Chortitz on the Piney Highway there is a small settlement of Mennonites who went on the 1948 migration to Paraguay, but who returned to this district after they did not find conditions to their liking in South America. They have cut lots out of the bush which fringes the Piney Highway at this point and have built small cottages. They stay alive by keeping chickens and working for low wages in Steinbach.

The area of conservative Mennonites continues north of Chortitz, and they have another centre in New Bothwell (Figure 33), which was developed around a cheese factory. Very little milk from the New Bothwell area goes to Winnipeg, since most of it is processed locally in the cheese factory. Gradually other businesses have been attracted here, and in 1955 New Bothwell had two small stores, two garages, an oil station and a transfer. Some returnees from Paraguay have also settled here, near their old homes. They live on ten acre lots on which they keep hogs, a cow or two and chickens. They also work as labourers, but since there is insufficient work here, they will probably be drawn into the Steinbach and Winnipeg labour pools.

Two more centres, Tourond and Shakespeare, are situated on the fringes of the area of conservative Mennonites. Each has a store and a garage that serve an area of about two and a half miles around. Tourond was established as a post office after the war so that the farmers would not have to go eight miles to Niverville for their mail. It is not an essential centre, but merely an alternative to rural free mail delivery. It is significant that there are no trading centres in the area between Niverville, Tourond and New Bothwell. A grain growing area needs a railway shipping point, so all these farmers went to Niverville in the past, now that they are diversifying they continue to trade there.

North and east of the conservative pocket of Mennonites lies the area where the progressive Mennonites have plunged fully into specialization in poultry and

turkeys. The result is that the farms are small and the farm population dense. Because of the nature of their operations the farmers in this area require the services of local supply and processing centres. New centres have developed to take care of these requirements, but one old one, Giroux, has declined, along with the decline in commercial grain growing. Giroux's one remaining elevator burned in 1944, and was not replaced because its hinterland was not producing grain any longer. Giroux's place as the trading centre of the northeastern part of the Reserve was taken by Blumenort and today Giroux only has a shop and a gasoline pump.

Blumenort is the new trading centre *par excellence*, and well it should be, because it serves the area that has always been the best farming district in the East Reserve (Figure 33). The original village of Blumenort was located one and a half miles south of the present Blumenort. The new development was started in 1940 when a store was built where a high ridge crosses a road allowance. Soon a garage and machine shop were added, but not until 1953 was the Blumenort Co-op Poultry Killing Plant, together with an egg grading station and poultry supply store, set up. That same year the proprietor of the first store built a large feed mill. Now the farmers have a local centre where they can secure quick repairs for their machinery, obtain properly mixed feeds, and also market their produce (Plate 24-2). Blumenort was firmly established when a large Mennonite church was built there in 1952.

Blumenort grew out of the needs of the farmers and exists strictly to serve the farmer. At present it is only a trading centre, but it may become a village in time if the growth and prosperity continue. Its population increased from 70 in 1951 to 177 in 1956 (Census of Canada), but the people are scattered over a distance of half a mile. It is very difficult to found a new village once the initial settlement of an agricultural area is completed, especially in the present era of better roads and many cars, when the trend is for villages to decline. Consequently it will be interesting to observe the development at this centre. Blumenort might actually be considered a village, if one demands only that a village be a trading centre, but I believe that the mental attitude of the inhabitants should also be considered. In their minds it must be more than a supply and processing centre. It must be a place where the women will willingly accompany their husbands to do their own shopping; and it should have side walks on which knots of farmers can move along, where they can collect to discuss the day to day events of farming. That is to say, it must have a reason for pedestrian traffic – a street that is more than just part of a through road. Blumenort has not yet reached this stage, nor has Kleefeld.

Three settlements, Greenland, Landmark and Linden (Figure 33) north and northwest of Blumenort, serve progressive farm areas, but none of them is as well developed as Blumenort. Greenland consists of one isolated store, and a church located a quarter of a mile from it, and the name really refers to a district rather than a central place.

Landmark is more highly developed, and approaches Kleefeld in its appearance, except that the farms are not all on one road. Landmark had a very large cheese factory at one time, which was the nucleus for the district, but now the farmers are specializing in poultry. It has a large store, a garage, an appliance shop and a feed mill.

The feed mill serving this general area was formerly in Linden, about four miles east of Landmark. The mill burned down in 1953, and was not replaced. A new one was built in Landmark, and Linden now has only a store and a service station. When it still had the feed mill, it attracted customers from a five to six mile radius, but now they come no farther than two miles to buy at the store.

Two miles is the usual radius of the hinterlands of small centres such as Linden, Greenland, Shakespeare and Tourond, which have no facilities other than store or service stations, but as the number of services increases the radius of the hinterland expands to a maximum distance of about five to six miles. All these centres serve only the day to day needs of the farmers, and survive because they are close to the farmers, and provide quick convenient service. As farmers specialize more and more they will turn increasingly to these centres, because they will require supply and service specialties which must be available at all seasons. At present farmers have a closer contact with their supply centres than they did in the grain growing days. It would appear that enough centres have developed to serve the area, especially in the north. Steinbach, Grunthal, and Niverville serve only the areas within about four to seven miles of them, and the smaller centres take up the rest of the work.

The services which these centres supply vary in the different parts of the Reserve. In the north the centres developed to serve a dense farm population, which is mechanized and engaged in specialized farming. In the south the centres were brought into existence because of the poor communications that formerly existed there. As yet they have no garage facilities or mills for producing balanced feeds because these services are not in sufficient demand.

These centres are unique in Manitoba at present. They have developed because of the dense farm population in one part of the Reserve, isolation in another; because of the mixed and specialized farming that prevails; because the area is dependent on trucks; and in a few districts because of the examples left by the agricultural villages. Other areas in Manitoba do not have these same conditions. To the west of Hanover, for example, in the grain area of St. Pierre, Otterburne, and Dufrost, the rail centre is still prominent, and to the east, the bush starts immediately and little agricultural development has taken place.

### **West Reserve**

#### **Altona – Winkler – Morden**

During the depression the businessmen in the West Reserve trading centres soon realized that their own prosperity depended upon the farmers in their hinterlands regaining their prosperity. Businessmen in three centres, Altona, Winkler, and Morden, have taken most of the initiative in helping the farmers, and in turn, they have benefited most from the new farm enterprises that have been introduced.

Altona is the best example of what can be accomplished when the trading centre and farmer work together. In 1944 Altona's population was under 700. In 1945 the C.V.O. plant was operating, and it was on the strength of this rural processing industry that Altona really expanded. That year alone, 45 houses were either built in Altona or were moved into the town.<sup>1</sup> The other big sustaining industry in

Altona is a printing firm which employs over 30 people. This firm was established during the depression by a local businessman, and now obtains work from an area bounded by Crystal City on the west, Winnipeg in the north, and Steinbach on the east. The firm's chief importance within the Reserve lies in the educational work performed by the newspaper it publishes. *The Red River Valley Echo*, the first Mennonite newspaper in the Reserve published in English, was established in 1940 (as the *Altona Echo*), and has been instrumental in bringing new crops and new methods to the attention of the farmers, and in integrating the whole Mennonite area by making the people conscious of themselves as a potentially progressive ethnic group. For the first time Mennonites had a weekly medium for expressing their own views on farming, and this began to give them a feeling of self-realization which led to the undertaking of new projects. (An ethnic newspaper, the *Canadian Mennonite* was founded by the firm in 1953 and carries out similar work along educational and religious lines.) At the same time the cooperatives were distributing literature and holding meetings, thus complementing the work of the newspapers. Altona, which was the centre of all this self-expression, benefited greatly from all the activity.

Altona has to some extent been consciously fashioned since 1940. The public responsibility and the initiative of a few citizens has built up the town, until at present it is on a level with Winkler and Morden. The town is definitely dominated by the cooperatives; not only do they provide many services, but they also employ many people. Furthermore, they follow a practice, new to many rural areas, of paying adequate salaries and taking care of their employees. For example, the C.V.O. plant employs its men on a year round basis by processing soy beans in the off season. The plant makes no profit on the beans, but by keeping the men employed brings money into the community. Merchandising is also dominated by the cooperatives; in 1955 the annual turn-over of business by the cooperative store was over \$800,000, and its biggest competitor was not another Altona store but Eaton's Mail Order in Winnipeg.

Winkler thrives because of the keen business competition within the town, which makes it a good shopping centre for farmers. This is probably a legacy of the Jewish business element which was a strong force in retail merchandising until about 1930. Two stores, which really set the competitive prices at present, are still owned by Jews, though they are run by Mennonite managers. Winkler attained its leading position in the World War I boom, and has maintained its reputation as a good trading centre since then. It has also had good community leadership, but of a slightly different kind than Altona. The first agricultural extension work in the Reserve was done from Winkler in 1920, when Winkler Agricultural Society was founded, but the Society collapsed after a few years.<sup>2</sup> It had been organized by two prominent Winkler businessmen and a teacher, but since there was no drastic farm emergency at this time, such as the depression of farm prices a decade later, the farmers did not respond. An attempt was made to revive the society in 1924 but this also failed. But in cultural activities Winkler definitely took the lead in the Reserve, and through the efforts of the *Russländer* Mennonites it has never relinquished it. Winkler has a leading provincial musical festival, and its church choirs are well known for their excellence. An orchestra has even been organized by local musical

enthusiasts. A newspaper, *The Winkler Progress* (now the *Pembina Triangle Progress*), was founded in 1948 and is now attaining considerable influence in the western part of the Reserve.

But the close association with the countryside which the cooperatives gave Altona was lacking in Winkler during the 1930's, and it was not until the 1940's that the active participation of the town in agricultural affairs was resumed. The Co-operative Creamery was established in 1940, and the Stanley Agricultural Society, the equivalent of the Rhineland Agricultural Society, was founded in 1947, 17 years after the Rhineland group. But the enterprising big farmer outside the cooperative movement has continued to provide important leadership in the Winkler area. The Mennonite farmer who introduced corn to the Reserve in the 1930's, built a large modern seed cleaning plant in Winkler in 1955, and a huge potato warehouse in 1956. Large investments are also being made by small groups of farmers in piggeries and broiler factories on the outskirts of Winkler. All these enterprises, along with the vegetable cannery, keep Winkler well to the front as the centre of a diversified area.

The real difference between the towns of Altona and Winkler is that one is the centre of cooperation and the other of competition. Altona appears to be a benevolent company town with everything co-ordinated about the cooperatives. Winkler on the other hand has four large stores in competition for the retail trade, each of which did more than \$200,000.00 worth of business in 1955, and among which the farmers can hunt for bargains. Customers come to Altona because they are "Co-op minded" and have an almost fanatical loyalty to their store, and even beyond that, to the "Co-op" label. Trade is brought to Winkler by an extremely aggressive Chamber of Commerce, which realizes that the life blood of the community is trade, and therefore advertises Winkler to the fullest possible extent. The Chamber of Commerce is successful because it is generally admitted in the Reserve that prices are more competitive in Winkler than in Morden and Altona, and young people even come from Morden to shop in Winkler.

Morden began to reassert itself as a leading centre in the western part of the Reserve after World War II. Its location on the flank of the Pembina Mountains became especially important in the 1940's. In 1941 P.F.R.A. engineers created a small lake one and a half miles southwest of Morden, by constructing a dam across Dead Horse Creek. It was plain, however, that this was an inadequate supply of water for a waterworks project and for a cannery, both of which were under construction in 1951. Therefore P.F.R.A. enlarged the dam in 1952, forming a lake (called Lake Minnewasta) with a 16 foot water level (plate 25-1). In addition to supplying Morden with a source of domestic and industrial water, this lake also provides the town with a recreational facility of inestimable value. A beach, on the banks of Lake Minnesota, was constructed, and serves all of recreation-hungry South-Central Manitoba. Not only Morden but the whole area (for example, the Winkler Chamber of Commerce) was behind the construction of the beach, and it is widely used by people from as far east as the Red River. On some summer Sundays over 6,000 people visit Lake Minnewasta.

These improvements have revitalized the town, and not only rural industries but also new trades people have located in Morden. Mennonites are moving in,

and in 1955, 31 out of 81 businesses in Morden were owned by Mennonites.<sup>3</sup> In the schools there are as many Mennonite as non-Mennonite children. Morden now is a cosmopolitan town, a drastic change in its character from former years. Besides the Anglo-Saxons and Mennonites there are Germans, Ukrainians and a few other ethnic groups.

By 1951 the Reserves had three dominant trading centres: Morden (population 1,863), Altona (1,438), and Winkler (1,331). Morden still is well in the lead in retail trade as Table 33 shows.

**Table 33**  
**Retail Sales, West Reserve, 1931-1951**  
(in \$.000's)

	Division II			Morden			Winkler			Altona		
	Stores	Sales		Stores	Sales	%	Stores	Sales	%	Stores	Sales	%
1931	319	\$ 3953		37	\$ 554	14	24	\$ 340	8.5	-	-	-
1941	358	5301		31	662	12.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
1951	388	23388		39	3424	14.5	28	2767	12	34	\$ 1923	8

(Census of Canada)

Morden's portion of the sales dropped slightly in 1941, but the town had come back strongly by 1951. Winkler's sales campaigns have been successful, as its great increase in trade from 1931 to 1951 shows. Altona would probably show an even greater relative increase than Winkler if figures were available for comparison.

Rural industries accompanying the agricultural changes have played an important part in raising these three centres to their present level. The exceptions are the industries based on cereals. Both Altona and Winkler lost their milling industries after World War II, and Morden has not had one since the turn of the century. The war stimulated the Altona and Winkler mills, and even after the war the mills were working day and night to fill overseas orders, particularly from the West Indies. In the Altona mill, 10 men were employed in 1947, in the Winkler mill, 24 men. The Winkler mill turned out 250 bbl. of flour daily in 1947. But it was closed down within three years, when it was sold to a "line" grain company. This is a good example of what can happen to a local industry when it is sold to large outside interests. The "line" company turned the flour mill into a feed mill in 1950, thus throwing more than twenty men out of work, whereas if it had been left in local hands it would probably still be operating as a flour mill. The Altona milling plant was in very poor condition, and had to suspend operations in the early 1950's when the market for low grade flour disappeared.

Other industries are much more important in Altona and Winkler. Altona is really a two industry town with its C.V.O. plant and the printing shop. Winkler has more: there are the cannery and the creamery, and a new poultry dressing plant was added to the creamery in 1956. Thirty people are employed in the latter plant, and it is an important rural industry, especially for the small farmers in the south.



## Plate 25



*1. Spillway at Morden Dam; and Lake Minnewasta. Dam-height 65'; length 950'. Spillway-width 120'. Depth of reservoir 50'. Reservoir area 143 acres.*



*2. Newly broken pasture in 31-2-5W, showing the size of the boulders which had to be removed. This area is above the escarpment, and its soils are in marked contrast to the soils of the Lake Agassiz basin.*

Winkler also has an important butchering concern employing nine people. This privately owned shop prepares meat both for local trade and for sale in Winnipeg. Only a slightly higher proportion of the stock is secured from south of Winkler (which specializes in dairy rather than beef herds), than from the north. Another Winkler industry is a dry cleaning establishment, which employs twelve people, and serves Southern Manitoba from Gretna on the east to more than 100 miles west of Winkler.

Morden has a variety of industries besides the cannery. The Pembina Clays Co., employing four men, ships about 15,000 tons of bentonite annually from Morden. The bentonite is mined about 15 miles northwest of Morden, where it occurs in four beds (each about three to nine inches thick), about four to twelve feet below the surface. It is pulverized and about 1/3 of the moisture by weight is removed in a drying mill in Morden. It is then shipped to Winnipeg for further refining. Most of it is used in the petroleum industry for clarifying oil. Morden also has a machine works established by a German mechanic in 1938. It employed 37 men in 1955. Hammer mills, grinders, furnaces, pumps, and grain elevators are manufactured. The plant is of great importance to Morden, since the firm had a monthly payroll of \$7,000.00 in 1955. All shipments to and from Winnipeg or raw materials and finished products are made by truck. The plant is located in Morden because the parent machine shop was founded there, and so far the owner has not considered moving. In 1954 another industry was established in Morden when the Pembina Poultry Packers opened a poultry dressing plant. About 30 people are regularly employed in the plant.



Rural industries have helped to increase the population of these towns. Those additional people have also helped to support a greater variety of services, which in turn have extended the influence of the towns into the trading area of other centres as shown in Figure 33. In 1955 there were only three centres with the full range of services in the Reserve. Altona serves the southeastern, Winkler the central, and Morden the western sectors of the Reserve. They all offer more or less equal services, although one may have a service that the other doesn't have. Winkler is the only centre that has a dry cleaning plant, but the other centres are served by it, and also by Winnipeg firms. Similarly Winkler has the only funeral director in the Reserve, but he has branches in both Altona and Morden.

Among the most important of the services offered by these centres are the hospitals. Morden's first hospital dates from 1892. This served the community until 1951 when a new 40 bed hospital was built. Winkler's hospital was built in 1936, and has been enlarged periodically since, so that in 1955 it had 35 beds and a staff of 30. Altona has a new 29 bed hospital completed in 1954, but its first hospital was also commenced in the 1930's. The hospitals serve to mark these towns as definite centres in the Reserve.

Another excellent indicator of dominance is the newspaper: the only three newspapers published in the area are in Altona, Winkler, and Morden. The Altona *Red River Valley Echo* had the largest circulation in 1955, with 2,936 subscribers. This included the circulation of the Morris paper which was incorporated into its Altona competitor in the summer of 1955. The paper gives excellent coverage to the whole Reserve, and it is widely read: in 1955 Altona (and district) had 690 subscribers; Rosenfeld 132; Plum Coulee 233; Gretna 219; Winkler 206; Morris 237; Lowe Farm-Kane 157; Halbstadt 93; Horndean 78; and Morden-Haskett 60. The circulation of the Winkler *Pembina Triangle Progress* is much smaller, with only 790 subscribers in 1955, so it merely covers the local area. It had 600 subscribers in Winkler in 1955, and 50 in Plum Coulee: the rest is widely scattered. It remains to be seen whether the Winkler paper will be able to exert a positive influence on its own hinterland, as the *Red River Valley Echo* has done in the Reserve. At present no one reads the Winkler paper, or any English paper, in the agricultural villages in the south, and that is where the most education is required. The *Morden Times* had a circulation of 1,282 in 1955, mostly confined to the surrounding territory: Morden 592; Miami 117; Darlingford 90; Roland 74; Thornhill 61; and Winkler 27. Obviously it does not influence the Reserve to any extent. These circulation figures do not imply that Altona has the largest or strongest hinterland, but rather they indicate to what extent local correspondents have built up a following in the different districts. Also the figures reflect the age of the papers. Altona's paper was established first in the Reserve, and gave coverage to Winkler and the western part of the Reserve before the Winkler paper was founded in 1948. Morden's paper never catered to the Mennonites.

There are considerable differences between the centres in recreational facilities. Morden easily leads the other two, with its lake, a good golf course, a public park, an excellent movie theatre, and a large enclosed rink. In both Winkler and Altona strong local feelings against community recreation had to be overcome before any of these projects could be undertaken. Winkler did not have a theatre

until 1947 and many Mennonites still boycott it. Some letters in the *Altona Echo* of that year reveal the attitudes of the Mennonites. A letter from a high school student in the *Echo* of Sept. 26, 1947, suggested that a theatre should be established in Altona, because the younger people were tired of sneaking out to neighbouring towns. The student said that since they were going to the theatre anyway they wanted to do it in a respectable way. Two issues later three letters were published denouncing the student's attitude, saying that he should follow healthful recreations, etc. The letters cited biblical quotations to substantiate these statements. A theatre was inevitable, however, and Altona had one by 1955, although no movie advertisements are permitted in the local paper. Similar difficulties were encountered in building community skating rinks. Most Manitoba communities, even when they have only a tenth of the population of the Mennonite centres, have skating and curling rinks, but until the 1950's it was foreign to the experience of the Mennonite to spend money on community recreation. Thus a skating rink By-law was defeated in Altona in 1951. Fortunately it was passed the next year and a rink was built. Winkler too has a rink; it was built some years earlier through the efforts of the non-Mennonite element in the population.

Other facilities are also being introduced. Winkler has a golf course of sorts, and Altona and Gretna jointly support one built in 1950, two miles north of Gretna. They have no parks as yet, but gradually all the amenities of the small Western town are coming to Mennonite centres, as the Mennonites are slowly changing their attitudes towards these innovations.

These changes in attitude are revealed in other things as well. There is a United Church in Altona which in 1955 had over 100 ex-Mennonite members, and in the Winkler Lutheran Church over half the members (also about 100) are ex-Mennonites. At present there is very little to differentiate these two towns from non-Mennonite centres. Even a feeling of community responsibility for recreation is gradually entering the towns, whereas formerly it was only a small sport-loving element that was involved. Morden is a good example of how the Mennonites are accommodating themselves. There were 701 Mennonites in Morden in 1951, the largest single religious group out of the population of 1,862. Mennonites are taking a leading role in the business world, own some of the largest business establishments, are on the school board and the town council, and take part in most community activities. However, in some instances there is still a predilection for Winkler among the Mennonites, because they still feel more at home in Mennonite circles. Most Morden Mennonites women have their babies in the Winkler hospital, and there was a small *cause celebre* when a town counselor's wife had her baby there. For political reasons she gave birth to her next child in the Morden hospital. In many ways the Mennonites are taking over Morden, but at present the mutual compromises that are necessary have not yet been accomplished. However, intermarriage is taking place, the older uncompromising generation is dying out, and a new community spirit is developing. Mennonites and new Mennonite businesses are moving into Morden, because with its waterworks, and its beautiful site it is a good place to live. A cafe, now the best in Morden, was moved from Plum Coulee in 1954 by an enterprising Mennonite, and some Winkler businessmen have also moved their establishments.

Morden has a definite advantage over the other two centres in its waterworks system. Waterworks make the distinction at present between a centre which is going to attract rural industry, and one that is not, and waterworks programs are being pushed by small centres throughout Manitoba. Morden had a water supply right at hand and did not have much difficulty in installing water and sewage. The problem of obtaining water is much more difficult for Winkler and Altona. In the case of Winkler, there are three possible sources of water: the lake at Morden, the Red River, and wells. It would be rather expensive to bring water to Winkler from the first two sources, and it is doubtful whether the Morden supply is sufficient, so that wells will probably be the best alternative, and they were the source most favoured by the engineers in 1955. Altona has no wells at all, so that lately another scheme has been prepared which would benefit both Winkler and Altona, and also provide some water for irrigation of row crops.

The Pembina Valley Water Control Association was formed in 1955 at a meeting in Winkler where representatives from Altona, Rosenfeld, Winkler, and Morden were present, as well as the Reeves of Pembina, Stanley, Rhineland and Morris Municipalities. Since the United States government was showing an interest in doing some work on its portion of the Pembina River, the Canadians in the area thought that an organization should be formed to safeguard their water rights, and at the same time prepare plans to make the water available for use. A dam in the Pembina River 15 miles southwest of Morden is proposed. It would create a lake in the Pembina Valley over 30 miles long, and up to a mile wide at places. The 150 foot dam would be just west of township 1-6, and would back up the water to La Riviere. This would provide a reservoir for irrigation and urban waterworks, and would also be a wild life sanctuary and a tourist attraction. The water would have to be pumped out of the valley, but the natural gradient would bring it the rest of the distance to the main users on the Red River Lowland, the Mennonites. No definite plans have been prepared as yet, but there is little doubt that the scheme will ultimately come to fruition. There has also been a proposal that the Reserve be connected to the Winnipeg water system, but this would not provide overall regional benefits of the Pembina River undertaking. In the meantime Altona is importing water by tank car from the United States,<sup>4</sup> and securing the services of water diviners in an attempt to find flowing wells so that a waterworks system can be commenced.

There is a great variation in the urban morphology of the three centres, despite the fact that all three have a gridiron layout and are on the prairies. Morden easily has the most attractive site. It is located where the Pembina Escarpment has the gentlest slope within Canada. Dead Horse Creek meanders through the town site and provides a suitable area for a park. Thus with the park and the rise of the Escarpment to the west and the south, and with the well-treed grounds of the Experimental Farm to the east, Morden has a beautiful setting that is unrivalled by most other Western towns.

In most prairie towns the obvious control to which the course of areal development must be referred, is the railway track, because most towns were laid out in strict reference to the railway (Figure 6P). Practically all developments in Morden has taken place north of the railway—only one street of fine old homes (and the

cottage hospital of 1893), are south of the track. The three east-west streets paralleling the railway in the north side record the three stages in the development of Morden. Railway Avenue, opposite the track, was the main business street until World War I, while Stephen Street, immediately to the north, was the ultra-respectable residential street. But by the late 1890's there was not sufficient room on Railway Avenue for all the business firms, because of the angle in the tracks and because buildings could be placed on only one side of the street. Hence some businessmen started to migrate to Stephen Street (especially after a fire in 1895), where there was space for buildings on both sides of the street. By 1915 Stephen Street was the main business street (although the western half of it has remained residential to this day) and Railway Avenue was on its way downhill. Railway Avenue now has only an old hotel, an egg grading station, a few machine shops and other establishments of that nature. Most of the businesses catering to the farmers' service needs are located here, so there has been no need for them to disperse to the outskirts as has happened in Altona, and to some extent in Winkler.

All the retail stores, garages, banks, cafes and so on are on Stephen Street. With its brick and stone business blocks it is easily the most substantial and smartest looking main street in the Reserve. P.T.H. No. 3 runs through Morden in the street north of Stephen. No business development took place there until 1940 when a filling station was established and since then a creamery has been located there. In the future it will most likely become the choice site for business buildings, if no By-laws are passed to prevent them from being built.<sup>5</sup>

A new residential area is developing north of the highway. New buildings have also been erected in the southeastern part of Morden, which is on a rise leading to the Escarpment. There is no shortage of room for expansion, but the southeast is blocked by the Experimental Farm, and the south by the railway, so that most of the residential development of the near future will take place north of the highway, whereas the industries will be near the railway. The cannery, for instance, is located on a large tract of land south of the railway track.

Morden is a solidly established rural town. Recreational facilities are at hand, waterworks have been installed, the major streets are paved, curbs are in, and the many shade trees make every street a boulevard. Winkler and Altona in comparison have a raw appearance.

Winkler was laid out south of the railway, because the ill defined channel of Hespeler Creek makes the area north of the track subject to flooding (Figure 6P). Even then Winkler is poorly located, because the surface is only a thin layer of clay (at places no more than 1 1/2 feet thick), overlying a bed of sand.<sup>6</sup> Since the ground water table in Winkler is high, the sand is unstable quicksand and the highly organic surface deposits are waterlogged, producing a very insecure surface. As a result the roads in Winkler, despite a large expenditure of effort and money, are in abominable shape. Winkler has spent far more on roads than Morden, yet Morden has over five miles of paved road roads in 1955, whereas Winkler still had mud holes on its Main Street.<sup>7</sup> No matter how much fill is laid down, the road just won't be stable. Apparently the construction of expensive subsurface drains to lower the water table permanently will be the only solution.

Winkler's original business district was confined to Railroad Avenue, but it has

since migrated to Main Street (Figure 6P). This shift took place some 30 years after the shift took place in Morden, and for a different reason – the advent of motor transportation. Railroad Avenue and the most northerly block of Main Street had always been the main business streets. But beginning in the 1930's there was a general trend to move from Railroad Avenue to Main Street and Stanley Avenue. This shift was climaxed when the single bank moved to Stanley East from Railroad Avenue in 1954. At present Railroad Avenue is left to a couple service stations, a butcher shop, a bulk oil station and the hotel, which is at the corner of Main and Railroad. The general trend away from Railroad Avenue was the result of several factors. By the 'mid 1930's a large proportion of the freight shipped to and from Winnipeg was carried by truck, so that there was no advantage in being close to the railway. The fire hazard caused by closely packed frame structures meant high insurance rates, and the businessmen took every opportunity to spread out along Main Street. Parking problems which are serious in these market towns, were partially eliminated by lengthening the business section.

Since 1945 a number of businesses such as service stations, body shops, and implement agencies, have been established on the east-west road marking the southern boundary of Winkler. These provide the services for the mechanized farmers of today. The creamery is in the middle of Winkler, on Main Street, but the cannery and the seed cleaning plant are on the railway, and it is likely that future industrial developments will take place there.

The original residential district was in the central section of Winkler, west of Main. There was also an early development north of the tracks, but drainage problems stopped that. During the boom caused by World War I, the eastern part of Winkler was built up. These early developments have become dormant, and most of the residential building after World War II has taken place in the west, where one new street after another has been laid out, producing an area that looks like a suburban subdivision of a large city. The extension of Main Street south of the section road is outside the town limits. This area is occupied by poor families and most of the men work as labourers in Winkler. Many of these people have come to this section of Winkler from the agricultural villages to the south. Steinbach is the only other Mennonite centre which has a similar "suburb", and it also is an unmistakable product of the town's hinterland. So far Winkler has not reserved any land for a park, but the land along Hespeler Creek to the west of the town would be an obvious site.

Altona's gridiron pattern is not as regular as Morden's or Winkler's (Figure 7P) nor are its business and residential districts as compact. A series of "accidents" have produced this confused result. The first business district was on the east side of the railway along Main Street, with the residential area behind it, but instead of a uniform growth of residential area behind it, the land to the west of the railway was subdivided and another residential area was developed. This disruption was emphasized in the 1930's and early 1940's when a few business firms serving farmers established their premises on the west side. Further changes took place in the 1940's when the highway on the eastern side of the town was reconstructed, and more business places serving the farmers were established there. (By 1952 it was necessary to construct a highway bypass around them.) Many vacant lots were left

Plate 26



*1. Altona – Main Street. Shows some of the planning problems: the railway goes right through the centre of town, resulting in a “one-sided” Main Street. There is not enough space to provide lots for all the businesses in a trading centre of Altona’s size, so that many shops and garages are scattered about the town. The business district thus loses compactness, and also it is difficult to achieve a smart, finished appearance.*



*2. Rosenfeld. The hotel is located at the intersection of P.T.H.’s 14 and 14A, a quarter mile from the village, indicating how business moves to the highway.*



*3. Haskett. Now that the elevator is gone only a store and a garage are left of the former village of about 100 people.*



## Plate 27



1. Emerson. Business block erected in 1884 when Emerson was still battling Winnipeg for the control of the wholesale business of Southwestern Manitoba. Winnipeg has similar buildings dating from this time in its old wholesale area on Princess Street, but they are not found elsewhere in the province.



2. Business section of Gretna. As in Altona it is dominated by the railway and the elevators, but it does not matter so much here because Gretna is a lower ranking trading centre and the demand for Main Street lots is not nearly so great – in fact there are vacant lots on Main Street.



3. "Mansion" built by E. Penner, the pioneer Mennonite merchant in Gretna in the 1890's. A few of these brick structures differentiate Gretna from the other Mennonite villages which only have frame buildings – not having had a golden age during the 1880's and 1890's to leave buildings such as this as reminders.



4. On one hand Gretna is a museum piece among West Reserve towns, on the other hand it is just as unique in having a small scale housing development. These houses were put up by the Pipe Line Company for their Gretna Pumping Station employees.



between the highway and the built up part of Altona. The residential development of the 1940's confused the situation even more, because during the boom in building landowners subdivided their holdings into lots without taking into account how the subdivision was connected to the existing street pattern of Altona.

The poorly co-ordinated street plan makes it difficult to get to Main Street and the central business district. Things are not made easier by the railway which divides the town into two parts which are only poorly connected by three roads across the tracks. The elevators and the abandoned flour mill stand right in the centre (Plate 26-1). In Altona the business core has not migrated since the town was first established. Since there has been no room for new establishments on the "one-sided" Main Street the new business premises have been dispersed through the town. This is a handicap for Altona, because small town business districts must be compactly laid out for the sake of convenience and to make an impression. So far Altona has not been too adversely affected because it can count on the loyalty of its customers, and has not had to attract them like Steinbach did by extensive advertising and super-efficient service.

The streets in Altona are in somewhat better shape than those in Winkler, since Altona does not have the same difficulties with an unstable road bed. But there are drainage difficulties, since a tributary of Buffalo Lake flows through the western part of town. No park land has been reserved as yet.

### **Gretna – Plum Coulee**

Next in the hierarchy of towns are two well established secondary centres, Gretna and Plum Coulee. Their businessmen are not in theory dependent upon Morden, Winkler or Altona for their supplies. My reason for assigning a secondary status to these towns is that the farmers in the hinterland of Gretna and Plum Coulee do in fact patronize the larger centres when bargains are at hand, or when they can't obtain the services they require in their own trading centre. However, the merchants of Gretna and Plum Coulee are agreed that when it comes to retail trade Winnipeg has become just as great an attraction as the three larger centres. The smaller towns then, just content themselves with supplying the week-to-week requirements of the people in their hinterlands; they also continue to serve as the grain shipping points.

Gretna is still a very good trading town, as is indicated by the fact that it consistently ships more grain than Altona (Table 22). But the history of Gretna demonstrates the way an established town can come to be dominated by a nearby centre. Altona has the Municipal Office, hospital, law office, bank, specialty shops, radio repair shop and so on; Gretna lacks all these facilities and Gretna people have to go to Altona regularly for these services. Yet it still manages to hold its own in supplying the immediate area with its basic needs. Note though, in Figure 33, how Gretna has a unique hinterland, sliced off in the south by the Boundary in the north by Altona.

Gretna has been aided by the presence of two sources of population and revenue that are not related to its trading centre function. The Mennonite Collegiate Institute has been located in Gretna since 1891, and the approximately 200 students, who spend nine months of the year in Gretna, have a profound effect

upon the life and economy of a centre of about 600 people. Then, another and more recent economic stimulus was provided by the Interprovincial Pipe Line Pumping station which was established one mile north of Gretna in 1951. In 1955 approximately 25 well paid employees lived in Gretna, and permanent homes had been built for them and their families (Plate 27-4).

Gretna was a planned town from the start, and since it has not outgrown its plan (actually it does not even occupy a third of the original townsite (Figure 7P)), it has not suffered from the piecemeal planning which has paralyzed Altona. Gretna also has a "one-sided" Main Street but since it had been losing businesses since 1900 rather than gaining them, the pattern of its business core has not been distorted by dispersion or migration (Plate 27-2). (Niverville, a town of approximately the same age, has in this regard advanced beyond Gretna.) Even the small, stubby, old fashioned elevators near the centre of the town become part of the core instead of disrupting it. Gretna gives one a completely different impression than the other towns, with the possible exception of Morden, because it has not expanded beyond the shelter of its trees (Plate 27-3), except to the east, where the newly erected housing development of the Pipe Line Company supplies a contrast (Plate 27-4). This gives Gretna a mature, well established, leisurely appearance – a comfortable place in which to live. Business is conducted at a relaxed pace; for example, some of the general stores are closed at noon hour, a practice unheard of elsewhere. Main Street has gaps in it – if a business burns it is not replaced, the sure sign of a declining town. But the limit appears to have been reached in that respect, and Gretna will probably go on its placid way from now on, with little change.

Plum Coulee's growth was controlled by the Plum Coulee (creek) and the railway track (Figure 6P and Plate 18-1). Most of the residential development has taken place to the north of Main Street. An early residential area was established on the narrow strip of land between the tracks and the coulee, but further expansion to the south was blocked by the coulee. The village spread northwards to the section road, which became a highway in the 1930's. In 1952 the highway was re-routed to bypass the village to the south, so that the old road is no longer a barrier.

Despite the fact that Plum Coulee appears to be squeezed in between a coulee, a railway track and a highway, this constraint has caused no real difficulties because the village is not expanding. Its population was 498 in 1956. In both Plum Coulee and Altona the railway, and then the highway, fostered growth. In Altona the expansion in area found an obstacle in the very things which had fostered trade. At present in Plum Coulee, the coulee, the track and the highway pose few problems, and if for some reason the village were to expand, it would be wise to bring in a town planner right from the start. Fortunately one of the main problems was removed when P.T.H. No. 14 was moved half a mile south of the village

Plum Coulee is really a classic example of a prairie town. The Main Street faces the railway in stereotyped fashion, and is a broad street of straggling stores and implement shops, like so many boxes one after the other, with a large white, wooden hotel right in the middle. There has been almost no change since 1900 (little dispersion or migration of business places has occurred), except that garages have replaced the livery stables. Opposite the line of false fronts, a row of brick red

elevators strung along the track complete the picture.

Plum Coulee's hinterland is an interesting position between those of Winkler and Altona. Their zones of influence completely encompass Plum Coulee's hinterland (Figure 33). Therefore Plum Coulee's chances of becoming a trading centre of the same order are slight. Its present function of serving the district between Altona and Winkler will probably continue. As yet there is no direct competition for trade between Altona and Winkler; Plum Coulee is a powerful enough centre to prevent that, but the time may come when there will be a direct rivalry between the two larger centres, and then Plum Coulee may be reduced to the status of Rosenfeld.

### Smaller Centres

Rosenfeld, with a population of 338 in 1956, is the railway and highway node of the Reserve, but it has not even attained the trading status of Plum Coulee. Plum Coulee soon passed Rosenfeld because it had a richer tributary area in the early years, and no competition, such as provided by Altona, immediately to the south of it.

Rosenfeld has a flat site with no coulee and no natural forest cover; it just grew at the railway. Strangely enough Rosenfeld's main street was not, however, built directly on the railway, because of the coincidence that the road allowances was a few hundred feet to the east of the tracks, and provided the site for a double-sided main street (Figure 7P). In the 1950's this street has become a through highway to the north, which has its disadvantages because the street has lost the important characteristic of being the site of the business core, and now it actually does appear to be only "a wide spot on the highway". Rosenfeld could not, of course, expand to the west because of the railway tracks; therefore the residential area is to the east. With the increasing importance of P.T.H.s No. 14 and 14A, the intersection to the south of Rosenfeld has become more significant; a corner store was established there in 1938, and a hotel in 1950 (Plate 26-2). Otherwise there has been no move to the highway because Rosenfeld is a local trading town and is not growing.

Horndean in no more than a hamlet, a convenient grain shipping point for the local farmers (Figure 7P). There is no need at present for such a centre, and if the grain elevator were removed the trade now going to Horndean would easily be absorbed by Plum Coulee and Rosenfeld, whose trading areas meet at Horndean (Figure 33). Formerly when farmers brought their grain to market in wagons of 50-60 bu. capacity there was a place for centres like Horndean, but now with trucks of 300 bu. capacity such grain shipping points are outmoded. Horndean will probably survive if farm diversification continues in the Reserve and the farms decrease in size, because it can then supply farmers with feeds and service their implements on the model of the East Reserve centres. But as a retail centre it is already relegated to the role of a corner drug store in a city.

Haskett is a good example of what can happen to a trading centre when it has no *raison d'être*. At present it only has a garage and a store (Plate 26-3). The lifting of the railway in 1937, and Haskett's location near the boundary, contributed to its decline, but these factors were not wholly responsible. The removal of the railway did not pull the vital support from under Haskett, because the elevator company

## Plate 28



*1. Brown Post Office in township 1-6. This was an important cross roads store, but now it is only busy in winter when the roads to Morden are blocked. In 1952-55 there was much breaking of land in this vicinity.*



*2. Halbstadt Post Office; a cross roads centre on the site of a former village. This is a very well equipped centre – supplying dry goods, groceries, hardware, electrical goods, machinery, and even cold storage facilities. The continuous line of trees in the background marks the course of the Aux Marais River.*



*3. Mennonite Brethren Church located between Lowe Farm and Plum Coulee. It was built in 1954 to serve the local farmers. A Mennonite church is only used as a Sunday meeting house, and does not serve as a community social centre, so that it is quite feasible to build churches in the open country. This is an example of the Mennonite church architecture typical of the past 60 years.*

continued to operate the elevator until the early 1950's by trucking the grain to the railway at Morden. Nor was the location entirely to blame because Gretna has survived a similar handicap. A comparison with Gretna, however, points up the essential weakness of Haskett as a trading centre. Gretna had the great advantage of being the only trading centre in the northeastern part of the Reserve for 13 years, which gave it an opportunity to build up a farm community that was dependent on it, whereas Haskett was established after Morden and Winkler were firmly entrenched and it never managed to wrest much trade from them. Furthermore in the 1950's, good roads and rapid, gasoline-powered transportation made farmers independent of such small centres. But increased farm diversification in the Reserve may revive their importance, and the Reserve at present is just in the transition period in this regard. (See Plate 28-1 and 2 for the kind of centres that will probably develop.)

<sup>1</sup>Interview with the Altona Town Clerk, Altona, Man., August, 1955.

<sup>2</sup>Article in the *Morden Times*, March 5, 1924.

<sup>3</sup>*Morden Assessment Roll*, 1955.

<sup>4</sup>In July, 1960, an agreement was signed by the Manitoba government with the North Dakota government, making it possible to lay a pipe line between Altona and Niche on the Pembina River just across the Boundary from the Reserve.

<sup>5</sup>By 1959 the attractions at the highway site were becoming apparent—a motel, a service station, and a cafe had been established along the highway.

<sup>6</sup>J.C.D. Taylor, *Sewers and Sewage Disposal*, Manuscript in Winkler Town Office.

<sup>7</sup>This was still true in 1960.



## Chapter 15

### THE LANDSCAPE IN THE 1950's

In the nineteenth century farmers in both Reserves tried to continue the farming practices that they had employed in Russia. Wheat growing proved successful in the West Reserve but it did not prove suitable for much of the East Reserve. In the twentieth century these differences caused by the environment became more clearly apparent as the West Reserve headed to a climax of wheat growing in the 1920's and then suffered depression and drought whereas the East Reserve rode the 1930's out more easily because of its less developed but also less vulnerable agricultural economy. In the 1950's there were increasing differences in land use practices in the two Reserves, but there was at least a similarity in that farmers in both Reserves were trying to adapt their crops and practices to the potentialities of the land and to the market. Thus in each area the farmers are achieving a closer harmony with their physical and economic environment. At present we are seeing the beginning of what will probably be great changes in the agricultural landscape.

#### East Reserve

##### The Ukrainian South

In the southern townships, occupied by the Ukrainians, the quality of the farms varies more from one farmstead to the next than anywhere else in the Reserve. Terrain conditions more than farming practices cause this. Farms are located on land which should never have been occupied. Some farm houses are built on the only high ground to be found in an entire quarter section, amidst swamp and peat which can't be used even for pasture. Corduroy roads have had to be built to the section roads. Water tables are so high that the ditches are full of water regardless of the season (Plate 30-3), and even the well water has a swampy tang. Families living on these subsistence farms are isolated and view all strangers with suspicion. Horses are still essential, a few cows, hogs and chickens are kept; but in the main income is brought in by the owner's outside work. These farms are found on Class 6 land (Figure 4).

Most of the farms in the southern townships are not as poor as the kind just described. Yet, since most of the land in the south is in Classes 4, 5, and 6, few farmers are prosperous. Differences in perseverance among the farmers tend to show up, because adjoining farms which have similar soil conditions may differ widely in actual productivity.

Threshing machines still outnumber combines, partly because the farmers use the straw in winter to take care of livestock. In the extreme south haystacks replace strawstacks entirely, because the grain fields are few and far between (Plate 29-1). Most farmers stack their hay in preference to baling it, since this makes their labour the only expense.

In the northwest of townships 5-5 and 5-6, where the Mennonites used to live, there are some abandoned farmsteads, showing that some farmers found it impossible to make a living on this land. But the Ukrainians through scrupulous saving are managing to carve out neat farmsteads. One farmer I interviewed in 1955 still



broke about two to three acres a year, using four horses and a breaking plough. A furrow six to eight inches deep is ploughed in this land, so that the plough won't be continually sliding over the stones near the surface. Few farmers owned tractors before 1950, but most were acquiring them in 1955.

A uniform neatness is characteristic of all the Ukrainian farms. All the quarter sections are fenced, a complete contrast to those in the northern townships. Farmyards are often fenced with poplar poles which gives a rustic effect to the farms. Machinery is always well housed (a practice which is becoming more common in the West, as the implements become more complicated and more expensive). The farmsteads often are very compact because they are frequently confined to a gravel ridge with the houses standing on the highest part. The houses are invariably small, and frequently there is more than one house on the farmstead. The earlier, discarded house is relegated to use as a poultry barn or a milk shed after the farmer can afford a better home. Thus the original log or white-washed dwelling is often still visible, sometimes flat-roofed and covered with sod. Mennonites and Anglo-Saxons are more destructive; they seldom leave any evidence of the life they have left. Most of the new Ukrainian homes have extremely bright colours, often with clashing colour schemes in complete contrast to the drab older buildings. Brick siding is also very popular. There is no uniformity in houses; they vary in age, design and colour from one farmstead to the next.

Provincial agricultural representatives are somewhat disappointed in the little interest shown by the Ukrainians in adopting new cultural practices. The Ukrainians who pioneered this area were hard workers but not particularly good farmers. Their backward practices tended to become fixed, because for years it was almost impossible for outside influences to penetrate into this area, where transportation facilities were practically non-existent. By now Ukrainians are even harder to teach than the conservative Mennonites. The Ukrainian livestock is generally quite poor in quality and the farmers are quite cautious about trying to improve it, or accepting help for that purpose.

Some Mennonites live in the area but most have moved here after having failed elsewhere, and are not descendants of the few original homesteaders.

### **Grunthal to Steinbach**

Grunthal and Kleefeld districts are the most prosperous area in the southern townships. Dairying is the economic mainstay in both areas, but Kleefeld farmers are also active in horticulture. The land varies considerable in quality, but there are some districts of better soil (figure 4).

Grunthal's development is partially explained by the presence of a progressive group of *Russländer* Mennonites who settled here in the 1920's. They were the only group, among both Mennonites and Ukrainians, who were willing to accept the advice of the St. Pierre agricultural representative.<sup>1</sup> They had had little experience in farming in Russia, but they were anxious to learn. With the help of the Department of Agriculture they showed that it was possible to make improvements on this land.

By 1929 the *Russländer* Mennonites were well known in Manitoba for growing a blight resistant potato. But the greatest stimulation for the district came from

Plate 29



*1. Hay field in August. Typical landscape in the southern part of the East Reserve where the grain fields are few and far apart. Woods in the background. 3-5-6E.*



*2. Land about a 1/4 mile north of a prominent Lake Agassiz beach. Soil is the Pelan Stony Phase. Organic layer is only 3-4" thick; land can only be used for pasture. Note the stony parent material, and the boulders on the surface. Poplar in the background. 12-6-5E.*



*3. Lake Agassiz beach in the background. Hay land on the poorly drained low land in the foreground; but cereals are grown on the ridge. The Ridge Road used to run along the top of the beach. 17-6-6E.*

## Plate 30



1. Road Allowance crossing Lake Agassiz beach. Gravel pit is on the allowance. Crops are grown on the well drained ridge; trees occupy the adjacent lowland. 1-6-6E.



2. View from top of Lake Agassiz beach to the southeast. Variations in land use – grain, fallow pasture, bay land, and bush in the background. Road Allowance in the centre. 1-6-6E.



3. Poorly drained area, only good for bay land and pasture. The field is original meadow. The ditch is full of water, though the picture was taken in mid-summer after a dry spell. These drainage problems are characteristic of the southeastern part of the Reserve. 25-6-6E.



4. Cleared poplar scrub in preparation for the breaking plow. Scrub is easily pushed over by a bulldozer. Unfortunately most of this land has poor soil or is poorly drained so that it is only suitable for bayland or pasture. 24-6-6E.

dairying (described in Chapter 13). Improvements in dairying are continuing. The Grunthal Dairy Herd Improvements Association was organized in 1949, and definite improvements have been made in methods of breeding, feeding and managing cattle. By 1955 there were a number of prosperous dairy farmers in the district, and the general level of agriculture was definitely higher than that found among the Ukrainians, or in the other Mennonite areas in the south. Many new homes have been built; the weatherbeaten, unpainted Mennonite homes, some with house and barn together, are being replaced by painted homes of modern design.

The Kleefeld district to the north of Grunthal has improved considerably since 1940. Though dairying still provides the greater portion of the farmers' income, this is essentially a transition area between the southern and northern townships. The soils here are somewhat better, and more uniform over a large area, than in the south. Farms are small, so that farmers have found it advisable to intensify their operations. Bee keeping is significant, poultry farming is becoming important, and small fruit farms are operated. In 1955 two farmers had over seven acres each in strawberries and raspberries, and others were following this trend.

This diversification is a recent development, and as a result, a new landscape is being produced. Much clearing and breaking has been accomplished since 1940. In 1955 a few farmers had up to 90 acres of land broken and in pasture and crop, but usually the cleared area is considerably smaller, averaging about 60 acres, and there were many farmers whose entire holdings did not even reach this figure. A few manage to make a good living from 40 acres, but others have outside jobs to bring in additional income.

The entire Kleefeld development is associated with the highway extending from Grunthal to the Piney Highway (Figure 24). For about four miles south of the Piney one farm follows another on both sides of the roads so that the settlement almost becomes a *Strassendorf*. At places these farms are very close together, at others they are an eighth to a quarter of a mile apart. Most of the farm homes are neatly painted, relatively new frame buildings.

Farming has not been uniformly successful in the triangle between Grunthal, Kleefeld, and Steinbach, where the land is generally of poor quality (Figure 4). The farmers to the east of Kleefeld remained almost completely unaffected by modern farming trends, at first through lack of communications, then through force of habit. For years the people in this area were quite content to live close to a subsistence existence, just as the Grunthal district was before its transformation in the 1920's and 1930's. The land was poor, but they could always make enough money to stay alive by selling some stock, eggs and an odd load of wood, or by working as labourers for awhile. Most of this district remains this way, but the desire to possess automobiles and the necessity of paying for electricity are finally beginning to spur these Mennonites. In 1955 most of this district was still pathetically poor. There was little interest in education. The children attend school only intermittently until the legal age limit is reached, so there are few chances of improvement from within.

South of Steinbach, the Lutheran settlers of Friedensfeld have prospered, as mixed farmers. Their high advance on relatively poor land, no better than that of the backward district just described (Figure 4), is the result of their unremitting

labour over many years. The land looks well cared for (Plate 31-2). The ditches are always cleared of scrub, the fields well fenced, the edge of the bush is kept sharply trimmed by a cultivator, hay stacks are well made and the barns are generally large and always painted.

Farm sizes in the southern townships reflect the developments I have described. In the rather poor Ukrainian townships of 5-6 and 4-6, there are 160 and 80 acre farms in the north, but only 160 acre farms in the newly occupied south, that extends right through township 4-6. Quarter section farms predominate in the Grunthal district (townships 5-5), with smaller farms scattered here and there, especially in the southeast and close to Grunthal. In township 6-5 most of the farms are either 80 or 160 acres in size except on the Grunthal to Kleefeld road, where there are 40 acre farms for about two miles on both sides of the road. Quarter section holdings are common in the southeast of townships 6-6 in the Friedensfeld area, but toward the north, closer to Steinbach, the farm size decreases.

### **The North**

Near Steinbach the landscape opens up, since much land has been cleared on these better soils, and a traveller realizes that he is leaving the bush country of the south and beginning to approach the prairie of the northern townships. There is a marked improvement in the quality of the land (Figure 4). About Steinbach potatoes are grown, and farther north, on soils which are still light textured, sugar beets are important, though grain growing and dairying are still of most significance. Farmers in township 7-6 were fairly up to date from the decade of 1890 on, and bought the latest farm equipment (such as cream separators and wind driven water pumps) as soon as it was available in the province. Even before 1914 many of the farmers were prosperous and had money to lend to less affluent neighbors or to businessmen in the rising trading centre of Steinbach. On this land there are numerous substantial farm houses, many built by the Clearsprings settlers. The farmers built large homes, since lumber was cheap, it was simple to design and construct the buildings, and the families were large (Plates 11-3 & 4, 15-4). None of these homes has the excessive ornamentation so common on many Western farm homes built at the turn of the century. Every farmstead has a large barn for horses and cows, and is generally enclosed by a dense grove of trees. These farmsteads leave the impression of a rich district, that owes its chief cultural characteristic to a bygone farming era (Plate 32-1). Creeks flowing from the east run in wide shallow channels, giving a roll to the countryside (Plate 32-2) and this, together with the groves of trees and the old homes gives a feeling of well-earned serenity to an area extending to about four miles north of Steinbach. But due to population pressure there has been greater intensification in farming in the 1950's, and as a result newer homes are found amongst the older ones.

In the north of township 7-6, around Blumenort, the new smaller homes and barns outnumber the older establishments in what has become the poultry and turkey producing area of the Reserve. Poultry farming was started in this area in 1936-37, and has since become very important. Nowhere else in either Reserve does an observer receive such an intense impression of being in the midst of a

Plate 31



*1. A new farm being cut out of the bush in 29-6-6E. Farmer has a few cows and a small acreage of sugar beets. Horse power is still being used.*



*2. Lutheran farmstead 2 1/2 miles south of Steinbach on top of a wave worked beach. Beach is about 150 yards wide and, as the boulders show, can only be used for pasture. Farmers in this area are making their living from dairying and a few acres of coarse grains. Note the straw pile on the neat farm yard.*



*3. Modern poultry barn in 31-7-6E. These barns look more like factories than agricultural buildings.*



*4. Friedensfeld Lutheran church, 3 miles south of Steinbach in the heart of the Lutheran area. No Mennonite church has a spire such as this.*



## Plate 32



1. Sheet erosion on a Lake Agassiz beach. The ridge was formerly used as a road before road allowances were graded. House in the distance is of the 1910-20 large two storey style – indicative that this has been a prosperous farming area for many years. Note that the house is located on the ridge. 26-7-6E.



2. Valley bottom of Steinbach Creek is used for hay land. Hay land is about 150-200' wide, and only the 25' wide depression in the centre is filled with water. Contour tilling is practiced. Note good trash cover. 1 mile north of Steinbach.

dense rural population, there are many farms that are 40 acres and even smaller in size, so that farmsteads are to be seen everywhere. Many new buildings have been constructed in the Blumenort and Linden districts since World War II, but they are not as large as the older ones nearer Steinbach, nor are they surrounded by such large groves of trees. Instead of large barns this district is characterized by the new squarish poultry houses that resemble small factories and mark a complete break from the traditional western farm landscape (Plate 31-3). In driving through this area one still sees grain fields and livestock, but much more striking are the penned-in turkeys on the farmyards and the poultry shelters which dot the fields. This landscape continues into the northern edge of township 7-5 and all the way to the river lots of the Seine River (Figure 32). The entire area from Steinbach to the French district on the Seine owes some of its pleasant character to the higher forested lake terrace country to the south and east, and to the tree lined Seine River to the north both of which supply a background against which the district can be viewed.

When we go west of township 7-6 into 7-5 we enter a new country, which is almost bleak by contrast. This area, of course, was practically a marsh for many years, making farming difficult (the land is slightly lower in quality—Figure 4), and even now it does not have the diversified crops of the townships to the east and west (Figure 32). But physical factors alone are by no means responsible for the



difference in landscape. Farmers are much more conservative in this middle area than in the poultry districts in the north and east, and the grain and special crops area near Niverville to the west. This conservatism has resulted in a lag in the intensification of farming.

The land in the New Bothwell and Chortitz areas (in township 7-5) is occupied by the *Chortitza* Mennonites, a conservative off-shoot of the *Bergthal* Mennonites who originally settled this area. Their numbers were depleted after World War II by the last big emigration of conservative Mennonites from Manitoba. Approximately 1,700 Mennonites left for Paraguay in 1948; about 700 were from townships 7-4, 7-5 and 6-5 and the rest from the West Reserve. This migration bears the same relation to World War II as the 1920 migration did to World War I, though the motivation was different. During the war the Mennonites were not forced to take up arms, but were given the opportunity to go into alternative services. But the church elders found it impossible to control the young men, and many Mennonites fought in the War, a great change from World War I. The impact of cars, roads, trading centres and war had definitely affected all the young folk, so the church leaders decided to retreat from Canada. These Mennonites were not fleeing from any direct interference by the government, such as the insistence on flying the Canadian flag or on teaching the English language, that had precipitated the post World War I migration. This time the Mennonites really feared assimilation; in Canada they were too exposed to the "world". The fear was sharpened by the fact that all the farm land was taken up, and young people were forced to go to the trading centres or to Winnipeg to obtain work. Many of the young people were reluctant to go to Paraguay but the authority of the clergy was apparently still strong enough to force them to go along.

The migration resulted in only a slight reduction in the population of this area (Figure 38), and the lands vacated were easily disposed of to the *Chortitza* Mennonites who elected to remain behind. Some of the Mennonites who went to Paraguay returned the next year, and more have straggled back in subsequent years. Since most had sold their farms they chose to settle on small lots on the Piney Highway southeast of Chortitz and in the vicinity of New Bothwell. They make their living as labourers, and by growing vegetables on their lots and keeping a cow or two, pigs, and some chickens.

The *Chortitza* Mennonites who have continued to farm in this area have not adopted the latest farming ideas with the ease of their Mennonite neighbours to the northwest and west. Most of them are still mixed farmers; growing a little grain, keeping some cows, and raising chickens on a small scale. The milk is sold to the New Bothwell cheese factory – the only one that is still operating in the Reserve.

This is a new landscape within the Reserve. Houses and barns are nearly all small unpainted frame structures in this area, and the groves of trees are few and far between so that their shabbiness stands clearly revealed. The road grades are high with unsightly ditches on either side, and there are many large drains, all cut in a flat terrain with no gentle swales to lead the eye (Plate 22). Rank grasses in the ditches tending to mingle with the untrimmed edges of the fields and pastures add to the raw appearances of the landscape. This area is perhaps the least attractive in

the Reserve (though by no means the poorest) because there are no trees to obscure the buildings and provide a setting for the farmsteads. There are many large farms here, 160 acres and up, so that it is a relatively empty landscape, except near New Bothwell and Chortitz where there are many small holdings. In this area much more attention should be given to planting shelter belts and maintaining attractive farmsteads but the conservative Mennonites prefer to let things slide (Plate 24-3).

Westward in township 7-4 we pass out of the depressing dead flat terrain, and enter an area of long swells and swales produced by the beaches and off shore "submarine bars" of former Lake Agassiz. Many farmsteads were built on these heights, especially in the years when this area was still poorly drained. These homes are as large as those near Steinbach, and most are surrounded by splendid shelter belts. The farms are the largest in the Reserve, with a number over 320 acres and only a few under 160 acres in size, but the landscape does not appear to be empty because the farmsteads clearly stand out on the ridges and draw the eye from high point to high point. There are lighter textured soils in this area and sugar beets have become an important cash crop; poultry raising is significant as well but basically this is still a grain growing district. Many of the farms have been soundly established for many years, and this mature district is pleasant to drive through with its neatly trimmed roadsides and fields of grain. The grain elevators of Niverville in the distance, the only ones in the Reserve, are visible from almost anywhere and make one think of the northern part of the West Reserve which this region closely resembles. However, this is perhaps a more attractive area because the trees along the Red River supply a background to the landscape.

Nowhere in the Reserve are the original agricultural villages still significant in the landscape, though they are important in the West Reserve. On the other hand the great diversification and intensification of agricultural in recent years has stimulated the growth of small farm service centres.

## **West Reserve**

### **Settlement Patterns**

Today, 17 of the old Mennonite agricultural villages are still in existence in the West Reserve. The populations vary from 67 (1956) in Neuenburg the smallest village, to 254 in Chortitz, the largest village in the Reserve. The average is about 140 people per village. In township 1-4, 72% of the residents live in villages, and in townships 2-4 and 1-3, 51% and 50% respectively.

Not nearly all the inhabitants of these villages operate farms. Many of the people are old and have retired to the villages to live out their lives, surrounded by friends, in the quiet and orderly communities. A surprisingly large number of these old people are veterans of the Mexican and Paraguayan migrations, and have finally returned to the village they came from (Plate 33-1). Usually they inhabit buildings that were abandoned by farmers who moved to homesteads. Some of these old folks are found in every village.

Another group in the villages is composed of part time farmers. They are particularly concentrated in the villages immediately south of Winkler. Sometimes the

farmer owns a 10 acre lot (or so) in the village, but more commonly he rents land just outside the village, and farms that intensively.

Some farmers have moved to plots on the outskirts of the villages proper, in effect adding an additional line village to the main settlement (Figure 30: sections 31 and 35). In winter these farmers leave their families in the village and go elsewhere to find work. Or often they may work as labourers the full year round, as hired men on large farms, as mechanics in town, or for a dairy, coming home only on Sundays. Their wives and children do all the farm work. In one village the church has stepped in to help out these part time farmers. The church bought a quarter section and subdivided it among a large number of these landless labourers, in an attempt to stabilize their existence.

On the whole this small acreage farming is not very satisfactory, because the land cannot be farmed intensively enough to support a family. Yet these people are happy. Many indeed have had the opportunity to acquire farms of their own in non-Mennonite areas, yet prefer to stay near home, even if it means working as a labourer. A large number of children and a Model A Ford parked in front of the gate usually mark their places.

Then, of course, there are the villages made up largely of landowners, though labourers are also always present. These villages are in the south and west, away from the vicinity of Winkler. In 1954, for example, there were 15 farmers in Rosengart, 17 in Sommerfeld, 24 in Neuhorst, 30 in Blumenort, and 39 in Gnadenthal (Figure 4P).<sup>2</sup> Their homes and the general layout of their property in the village is just as simple as that found in the poorer villages, but a feeling of comfortable prosperity pervades each community. The two to five acre lot in the village is crowded. House and barn, and a flower garden take up the front, and farther back the entire yard is generally packed with machinery. Behind the yard there is always a garden and perhaps a small pasture for cows. Dependence upon horses made it difficult to live far from the land, but with mechanization this is no longer a problem, and machines are always travelling rapidly to and from the village throughout the day.

But the problem of conducting farm operations from nucleated settlements is still not the same in the Reserve as it is in Southwestern Manitoba, where "sidewalk" farming prevails in a few places. In the Reserve the farmer still cannot live too far from his property, because intensive farming demands that constant attention be given to the land. With mechanization it is possible to do so within a radius of about four miles of the village (See Figure 31). It is impossible to draw any final conclusion on the efficiency of village-operator farming, without conducting a detailed farm management study. My interviews indicate that most farmers are quite content in the villages. Some think it a nuisance to have to travel out to the land every day, whereas others think nothing of it. Yet the Rhineland agricultural representative, who has been serving in this area for many years, reports that there has been a marked tendency to build on the land in the last 15 years.<sup>3</sup> But this is not so true of Stanley, where I could detect no particular movement towards the land.

As far as the cost of supplying public services such as telephones, electricity or roads is concerned there is little difference between the farmstead and village form

## Plate 33



*1. Fürstenland farmer from the village of Blumenfeld. He migrated to Mexico in 1924 and returned in the 1930's. One of the few Mennonites who still uses a buggy regularly.*



*2. Threshing outfit working just north of the village of Blumenfeld. Both threshing machine and tractor date from the 1920's. Only a few threshing outfits are still in use in the West Reserve.*

of settlement because the Reserve is so densely settled that a close grid for each service has had to be constructed. With modern roads and cars, farms are not isolated from each other or from trading centres, so that there is not nearly the difference in life between village and farm that there used to be. Admittedly there is a certain comfort about living among people and it is that which keeps the villages together. Yet nowadays there is no stigma attached to living on the farm, sales are readily made, and the conservative Mennonites move in and out of the villages as easily as other farmers move from farm to farm.

Every village still has its houses fronting on the street; each house is on its 150 to 200 foot lot that extends back for an eighth of a mile or so (Plates 13 and 2P). Trees obscure most of the houses, and an impression of these groves is the main one left with a visitor, whether the village is seen from a distance or whether one is within it (Plates 13-1, 4 and 19-4). Every village has its public school, a store, and a gasoline station of some sort. The stores by no means replace the general stores of the trading centre, and only four villages have even a small garage.

Only one cross roads centre has developed in the entire Reserve, and that is at Halbstadt, the site of an old village in township 1-1E (Plate 27-2). The dominant influence of the trading centres, the good roads, and type of farming account for this dearth of country centres.

Well over half the farmers in the Reserve live on their individual farmsteads (Plates 34, 35 and 36). It is impossible to describe an average farmstead, since farms vary in size from a few acres to a 1,000 acres or more, but the median farm size is somewhat under 160 acres. Most farms are well diversified. Cereals are still the

main crop, but there also are specialties such as flax, sunflowers, a few head of livestock, and a few hundred chickens, on the average farm. Farms are heavily mechanized and every farmer who owns a quarter section nowadays has a combine, or at least shares one with a neighbouring farmer. The fields are rarely fenced; only the pastures are enclosed. The farm yard is about four acres in size and is usually surrounded by a shelter belt. One of its conspicuous features is the yard pole distributing electricity to all parts of the yard. There may be an old barn on the place, in which case it is likely to be a large, severe structure with a gable designed for lifting hay into the loft. If the barn has been constructed since the 1940's, it is probably smaller, much shorter, and not so conspicuous. Gambrell roofs or even curved roofs are common in later barns (Plate 34-3). Machine sheds, garages, a few granaries, a piggery and a hen house, and, in Rhineland, a dugout, make up the rest of the yard.

Farm houses in the Reserve vary in character; the only safe generalization is that they are invariably of frame construction. Older houses survive in all parts of the country and are very akin to the barns, with their simple rectangular outlines, evenly spaced windows, and two slope roofs. Few large farm houses of the 1900 period were built in the southern part of the Reserve, but to the north a number of large, dormer-windowed, multi-gabled houses with porches and intricate woodwork survive. Far more common, however, is the small, two storey, unadorned and utilitarian frame house. In the 1940's more tastefully designed one and a half storey or two storey houses, that looked less box-like were constructed, and more recently, in the 1950's, the bungalow has become popular. Colour combinations are vivid, and the houses built recently have a pleasant appearance.

Architecture lags behind every other farm change however. Horses have not been used for 10 to 15 years, even 20 years now, yet the old barns remain. Similarly with old houses. Relicts are everywhere, and a drive through the countryside is just a kaleidoscope of changing design. It is possible to see a Victorian frame house bedecked with "gingerbread" sharing the same yard with modern combines and cars, yet in the next section a farmer may be living in a trimly designed split-level bungalow (Plate 35-4). But there is always a lag before the old barns are replaced. Farmers with money are tearing down the old homes, but barns tend to linger on, and are often converted into granaries, machine sheds, or hen houses.

There has been very little change in the functional layout of the farms. Usually the first farm yards are retained to take advantage of the old shelter belts, and as a result some of the driveways from the section road to the yard are too long for easy snow removal in winter. When new farm yards are established they are invariably laid out close to the section roads to make communication easy. No fences partition off the various fields, because the service roads between them are generally sufficient. But there is one important difference between the new farmsteads and the older ones. Modern farmers seem to be more conscious of the value of the land. The old farm layouts were quite spacious with lots of land around the house. House and barn were well separated, and the machine sheds were placed inconspicuously among the trees of the shelter belt, a discreet distance from the house. Nor was the older farmer niggardly about his garden and orchard. Everything is more compact nowadays; it is only a short distance from the house to the barn, and

## Plate 34



1. Solitary, old, Mennonite style house; southwest of Lowe Farm. This is the northern most house of this style. Very few were built away from the villages. Typical flat, spacious, Red River landscape – the elevators of Lowe Farm are barely visible on the horizon.



2. Typical small house and barn of the kind built about 20 to 35 years ago. Barn-red; house-white; in the usual conservative colour scheme. Farmsteads like this dot the countryside. The houses are about ready for replacement, especially if expensive plumbing is to be installed. Small barn indicated that only a little livestock has been kept at any time.



3. One of the few non-frame Mennonite farm buildings. Built of tile just before World War I. There are no brick, stone, or tile Mennonite farm homes in the Reserve proper. A few prosperous Anglo-Saxons built brick farm homes in the Roland district in the 1890's and early 1900's. Note the unfortunate absence of a shelter belt – the few trees are volunteer about the dugout. The first three farmsteads shown on this page are all within a 1 mile radius, showing the variation in architecture which one can expect in this area.



4. Farmstead 2 miles east of Kronsgart. One of the largest, if not the largest, farm homes built by the West Reserve Mennonites. Built in 1910 from the profits of early large scale wheat farming practiced on the big farms north of the Reserve. Interior of these large homes is always simple, and the homes were relatively inexpensive to build – few wall partitions, and no plumbing or electricity at that time.



from there to the fields (Plate 35-2). The new arrangements are more efficient perhaps, but a casual beauty has been lost. Now there is often no more room left for landscaping, than there is on a city lot.

There are regional differences in crops and farms within the West Reserve; although they are not as marked as those within the Mennonite settlements on the east side of the Red. These differences have grown out of the variations in the land, the economic activities which have been carried on, and the interaction of Mennonite traditions and outside influences. Figure 6 shows that most of the land is classified as being of good productivity. There is some land of very good productivity and of moderate productivity, and in the western part of the Reserve of still lower qualities.

### North of the Reserve

In travelling south from Winnipeg towards the West Reserve one is impressed most of all with the unvarying nature of the terrain. This is most apparent in the area north of Lowe Farm, where one enters the region of Mennonite settlements (Figure 44). In October, for instance, when the fields have been ploughed, the land stretches black and dormant for mile after bleak mile, broken only by regularly spaced drainage ditches with high waste dumps running from west to east. The only vertical structures in the entire landscape are the hydro and telephone poles. Even farmsteads tend to fade into the landscape, because distance erases any colours which a house or barn may have. Only the sky is alive.

This area is so inert because the farms are large. Rarely are there more than two farm buildings to a section, and many of these farm yards are well over an eighth of a mile from the road; sometimes they are even in the centre of the section. This dates them in the horse and buggy era. American wheat farmers exploited this area, owned very large acreages, and did little to improve the landscape aesthetically (Plate 37-4). Shelter belts are few and far between. Houses are either old and large, signs of a past "bonanza" farming area, or they are the small structures of the farmers who have never made good. This is still wheat and barley country and man has made little impression here except for his drainage ditches, which are emphasized every four miles or so by a large double dyke.

Here you can see for miles – but there is little to see. White elevators give the effect of heliographs and can be seen for ten miles, but red elevators fade into the ground and can be made out only at a distance of three to four miles. The elevators are most impressive when seen against the sun, as black masses jutting out of the earth of which they appear to be a part. As one approaches Lowe Farm or any other small prairie centre, one gets the impression that the centre is overwhelmed by the prairie, lost against the length of the railway grade which appears to pull the village into nothingness. Few small places can stand up against the prairie and maintain their identity. Morden, by contrast, is similar to Eastern Canadian centres which are located in valleys, or against escarpments, or among woods, each in its own pleasant setting. Curiously, an individual farmstead is not so completely lost in the prairie; but becomes one with it, since it consists of a compact group of buildings without the long leading street that fights a losing battle against the horizon.



If they are large enough, vertical buildings can compete successfully with the prairie. The C.V.O. plant in Altona, for example, acts as a cohesive force, and gives the travellers an impression that here is a community. But in this function nothing can surpass a prairie Roman Catholic Church. It is dominating in its solid appearance and massive bulk, yet its airy spire in the clear prairie atmosphere is always satisfying. Mennonite churches fail to stand out in the prairie (Compare Plates 31-4 and 37-3).

This is really a formal geometric landscape, with lines supplied by the regular roads and ditches. There are few trees to disturb this simplicity, and the only stream, the Morris River, cuts an abrupt trench into the prairie, its presence betrayed not even by willows (Plate 36-3).

This is the country that the Mennonites came to in 1875: today it is still a silent, empty, gripping landscape with no history apparent anywhere, except in the ditches. No wonder that the Mennonites decided to continue settling in villages when they first saw the prairie.

### **Transition Area**

Between Lowe Farm and Plum Coulee, Roland and Morden, we enter the Reserve, and travel, through a transition area. Drainage channels are not as numerous, nor as large; there are more trees, and there is a greater variety of crops. This area has the greatest diversity in houses on the Reserve. The land south of Lowe Farm and Kane, and from there towards Myrtle and Roland was originally owned by Americans and Ontario Canadians. They erected large comfortable buildings in the late 1890's and first quarter of the present century, and also started small shelter belts. South of Roland there are a number of brick homes, and southwest of Lowe Farm a few large stone, cottage style homes (Plate 34-3). But frame Victorian designs are much more common. Even the Mennonites built large homes here (Plate 34-4). As the large farms were broken up, smaller frame houses were built in the familiar box style (Plate 35-2). Many new homes are being erected nowadays, commonly in the one and a half storey style, although bungalows are popular too (Plate 35-4). To complete the diversity, there are a few remaining examples of the simplest pattern of the Mennonite house and barn together (Plate 34-1), and also of the more complicated Victorian house attached to a barn (Plate 35-1).

This is a transition area in architecture, land use, drainage, population characteristics and density, but there is no transition apparent in the farming methods employed. There may be more difference in the cultural methods of two Mennonites in an agricultural village, than between the general run of cultural practices in different parts of the Red River Lowland. All agricultural representatives will substantiate this observation. Some generalizations may be made about preference in crops; for example, Anglo-Saxons on the whole dislike dismounting from tractors and working with potatoes or sugar beets. They leave that to the Mennonites or Ukrainians; however, there are plenty of exceptions.

### **Pembina Mountain Country**

In going from Morden to township 1-6 one encounters country which is different from the rest of the Reserve (Plate 2). Here the Escarpment rises, deeply

gullied in places, so that there is much agricultural wasteland (though it has value in other respects). Most of the rest of this area is undulating country, practically all cultivated, even though this is not always a sound practice. Mixed farming is carried on here, though west of Brown Post Office the land is not so rolling, and the grain fields become larger again.

South of Morden the farms are very similar to those of the transition area; large old houses in the midst of shelter belts situated in the centre of the farm. The difference is that the shelter belts and even wood lots are very well developed here. Oak groves are abundant and it is a beautiful farming country. Township 1-6 was settled relatively recently and does not have the buildings of a former farming era. Here we have small frame buildings, small barns for the stock, and the land only half-cleared so that the fields are always rimmed by bush, not by the horizon.

This is the most beautiful landscape in the Reserve, with plenty of contrast-green fields, hay meadows, trees, rolling country, and the Pembina Valley. The insignificant Pembina River flows on the floor of a spectacular, two mile wide trench which cannot be detected until one is right to the brink of it. The valley floor is used for hay land, and for raising sheep, and here and there a few feed crops are also grown.

Beyond the Reserve to the west, a new landscape begins. In the Reserve there are none of the tall, austere houses that were put up by the first Ontario settlers (Plate 5-3), nor any of the long, high, narrow barns with the doors in the centre that are also sometimes seen in Ontario.

### **Winkler to Gretna and Rosenfeld**

South of Winkler we come into the land of the cottonwoods, where the villages remain the dominant feature of the landscape. No matter where one looks these tall rows of trees, marking the site of a village, come between the observer and the horizon. Even so there are a considerable number of farmsteads scattered about, though of course they are not marked by the magnificent sweep of a long line of cottonwoods. Most of the villages are off the section roads, so that detours have to be made to enter them. So in a way, the agricultural villages are a hidden feature of the landscape. Most people who travel through this area are unaware that they are passing through a area containing European-style farm settlements, and over land which still bears the marks of the open field system.

The farmsteads in between the villages are always well protected by shelter belts. Most of the houses are relatively recent construction (since World War I) and none of the large multi-windowed houses of the area between Roland and Morden are ever found between the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* villages. It is only as you approach Altona that the landscape changes in this regard. Many large old homes, often attached to barns (Plate 35-1) are found near Altona. There are a few villages left, but on the whole this is an area of individual farmsteads. Approximately 1,000 conservative *Bergthal* Mennonites, called *Sommerfelders*, migrated to Paraguay from the area about Altona in 1948, and though there was a considerable drop in population in the area (Figure 40), it is not apparent in the landscape because the vacated land was immediately taken over by other Mennonites in Rhineland. No villages were broken up as a result of this migration. Here also at Blumengart is the

## Plate 35



1. Beautiful farmstead northwest of Altona. This district contains a number of these large, prosperous farms, some with house and barn together. Note gable on barn for hoisting hay. Farms like this reflect the "wheat-prosperity" of the first quarter of this century. Large barns were necessary for the horses.



2. Well kept farmstead between Rosenfeld and Altona. Relatively new, and everything is still simple and utilitarian with regard to design of house and the barn, and the lay-out. Shelter belt is just developing. Spoil bank of the essential dugout is at the right centre.



3. Modern farmstead in 20-3-2E. Everything is well painted. House of conservative World War II design; barn is in the style popular in the last 10 years. A mixed farm on a quarter section, with livestock and pasture as well as grain fields.

Compare with farm shown in picture opposite, just down the road – especially the 3 kinds of house architecture and 2 kinds of barn architecture. Note shallow ditch using the full limit of the road allowances; the modern way of building roads.



4. Contrast in farm houses in 19-3-2W. Old house built about 1910, is typical of the houses built at that time, though not many people had enough money to build them as large as this. Squat barn is also typical of the time. Foundations are of mortared stone. New 1 1/2 storey house is being built in 1955; it has all the conveniences; also a bright colour scheme.

Plate 36



*1. Dammed creek used for watering stock 5 miles west of Chortitz. Deep ponds like this can only be formed near the escarpment where the stream channels are still fairly pronounced.*



*2. Dam which forms the pool shown in picture opposite. Note the valley beyond the dam.*



*3. Morris River just north of Rosenboff. Shows the typical, gently sloping banks out by rivers in Red River soils. Still contains water in August after a dry summer. Only a few trees along its banks—exceptional in this regard.*



*4. A few trees and buildings are all that is left of the village of Neuendorf which disintegrated in the 1880's. Good impression of the empty topography between villages.*

## Plate 37



1. Mixed farm in 25-2-5W. Neat farm yard with good buildings shows the constructive effect of the dairy farming promoted by the Winkler Creamery. Bungalow style is popular for farm homes built in the 1950's. This is one of the most prosperous farms. Compare it with a farm 1 1/2 miles away shown in the picture opposite.



2. Small mixed farm 1 mile west of Chortitz. Livestock provides a good part of the income on these 40 acre farms. Houses are small and simple, but all are electrified. Barn is in exceptionally good condition for this part of the Reserve.



3. Well kept farmstead just west of Blumenfeld. Established after the exodus to Mexico; shows what can be done in a relatively short time by planting trees. New barns are not typical, but more and more are being built indicating the new interest in mixed farming.



4. Farmstead 4 miles west of Lowe Farm showing no improvements in 45 years. This bleak landscape will have been typical of the first 5 years or so of settlement in most areas but very unusual after that. This farm was established by an American grain farmer who saw no need to plant trees, and none have been planted since.



one Hutterite colony in the Reserve. The Hutterites have moved the buildings of the former Mennonite village, and their settlement has the appearance of a disordered cross roads hamlet, marked with a profusion of large farm buildings.

The farms south of a line drawn from Winkler to Rosenfeld are far more diversified than in the transition area (Figure 32). There are many swales and meadows marking the courses of creek beds, and none of the regularly spaced ditches that are found to the north. The soil is lighter, the road grades are not so high, and at places soil has drifted into the ditches. On the whole it is a far less rigorous landscape than the northern area. There is much more to see in the fields. They are much smaller, and alternating with the grain fields are meadows with grazing cows, and fields of forage crops, sunflowers, sugar beets, potatoes and canning crops.

To the north of Rosenfeld the large scale grain growing typical of the country north of Lowe Farm also prevails, on land of moderate productivity (Figure 4). This area is more thinly settled than the transition area between Lowe Farm and Plum Coulee, and more exclusively devoted to grain. Much of this district has only been occupied since World War I, after the drainage was improved, and the houses are all small frame structures with meagre shelter belts which could certainly be improved. It is "raw" country compared to other parts of the Reserve.

In the southeast of the Reserve there are still two agricultural villages. Close to them are, naturally, few individual farmsteads, but otherwise it is a maturely developed landscape, with many farmsteads that are surrounded by adequate shelter belts. This district also has a stream meandering through it with lovely oak groves on both its banks. On the eastern side of the Reserve are English Canadian and French Canadian settlements, which have no effect whatsoever on the Mennonite settlement pattern. Farmers were too closely attached to the agricultural villages and Gretna and later Altona, to be affected by the six miles of farmland between the Reserve and the Red River.

### Regional Setting

The East Reserve can be distinguished quite clearly from neighboring areas. To the south an unsettled tract of woods, bush and bog, ten to fifteen miles wide, separates the Mennonite settlements from the Ukrainian centres of population close to the United States Boundary.

To the east, north and west the Reserve is flanked by French settlements. There is fairly close contact with these French areas, especially with those to the east and north, and consequently the Mennonites are aware of the contrast. The French settlements are associated with the Seine, Red and Rat Rivers which are lined with groves of trees, thus giving the effect of a green belt around the Reserve. La Broquerie lies to the east, Ste. Anne, Lorette and Isles des Chenes to the north, and St. Pierre to the west (Figure 4P). These settlements were founded before the railway was built through Southeastern Manitoba so they have a casual unplanned appearance. Both Ste. Anne and Lorette consist of a single wide, tree-lined street paralleling the Seine River. La Broquerie and Isles des Chenes have similar streets, but the former is close to but not on the Seine, and the latter is on Oak Creek, now little more than a drainage ditch (Plate 38-1). Only St. Pierre has a more complex pattern; it is one of the few cross roads centres in Western Canada (Figure 8P).

## Plate 38



*1. Main Street of La Broquerie. Can be distinguished from a Mennonite village by the church, and the variety of building designs.*



*2. St. Pierre. From left to right, the bank, the municipal offices and the church which dominates the cross roads and the village. A central, spacious plaza such as this is unknown in any of the Mennonite street villages, or in the all too common gridiron pattern of the average prairie trading centre.*



*3. Store on La Broquerie's Main Street. Many French-Canadian stores are of this kind; store in front, living quarters in the rear. Anglo-Saxon false fronted stores usually had the living quarters on the second floor leaving far more warehouse space. The Mennonite shop keepers followed the Anglo-Saxons. House has a French touch – two chimneys, and a verandah. Compare with house at the right.*



Plate 39



*1. French Canadian farmstead between La Broquerie and Giroux. These farmsteads generally look casual and unplanned; for instance, the barn in this picture.*



*2. Ukrainian farmstead in 25-5-6E. Original house in the back; the second house is not much better. Farmstead is located on a gently rising sandy beach. The land is not gravelly but still the soil is not too good so that the whole layout is not very prosperous. Practically the whole East Reserve was electrified by 1955.*



*3. French style house, built 50 to 60 years ago, on the Rat River river lots northwest of St. Pierre. This kind of architecture never appeared in the East Reserve.*



*4. French houses on the river lots along the Grunthal to St. Pierre road in De Salaberry Municipality. Joubert Creek is to the right. Note the verandahs; typical of French homes.*

There are river lots in all the villages, except La Broquerie, but even in the latter many of the lots have houses fronting on the street, with the barns and equipment in the back yards as in the Mennonite agricultural villages.

The main differences between these communities and the Mennonite settlements are the flowing rivers near which the French villages are built, long lots, and the large beautiful Catholic churches whose impressive spires provide the focal point for each village (Plate 38-2). The architecture is also distinctive. There are simple old log structures with chimneys at both ends of a two-slope roof, and the gambrel and mansard-roofed houses that are popular with the French settlers in Manitoba (Plate 39-3). Wide verandahs and outside stairways also show the French influence.

In all these communities one finds among the people a feeling of identity with the place in which they live. This quality is unmeasurable but my impression is that it is stronger than that found in the Mennonite communities. Even though a community such as La Broquerie did 70% of its retail business in Steinbach in 1955,<sup>4</sup> one still does not feel that its existence as a rural community is being sapped as is happening in many places in the prairies, even if not in the Reserves. The French areas have a more restful, comfortable atmosphere than even small Mennonite centres such as Blumenort and Kleefeld. For instance when the railway reached Ste. Anne and La Broquerie in 1898, only a few small business establishments moved to the station—the bulk of the population remain about the church, and community was not dislocated (Figure 8P). Only in St. Pierre, is there a business area of significant size, and even it does not have the smart shop fronts and neon signs of Steinbach. But on the other hand St. Pierre has a recreational centre and La Broquerie (1/6 the size of Steinbach) has an indoor skating rink (whereas Steinbach has neither).

There is a clear feeling that one is entering a new country of flowing streams and a more relaxed way of life when one leaves the northern part of the Reserve, and passes into the French communities.

To the north and east of the West Reserve there is not nearly as well defined a regional boundary as there is in the East Reserve. This is something of a paradox because nowhere else in Manitoba is there such a distinctive core as the nucleated villages and the special crops of the south central part of the Reserve. But the fact remains that when one leaves this core, which lies between Morden and Gretna, one passes through a transition belt that begins within the Reserve and continues without change for many miles beyond its boundaries. Emerson and Letellier are the next communities to the east of the Reserve. Between them and Altona and Gretna there is an area of individual farmsteads, about 15 miles wide, and as one leaves the Reserve one does not seem to enter an area that has another way of life, as one does in the French districts near the East Reserve. The same is true of the northern part of the West Reserve, where again there is no feeling of entering new country beyond the Reserve. There is a greater contrast between the Mennonite villages in the area south of Plum Coulee than between Plum Coulee and the country around Lowe Farm twelve miles north. The change has occurred within the Reserve, and there is no further variation for many miles to the north.

To the west, however, there is a recognizable break. The Escarpment marks a sharp physical and agricultural boundary. On the Manitoba upland there is a new region; the countryside is rolling, there are sharp gullies and deep valleys that are usually clothed in trees, and on the interfluves the grasslands provide a touch of the country found still farther west. The human aspects of the area are different: the farms are larger and farmsteads are far apart; more of the homes are located on the ravines that go through the region, and provide natural settings for the farmers' homes. The farmsteads are distinctive in the architecture; this land was settled by farmers from Ontario who kept livestock and there are many old barns with stone foundations and centre doors, such as are never seen in the Reserve. It is true that township 1-6 climbs the Escarpment, but even it is not typical of the general upland because it is cut by the heavily wooded Pembina trench. It was not settled by Ontario Canadians and its farmsteads are more akin to those of the Reserve.

The United States Boundary is just as sharp a demarcation line on the south of the West Reserve as the bush country is south of the East Reserve. The Pembina River parallels the Boundary and its tree lined banks provide a visual "stop" on the southern horizon. But the man-made features supply even firmer contrasts. The area to the south does not have villages, nor is the population dense since the land is devoted to grain rather than special crops. By contrast, indeed, the landscape appears almost empty. Not only are the farms large but there is much "sidewalk" farming. Shelter belts also provide a contrast, because the American farmers have not only planted windbreaks around their homes but also around their farms; in some areas as soon as the Boundary is crossed, one drives through long avenues of trees. Consequently the effect of the 49th parallel is clearly apparent in the landscape.

The two Reserves thus are fairly well defined areas within the province, partly by reason of their physical environments, partly because of the distinctive Mennonite landscape, and partly because of other distinctive areas which surround them.

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Mr. Joseph La France, the St. Pierre Agricultural Representative, October, 1955.

<sup>2</sup> *Rbineland Municipality Assessment Roll*, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Edward Howe, the Altona Agricultural Representative, August, 1955. Four years after I interviewed Mr. Howe, I travelled through the area again and I found very little change in the villages, and there appears to be no danger that they will disintegrate.

<sup>4</sup> This statement is based on interviews with La Broquerie businessmen in September, 1955.



## Chapter 16

### THE MENNONITES AND WESTERN SETTLEMENT

#### Mennonite Contributions to the Early Settlement of the West

The contributions of the Mennonites to the early settlement of the West are rather difficult to assess. I know of no attempts to examine this question, though sweeping erroneous statements have appeared at times, which virtually credit the Mennonites with founding Manitoba agriculture: "*Die Mennoniten fuhreten in Manitoba den Weizenbau ein, und zwar mit so ausgezeichnetem Erfolg, dass Manitoba zwei Jahre nach ihrer Einwanderung seinen ersten Weizen exportieren konnte.*"<sup>1</sup> Before we examine the problem I will give a brief summary of the history of prairie settlement, based on excellent, fully documented accounts in books by Principal W.A. Mckintosh, and Professors A.S. Morton and W.L. Morton.<sup>2</sup>

From 1812, the date of the first agricultural settlement at Red River, until 1870, when Manitoba entered Confederation, settlements were largely confined to the wooded land near the rivers. Most of the settlers lived on river lots along the Red and Assiniboine, but there were a few outlying settlements, particularly along the smaller tree-lined streams that crossed the prairie. The survey of land into townships and sections, completed in Manitoba by 1873, ignored topography and went over prairie, woodland and river valley alike. Thus it was more difficult for settlers to select the type of land they wanted. But the first immigrants to enter the new province, who were mostly from Ontario, selected quarter sections that lay in the park areas, and thus managed to secure both the wood and the water that had been the advantage of the river lots. After 1871 the wood and meadow lands to the east of Winnipeg, in the Pembina Mountain Country, and along the Saskatchewan Trail west of Portage la Prairie were quickly settled. It is at this time that the Mennonites entered the province and settled in the park country of the East Reserve and on the prairies of the West Reserve. In 1875 they were followed by the Icelanders who settled along the partially wooded western shore of Lake Winnipeg. But the main surge of Canadian settlement (assisted by the completion of a railway to St. Boniface in 1878) swept past the Icelanders and Mennonites, ignoring them and the areas they occupied, to the uplands beyond the Pembina Escarpment and along the upper Assiniboine River. By 1881 these settlers had reached the limit of the park country in Western Manitoba, and there they halted their forward movement to await the advancing railway which would make commercial farming possible. Before them in the North West Territories was an essentially different country where trees were not at hand and water might be difficult to obtain, so that agricultural settlement would be bound to the railway.<sup>3</sup> It is here that the Mennonites might have been expected to serve as guides for settlers who were unfamiliar with the prairie environment.

The East Reserve had no impact whatsoever on the development of agriculture in Western Canada; after 1878 it was off the mainstream of migration into Manitoba, and furthermore the type of wooded country found in the Reserve presented no technological problem to farmers who hailed from the humid east. Any Mennonite contributions to prairie settlement would therefore have to have come from the

West Reserve, and the following discussion is largely confined to that area.

The Mennonite farmers of the West Reserve were the first agriculturists to move on to the Canadian prairie in large numbers, and thus they occupy a very important place in the settlement geography of Western Canada. However, they had very little direct influence on the few farmers who had preceded them or who moved in at the same time as they did. The Mennonites settlement pattern, agricultural villages, seeds, implements, architecture, stoves and fuel, were never adopted by other settlers. Nor were their agricultural methods more advanced than those of their Canadian neighbours; indeed, within a decade of their settlement in Manitoba they were somewhat behind in their techniques. But even when all these charges are allowed, it is still true that the Mennonite group settlements of the 1870's were very soundly established. When 4,600 people of proven agricultural experience are placed in an area which is physically suitable for commercial agriculture they are bound to produce results, even though their methods are not exactly the best.

The Mennonites did not demonstrate the fertility of the Red River Lowland. That was an accepted fact before they got there.<sup>4</sup> But they did demonstrate, beyond any doubt, that it was possible, even before the building of the railway, to settle successfully on the open prairie away from a river and away from the immediate vicinity of the forest. Very few other people attempted to settle in this area before a railway was built. Indeed, no homesteaders settled on the plain, but in the area to the north of the Reserve, near the present village of Lowe Farm, large scale grain farming was first attempted in the late 1870's, by the son and nephew of John Lowe, the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture. Large sums were invested in the project, but the experiment, which attempted to emulate the bonanza farms of North Dakota, did not prove a success. Unfortunately we can make no direct comparison between Lowe's agricultural experiments and the Mennonite settlements, because the former established their farm on poorly drained land, which probably was the main cause for the failure of the venture. But the Lowe enterprise does indicate where the strength of the Mennonite settlements lay. The Mennonites did not have much money but they did have manpower: by division of labour among themselves they accomplished things during the critical first two years of settlement which isolated homesteaders could not do. While some Mennonites were obtaining wood for shelter and fuel, and others were digging and cribbing wells for water, others were procuring supplies and stock and preparing hay for winter, and still others were breaking land. (The periodic cooperative working bees of the Ontario Canadian settlers were similar in intent to the steady cooperation found in the Mennonite villages, but they were not an adequate substitute.) On the open prairie the aim must be commercial farming or nothing, because subsistence living, as in a forested area, is practically impossible. The Lowes failed in their attempt to settle on the plains, and the Ontario settlers did not even try to settle on prairie land, but the Mennonites proved that it could be done.

An essential prerequisite for any farm enterprise in Manitoba was a market for grain. This existed in Manitoba in the decade of 1870; at first the grain was consumed locally but after 1876 it began to be exported. But it remained the individual farmer's problem to find a means of delivering his grain either to Winnipeg

or to Emerson at a cost sufficiently low to leave enough money, after shipping costs were paid, to cover the cost of lumber, nails, food, implements, fuel, etc. The railway connection with Eastern Canada alone was not enough. In 1884 W.H. Barneby wrote that Manitoban farmers told him that it was not profitable to haul produce more than 25 miles to market.<sup>5</sup> A farmer living in the park country had a better chance than a prairie farmer of struggling through the years until a railway and trading centre were brought within efficient hauling distance of his farm; because he could at least assemble many of the supplies he needed right on his quarter section, and did not have to spend his precious savings on items such as fuel and lumber. Even so, many farmers in the park country had a difficult time until the railway reached their area. On the open prairie only a large scale, well capitalized farming enterprise, or a settlement consisting of a cohesive community with a large labour force could hope to be successful as long as the supply and markets points were far away. The Mennonites managed to occupy the prairie before the railway came because they had the manpower to maintain a communications system from their villages on the prairie to the river-based trading centres of Emerson and Winnipeg, and to the nearby woodlands, without seriously disturbing their day to day farming activities. An individual farmer could not hope to assemble his supplies and to market his produce efficiently until the railway brought a trading centre close to his farm.<sup>6</sup> Therefore what the Mennonites actually demonstrated was that settling the Red River prairie was not a matter of soil or climate, but a matter of assembling supplies and delivering produce.

But Eastern Canada read a far more simple conclusion from the Mennonite success: agriculture was possible in Manitoba and the Northwest. Even as late as 1890 the questions directed to witnesses before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization revealed that there was still much skepticism in Eastern Canada about the agricultural possibilities in Western Canada, and a good deal of misinformation about the area.<sup>7</sup> It was the well-publicized success of the Mennonite migration that was important, not the introduction by the Mennonites of any new settlement patterns or agricultural techniques to the Red River prairie. The Mennonites' agricultural experience was not required in the Canadian West because the Mennonites arrived in Canada just when new agricultural techniques and implements for occupying the treeless prairies were being developed in the United States. Thus it was unnecessary to adopt the methods that the Mennonites brought from Russia. An example will make this clear. A party of Cabinet Ministers visited the East Reserve in 1877; in their opinion the two chief Mennonite contributions to the settlement of Western Canada were: the practice of herding cattle, thus overcoming the lack of wood for fencing; and the practice of heating houses with a mixture of manure and straw, thus again overcoming the lack of wood.<sup>8</sup> Twenty years earlier these would have been extremely important innovations. Grain growing and livestock raising are mutually exclusive for efficiency's sake and must be separated. Thus the nucleated settlements of the Mennonites, each with its own herdsman, suggested one method of controlling cattle. It is even possible that if barbed wire had not been invented and introduced in the 1870's, an entirely different survey system, based upon the European nucleated patterns, would have been necessary in the West.<sup>9</sup> But barbed wire summarily solved the problem posed



by the lack of wood on the prairies for fencing, even as the new branch railways began to deliver cordwood for fuel, making obsolete the mixture of straw and manure. The Mennonite techniques thus were never required by other ethnic groups in Manitoba.

Nor did the Mennonite experience on the Manitoba prairie serve as a guide for the settlement of the land further west. The climatic and soil conditions of the Red River prairie and the Saskatchewan short grass prairies are not at all comparable. Mennonites were always within reasonable teaming distance of timber, and water could always be obtained, either by digging wells or damming creeks and sloughs. Successive pioneers went farther west into essentially new land, water and marketing conditions which required the development of new institutions. The Mennonites' settlements were not used as examples, even though some of their developments might have proved applicable.

### **Changes Within the Mennonite Settlements**

Settlement geography is inseparable from life. Man has close, complex, and continuous intersections with the land on which he pursues his agricultural endeavours. The body of agricultural knowledge, the social organization, and the cultural objectives of a group of people determine the value placed on, and the use made of, different features of the land. Naturally, pioneers, such as the Mennonites, utilized their previously acquired fund of experience as much as possible, but the novel features of the land required new adaptations, and demanded new responses. With the years, a new body of knowledge accumulated, and changes in drainage, climate, market conditions, crops, agricultural techniques, communications, and the effects of trading centres, resulted in changes in the way of life of the settlers, in the settlement pattern, in the farmstead and even in the attitude of the farmers to agriculture.

Thus one landscape, and one way of life followed another in the Reserves, each revealing a new appreciation of the physical environment and its potentialities. The first evaluation of an area is never the last: it will be followed by others that may have even more striking and interesting settlement results than when the land was first occupied.

### **Farm Settlement**

The changes in the Mennonite settlements that began to take place in both Manitoba Reserves during the decade of the 1880's have been described in previous chapters. These changes in the settlements were the evidence in the landscape of a major break in the protective insularity of the Mennonite communities. This decade saw the progressive Mennonites begin to adopt the dynamic trading centre as a sphere of activity. After 1880 more and more Mennonites became entrepreneurs, and the movement to the centres began. But there was also another reaction to the same conditions in the movement of the conservative Mennonites farther west, and later to Mexico and Paraguay. It is during these years that the Mennonites had to make important adjustments in their attitudes to Canadian agriculture, and in the end this meant that the way would eventually be open for the penetration of

positive agricultural advice from the outside, instead of merely the reluctant adoption of corrective measures for farming abuses.

It is true that the adoption of the Canadian settlement pattern by the Mennonites, and the abandonment of the *Gewanne* and *Kagel*, enabled many farmers to grow wheat more effectively than before. But this does not mean that the switch in settlement patterns was responsible for the adoption of monolithic grain growing economy. Mennonite farmers had been grain growers in Russia; in the practically ideal grain growing conditions of the West Reserve the farmers continued to grow the same crops and use the same techniques that they had used in Russia. This meant that an agricultural maladjustment would develop, since most Mennonite farmers made no attempts to test the agricultural possibilities of the area. (See Appendix I for an account of the problems engendered by grain growing in the West Reserve.) They were attempting to improve their productivity efficiency in what they were already doing, instead of trying to determine, by experiment and by requesting outside advice, whether they were doing the right thing. And the Mennonites in both the East and West Reserves lived in areas which demand something more than a stereotyped agricultural approach.

The Mennonites had introduced a semi-arid culture, one-crop specialization, into a continental humid climatic area, which could and should have been used in far less rigid fashion. From 1890 to 1920 the large wheat areas in Western Canada were being developed. By then it would have been advantageous for the West Reserve Mennonites to diversify their agriculture—but they didn't. Many Mennonites attempted to increase the size of their farm business by enlarging their farm operation, but they still produced only grain. But by 1900 there was little unimproved land left in the Reserve and consequently many Mennonites were forced out, migrating to the west. Also the time had come to start conserving the land by better practices, such as employing a proper rotation and fertilizer, but the emphasis on grain, stimulated by high prices, throttled this. Quite unconsciously the Mennonites were headed for disaster through the early decades of the twentieth century. All their efforts were aimed at improving the conditions for wheat farming; large scale machinery was introduced, drains were constructed to get the water off the land, communications from farm to grain elevator were improved. It was the pinnacle of the wheat era.

In the decade of 1930 the people of Western Canada suffered disaster from drought and low grain prices, and large farming areas had to be abandoned. Many of these areas should never have been ploughed, but this is not true of the Mennonite Reserves. Yet the Mennonite farmers of the West Reserve suffered severely during the 1930's because they had concentrated on wheat at a time when they could have been laying a wider agricultural foundation on their favoured lands. Eventually the trials of the 1930's awakened them to the need for diversification. Those farmers (and their descendants) who had broken away from the villages in the 1880's and 1890's, together with the *Russländer* Mennonites, led the way in introducing new crops and agricultural practices. The conservative Mennonites still would have nothing to do with bringing in outside aid. Clearly, a paradox emerges. The break from the open field system led to the great grain growing era that ended so disastrously, but only the freedom of action and asso-

ciation provided by that break opened the way to a much needed new approach in agriculture. In the West Reserve the progressive Mennonites started the cooperative movement, and in both Reserves farmers turned for help to the Provincial and Dominion Departments of Agriculture. Thus the great revolution in settlement systems that began in the 1880's and continued until the early 1920's made possible the great agricultural revolution of the 1930's in the West Reserve, and that of the 1940's in the East, which has so changed the landscape of the two areas.

Thus the Mennonites of both Reserves started off in new agricultural directions, and today they are constantly striving to find crops and agricultural techniques which are adapted to their particular environment. Instead of following a rigid monoculture the Mennonite farmers are becoming more flexible in their operations all the time. In both Reserves the changes in agriculture have been reflected in changes in the trading centres.

The present farm landscape in the Reserves has been described in Chapter 13, and it is evident that the Mennonite communities have made some unique achievements in the province. Population pressure has been so great in the area that the Reserves are now more diversified than any other part of Western Canada. A significant contrast to agriculture in the West Reserve is the "suit case" grain farming area on similar land in North Dakota immediately south of the Mennonite settlement. (Contrasting market conditions and agricultural policies undoubtedly are also important in explaining this difference.)

### **Trading Centres**

There have been some fundamental changes in the relations between the trading centres and the surrounding farm communities. Prior to 1890 there was a close affiliation between town and country. Townsmen and farmers were engaged in the common enterprise of developing the country and were aware of their mutual interdependence. This was true of all the trading centres, and especially of Steinbach, where trade was conducted in an agricultural village. The feeling of working hand in hand died down between 1900 and 1930 in the West Reserve because farmers had made grain growing a routine, and there was no positive agricultural development taking place that demanded a joint constructive effort from both groups. Naturally the tradesmen realized that their livelihood still depended in the farmers' trade, and therefore were concerned about the weather, crops, marketing of grain and so on. But since the pattern of agriculture had been fairly well established in the 1890's and seemed to be continuing without change, the concern which had formerly been felt over the farm enterprise itself disappeared. This indifference did not appear in the East Reserve, which in the size of trading centres, variety of services supplied, and in the morphology of the centres, lagged about one generation behind the West Reserve, until it finally caught up in the 1940's.

In the West Reserve the depression and its crop failures changed the relationship between town and country again, because the trading centres were sharply caught up in the farmers' plight. The townspeople realized that their prosperity depended on that of the farmers. Thus they were anxious to see the introduction of row crops and more livestock to ensure a stable income for the farmer. Only the

larger centres of the West Reserve became genuine forces in agriculture at this time, but Steinbach in the East Reserve followed them a decade later.

The leadership of the Mennonite people was gradually turned over to the townspeople of Winkler, Altona and Steinbach in the decade after 1930. Better communications meant that the Mennonites came oftener to the towns; and the more conservative Mennonites who would have disapproved of this had already migrated. New crops, new farming techniques, more livestock and new machinery meant a greater dependence on the towns (not only on the larger centres in this case) and on people who lived there, such as the agricultural representatives. Finally, as the Mennonite businesses began to expand during World War II, Chambers of Commerce were organized in the different villages, newspapers were founded in the large centres, agricultural fairs were established and even the building of curling clubs and recreational centres was contemplated. In the towns the accent was on service, and almost imperceptibly the new leadership emerged, a business leadership which spearheads the present Mennonite society. The farmer does take part, but the important role of the towns is emphasized by the fact that some of the leading farmers have moved into the towns to be in closer touch with affairs.

The pace setters are Winkler, Altona and Steinbach. Winkler at present is still predominantly a businessman's town in a Mennonite district, and this somewhat hampers its activities because it has to make its way mainly on a business base. A closer affiliation with the country has been achieved, however, in the years since World War II. Altona, on the other hand, not only has the viewpoint of the businessman, but also it is the centre of Mennonitism in the Reserve. Winkler formerly held this position but now it has been superseded, though not replaced, by Altona. How this has been accomplished is hard to say; Altona's situation is advantageous (Winkler is too close to the Mennonite periphery), and perhaps most important, it is the centre of the cooperative movement, and possesses what is really the regional newspaper. Altona strengthened its position immeasurably in 1957 when a radio station serving all of Southern Manitoba was established by local businessmen. The new aggressive leadership in the West Reserve stems from Winkler and Altona, but the smaller centres send their representatives to these towns for the organization meetings and other activities, so that the entire Reserve is involved.

Steinbach is in a peculiar position, and sometimes seems like a combination of Winkler and Altona. At one time it was the purely Mennonite centre, but its businessmen have proved so aggressive that now Steinbach's Main Street, rather than Steinbach's Mennonite character, appears to be dominant. Its trading hinterland is all of Southeastern Manitoba, and thus it has lost some of the emphasis on Mennonitism which is still apparent in Altona. Great stress is still placed on religion in Steinbach, but it is now expressed in segmented denominations that restrict their attention to their own affairs. The atmosphere of a cohesive Mennonite community, that is still apparent in Altona, has disappeared.

Winkler and Altona townspeople are actively helping the farmer improve his agricultural methods and assisting him in the search for new, profitable crops, because they realize that in the end the whole community of town and hinterland will benefit. East Reserve centres would like to assume the same task, but so far

have not succeeded. The smaller centres such as Blumenort do not particularly direct farmers' activities; they are still part of them. Niverville and Grunthal are in the same category as Gretna, Plum Coulee and Rosenfeld. The difficulty with Steinbach is that it has such a large hinterland that it cannot be directly concerned with the economic activities of all parts of it. Yet, a portion of its wider responsibilities has been recognized. An editorial in the January 16, 1953 *Carillon News* strongly suggested that Southeastern Manitoba needed an experimental station to help improve local agriculture. Steinbach supplies as much leadership as the average Western town to its hinterland. But it does not come close to the association between town and country that is found in Altona, and even Winkler.

The medium of the cooperative in Altona and in Winkler has opened up a new technique in approaching rural problems which can (without exaggeration) be called research and planning. This is not as yet apparent in the other towns. It is not simply a close association of trading centre and farm (Kleefeld would be a good example of that); it is a joint investigation, an attempt to find ways of creating a better life. The object is to create the best possible rural community of town and country together. In this objective the East Reserve in reality merely lags behind the West Reserve; the two areas are undergoing the same process but are at different stages.

Generally trading centres are considered to have the function of performing the service tasks demanded by the farmers in their hinterlands. This would include handling grain, grinding feed and so on. Recently, however, this procedure has been partly reversed and the centres have been placing welcome demands on the farmers that have resulted in changes in land use. Such processing industries as the sugar beet factory (not located in the Reserves, of course), the C.V.O. plant, the cannery and the powdered milk factory have stimulated farm production and created new sources of revenue. The "townscapes" reflect these new agricultural activities in the farming hinterlands, and with modern diversified farming the variety of structures is steadily increasing.

Since I made my field surveys in both Reserves in 1955 I have returned to the area in 1959 and 1960, and still other important changes in manufacturing that have taken place since 1955 are evident in the larger centres. In Chapter 10 we examined Morden's attempt to become a manufacturing and wholesale centre once it had reached its peak as a farm centre. Morden failed in this endeavour at the turn of the century, but in Steinbach a woods products industry was established in the 1930's and a tire retailing firm in the 1940's that both transcended the bounds of the trading area and achieved in a limited sense what Morden had set out to do. Manufacturing of varied consumers goods certainly did not develop anywhere in the Reserves, but we have seen how food processing industries based upon local produce have become important. In Steinbach, Altona, Winkler, and Morden they have been established by local initiative, and Morden has also been fortunate because national firms have selected it as a place to locate their plants.

To these advances must now be added some new developments which have only become apparent since 1955, but which are mentioned here because they have their origin in basic factors in the geographies of the Reserves that are now being exploited. New manufacturing plants are being established which are not

dependent upon local crops, livestock and poultry, but on imported materials.<sup>10</sup> The new manufacturing plants are located in the Reserves as a part of the post-1950 trend towards decentralization of manufacturing in Manitoba. The Mennonite areas have a number of special qualities to offer manufacturers. They have a location close to Winnipeg, so that technical advice is readily available, and also the transport of raw material and finished products to and from the metropolitan centre can be efficiently handled.<sup>11</sup> This situation with respect to Winnipeg is starting to be exploited by manufacturers because of the added advantage of the good, dependable labour supply that is found in and near Steinbach, Morden and Winkler. It is important to note that the special agriculture which had developed since the 1930's has made the Reserves among the most densely populated rural areas in the West.<sup>12</sup> Beyond these factors are the local commercial services, such as banks, stores and trucking firms, and such public services as water works and paved streets, which have already been established or built as a result of the important commercial and processing developments of recent years, and make these adequately serviced centres in which to establish new industrial plants. Furthermore, it is less expensive to erect a plant in these smaller towns, mainly because of the lower cost of land. As a result of these advantages a clothing manufacturing firm (200 employees) was moved to Steinbach in 1957 from St. Pierre where there was not a sufficient labour force, and in June, 1960, a hat manufacturing plant (80 employees) was opened in Morden, and capital was being raised for another garment factory in Winkler. In every case these factories are operated by Winnipeg enterprises.

Consequently the industrialization which Morden unsuccessfully strove for, and which Steinbach achieved to a degree, is now coming to the Reserves. Since the developments are all part of larger enterprises based in Winnipeg, it is impossible to say whether more companies will move out now that a start has been made. At any rate, few other rural centres in Manitoba have been selected as factory sites. At present agriculture is still the dominant economic base in Steinbach, Morden, Winkler and Altona, but these factories are of great significance. They will enable more people to gain a livelihood at home, and thus continue to reinforce the Mennonite communities.

Another side to the town-country relationship is shown in the changing ethnic composition of the trading centres. It is a general empirical rule that a trading centre will ultimately assume the ethnic composition of its hinterland.<sup>13</sup> Morden was founded as an almost purely Anglo-Saxon settlement, but gradually in the twentieth century its farming hinterland has been taken over by Mennonites (Figure 37), and now, in turn, the Mennonites are playing an increasingly important role in the town. Gretna, Plum Coulee, Winkler, Altona and Niverville at one time all have had very strong non-Mennonite elements in their business communities, but through the years the weight of the surrounding Mennonite population has asserted itself, and now most of the non-Mennonites have departed, leaving the business world to the Mennonites. Steinbach and Grunthal prove this rule. The Lutheran farmers who live southeast of Steinbach now have their representatives in what was formerly a strictly Mennonite business town, and the Ukrainians now also own some leading businesses in Grunthal. Rosenfeld has a mixed population of both Lutherans and Mennonites, and Lorette, a French river lot community



north of the East Reserve near Linden, already has a Mennonite businessman.

This tendency is another manifestation of the migration from farm to the trading centre and city that is taking place throughout Canada. In a stationary trading centre, such as Gretna, Plum Coulee, or Niverville, it is just a matter of replacing businessmen who have died or moved away, but in the larger centres it is a true augmentation of the population. Further, this increasing similarity in the population characteristics of the trading centres and their hinterlands shows that the Mennonite Reserves as a whole are largely by-passed by the new migration to Canada. Thus, in regard to population, the rural Mennonite areas are self contained units, and if there is any external migration it is away from the Reserves to the cities, not back into them.

### **Comparative Geography of the Reserves**

Mennonites with the same cultural background settled in two contrasting areas when they came to Manitoba. The question naturally arises as to what effect the difference in the environment of the two Reserves had upon the geographical evolution of the two areas. The general answer, of course, is clear, and is ultimately the basis of all work in regional geography. Every area on the earth has unique properties of both site and geographic location, and the settlers in a new area have to evaluate these qualities of the habitat in their attempt to make a livelihood and establish homes. If their previous experiences are applicable then every settler after the first year or two should have little difficulty in making his livelihood in the new area. If unfamiliar conditions are encountered, then the settlers must either master them and exploit the resources along new lines, or if no ready solution is found they must exist as best they can and hope that a solution will be found in the future, or that conditions will change. The only other answer is to depart. As we have seen, all these situations developed in the two Mennonite Reserves, and I will only briefly summarize the interplay of man and land in the two contrasting areas.

In the West Reserve the Mennonites found ideal conditions for grain growing. The land was good, and the railway with its trading centres was at hand within eight years. They had few serious obstacles in continuing the agricultural economy with which they were familiar. One problem, surprisingly, was the nucleated settlement pattern, which they brought from Russia, for many farmers soon began to adopt the quarter section because it was a looser form of settlement more suited to grain growing. A few other attempts were made by the settlers to improve grain farming conditions; in 1885 some farmers joined the Farmers Union and in 1899 a farmers' elevator was erected in Gretna. But no serious attempt beyond this was made to improve wheat farming. No single outstanding farm leader emerged until the 1930's. Even the single attempt at diversification, the unsuccessful cheese factory built at Schanzenfeld in 1885, was a non-Mennonite enterprise. In short, the experience acquired in Russia, along with a willingness to buy new implements when they became available, proved sufficient to develop the West Reserve; no original innovations seem to have been necessary.

In much of the East Reserve where the terrain is not suitable for grain farming the Russian-gained experience was of no value. Unfortunately the Mennonites



found no agricultural leader to guide them towards a suitable land use for this area. A commendable attempt was made when the cheese factories were established after 1889—the first successful organized cooperatives of either Reserve. Unfortunately this good beginning in diversification was not sustained. No effort was made to improve the quality of the livestock, and an important opportunity to advance agriculture in the Reserve was lost. The open field system broke up in the southern townships because the East Reserve farmers also favoured the quarter section since it was a looser form of settlement, this time more suited for grain growing in an area where the land is variable. Some individuals prospered in the northern townships where grain growing was possible, especially after drainage improvements were completed, but in many places farming was little above the subsistence level.

The agricultural collapse of the 1930's presented the farmers of the West Reserve with the same problem that had confronted the farmers of the East Reserve in the 1880's: how to find a new suitable land use for unfamiliar conditions. (The migrations from Reserve to Reserve of the 1870's and the 1930's in reverse directions are interesting results of the inability of the farmers to adjust quickly to new conditions.) The habitat had to be re-evaluated and this time the Mennonites found both leaders and an organization, the cooperative, to help them overcome some of their agricultural problems. In the Winkler area the help of the Experimental Farm was important. An agricultural change was thus underway in the 1930's in the West Reserve. In the East Reserve some changes also took place as cheese factories were reestablished and as the agricultural advice of extension service representatives was applied to the Grunthal area. But in this Reserve the face of the country was not changed because stimulating educational organizations were not associated with the cheese cooperatives, there were no farm leaders to lift the area, and the extension work did not prove as effective as having an Experimental Farm nearby.

Therefore the East Reserve as yet had not found an adequate replacement for its inapplicable Russian agricultural heritage. But changes began in the 1940's. The East Reserve may not have the same effective cooperatives or the same grain land as the West Reserve, but it does have a situation close to Winnipeg and in the 1940's the Mennonites began to respond to this market with increasing agricultural diversification. To help in supplying the Winnipeg market for poultry and dairy products processing cooperatives were founded.

Both Reserves have now attained a reasonably suitable land use, but we can see how the East Reserve lagged for 70 years before it moved forward as a whole, simply because most of its land was not suitable for grain production. Thus the whole geography has changed in both Reserves since the 1930's insofar as human adaptation of the areas is concerned. In the past in both areas there seemed to be no responsible leadership in either area that could guide the farmers to better ways of farming. Now we have service centres that are responsible, and are trying to improve agriculture, as well as merely serving the farmers with supplies. Also the farmers in both Reserves are now in close touch with the outside world, through agricultural representatives and through the processing plants that are found in the service centres, and they now appear to have a flexibility in their approach to

farming which they never had before.

In both Reserves much attention is now given to finding the most suitable use for the land. Every piece of the earth's surface poses a problem for man and every landscape embodies man's answers to the problems posed by nature. Naturally the expressions on the landscape of the inhabitants will be similar over large areas as shown in Chapter 13, because of the similar conditions presented by the land and the similar economic conditions. But the fact remains that at present it is impossible to say that we have two contrasting geographies in the Mennonite areas of Manitoba—one where grain farming is successful, and the other where it is not. There are many distinctive areas, each more or less adequately adjusted to the local conditions of site and situation, and this differentiation will continue as men of initiative develop new agricultural enterprises in the Reserves. In this regard, at least, the two Reserves have become similar.

### **Mennonites Contributions to Western Canada Today**

When the Mennonites first came to Manitoba their settlements were among the most distinctive that have ever been seen in Canada. But no region is isolated from the life around it, and after 1880 the Mennonite areas gradually took on the appearance and the attitudes of the rest of the prairies under the influence of the rectangular survey, improved communications, municipal organization, compulsory public school education and the trading centres that rose in their midst. Ultra-conservative Mennonites moved farther west in an attempt to retain their way of life, and fled to Mexico and Paraguay to seek an even more secluded haven. Others staged a passive resistance campaign, and attempted to avoid this new society as much as possible, though they remained in Manitoba. But an ever increasing number reconciled themselves to the new institutions, and during the 50 years after 1880 it appeared that the Mennonites would eventually lose themselves in the larger prairie society, as they abandoned their peasant way of life and adopted Canadian institutions without adding anything to, or changing anything in them. However, this danger disappeared after 1930 when the Mennonites demonstrated that they did possess considerable latent creative spirit and leadership by pioneering new agricultural practices in the province and by introducing new rural industries.

A surer and clearer sense of Mennonite identity has sprung from the experience of forming organizations to undertake needed projects, from the acceptance and even the desire for education, and from the establishment of newspapers. The Mennonites have become a more self-assured, confident, even proud group of people, and instead of habitually retreating into themselves and trying to escape the outside world, they are demonstrating their willingness to shoulder civic responsibility. They are becoming a more and more positive force in Manitoba, and now occupy a significant place in the province – for the first time since the first decade of their migration to Canada.

Steinbach is known as the smartest rural trading centre in Manitoba, and both Reserves are famous for their rural industries, which are visited annually by many agriculturists from beyond the province. The Mennonite radio station at Altona is having a positive influence in introducing good music to Manitoba, and has a large listening audience in Winnipeg. Mennonite students have achieved an outstand-

ing record in the University of Manitoba in the last two decades, and the graduates are beginning to assume a fuller role as professional men in the life of the province.

This is a complete reversal of the role of the Mennonites envisaged by the leaders who brought them to Manitoba from Russia. At that time the only hope of retaining the ethnic identity of the Mennonites appeared to lie in a retreat from the world. But in a shrinking world flight only ends in ultimate extinction, if there is no inner integrity within the group to stop the attrition of its numbers and its convictions. Fortunately the Mennonites of Manitoba have found themselves. They have a new self-respect and have accepted the necessity of education from outside their own body; thus they have a chance to survive as a group.

### Conclusions

What conclusions can we draw from the experience of the Mennonites in Manitoba over the last 80 years? Three things stand out clearly: first, the Mennonites' unique settlement pattern did not survive in Canada, though vestiges of it still remain; second, in the two decades from 1930 to 1950 an important change occurred in the landscape as a result of definite agricultural developments within the Mennonite areas: third, there have been significant changes in the role of the trading centre in the Reserves.

Much has been said in Mennonite circles of the direct attempts of the government, whether municipal, provincial, or dominion, to change their way of life, but the indirect yet continuous effect of Canadian customs has been far more important and far more effective. The agricultural villages with their *Gewanne* and *Kagel* could not meet the challenge of the alternative settlement pattern, the homestead, as the place from which the farmer carried out his grain growing operation. Naturally commercial grain growing was helped by the railway and the trading centre (functioning as the grain depot) and in that way both were instrumental in bringing about the break-up of the Mennonite settlements.

Grain growing prevailed as practically the sole source of income in the West Reserve until the 1930's, whereas in much of the East Reserve there was unfortunately no adequate source of income until the 1940's. During this time improvements were made in drainage facilities and roads in both areas. These helped to extend grain growing, but they did not produce an entirely different landscape. But the re-interpretation of the environment that occurred in the West Reserve in the 1930's and in the East Reserve a decade later, created a landscape which is almost as unique in the Canadian West as the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* were in their day.<sup>14</sup> The distinctive nucleated settlements were fashioned by the Mennonites as the result of their cultural inheritance from South Russia, but the new landscape that began to emerge after 1930 cannot be attributed so directly to the common cultural background of a group of people. The Mennonite Reserves happen to be located within some of Manitoba's specially endowed areas, giving the Mennonites the possibilities for trying new agricultural enterprises. Other ethnic groups have also adopted the new techniques, but it is only fair to add that in some areas, for example in the northern part of Hanover Municipality, the Mennonite farmers have forged well ahead of their neighbours who are favoured by the same condi-

tions.<sup>15</sup> Localized areas of a particular type of "advanced" land use are actually quite common geographical phenomena, and they have often developed because one man, or a small group of men, started a particular enterprise and the rest of the neighbourhood followed their lead.

The trading centres on the Reserves have played an important role in these developments. In the 1880's they were unwanted, even feared intruders, yet they were essential to a grain growing economy. They were very significant, since they functioned as the main alternative society to those Mennonites who wished to leave the agricultural villages. Thus they served as unintentional instruments of destruction to the Mennonite way of life. By the decade of 1940 their role had changed, and they had become the points from which the leadership in the Reserve was emanating. It is not too much to say that the present leading positions of the Mennonite Reserves as centres of diversified agriculture and rural industry will depend on these towns. The re-assessment of the possibilities offered by an area does not depend as much, it appears to me, on the nature of its inhabitants as a whole, as on a few foresighted, gifted men within the group. (I am not referring to the implementation of the ideas but rather to their origination.) At present not all the best Mennonite young people (who can provide this leadership or are willing to bring expert advice to the community) are being drawn away to the large centres, as is happening in many Canadian rural areas. They are finding sufficient challenge and reward in working in the Mennonite centres of Steinbach, Altona, Winkler and now Morden. It is no accident that Altona has a radio station, and that four of the outstanding newspapers in Manitoba are in the above named centres. These achievements reveal the calibre of the men who have elected to remain in the Mennonite communities. And if this continues one can expect that their contributions will keep the Mennonite settlements in the forefront of rural development in Manitoba.

<sup>1</sup> Victor Peters, "Schicksal und Leistung Der Mennoniten in Kanada", *Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen*, Mitteilungen, Juli-September, Nummer 3: 166.

<sup>2</sup> W.A. Mackintosh, *Prairie Settlement: The Geographical Setting*, Toronto 1934; A.S. Morton and Chester Martin, *History of Prairie Settlement and Dominion Lands Policy*, Toronto, 1938; W.L. Morton, *Manitoba—A History*, Toronto 1957. Also see *Economic Atlas of Manitoba*, Winnipeg, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Mackintosh, *Prairie Settlement*: 53.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> Barneby, *Life and Labour*: 53.

<sup>6</sup> Professor Henry Tanner described the problems encountered by individual immigrants in the West, and suggested a modified form of village settlement in the 1880's. See Tanner, *Successful Migration*: 27-32. Somewhat similar suggestions were made in W.F. Munro, *Emigration Made Easy or, How to Settle on the Prairie*, Glasgow, 1883.

<sup>7</sup> See *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, Reports of the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization, 1875-1890; particularly the Reports for 1886 and 1890.

<sup>8</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, September 29, 1877.

<sup>9</sup> There is an interesting suggestion concerning villages in the evidence of Robert Romaine before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization. See *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*, 1883, Appendix 6: 129-134.

<sup>10</sup> My field observations have been greatly aided by discussions with officials of the Manitoba Department of Industry and Commerce who are working to bring industry to rural Manitoba.

<sup>11</sup> This of course means that the goods are distributed through Winnipeg brokers and warehouses, at the Winnipeg based freight rates.

<sup>12</sup> In the Mennonite areas there is a more stable labour supply with less turnover of workers. Labour is not cheaper, because these garment workers get the same wages as those working in Winnipeg.

<sup>13</sup> My work on the *Manitoba Atlas* has confirmed this observation, first based on my study of the Reserves. See the article on ethnic groups in the *Economic Atlas of Manitoba*, Winnipeg, 1960.

<sup>14</sup> The new agriculture of special crops, dairying and poultry had nothing to do with the destruction of the *Gewanne* and *Kagel*.

<sup>15</sup> I have not studied the relationship that different ethnic groups have to the land in Manitoba, but I know experienced agricultural officials who believe that differences in agricultural developments in some parts of the prairie can only be explained by the varying attitudes of different ethnic groups towards agriculture. They won't argue this in print, but they believe that the Mennonites are among the best farmers in Manitoba.



## Appendix A

### Land Surveyors' Descriptions – Township by Township<sup>1</sup>

#### East Reserve

A.W. Lippe's report indicates that in almost any part of township 7-4 the land consisted of a sequence of prairie, clumps of willows and weeds, a bit of marsh (sometimes a dry marsh), and perhaps burned ground. Clear prairie, that is low grasses, is only mentioned rarely. Lippe said that, "A large part of the township is covered with marshes, here and there alternatively interspersed by high prairie land, wherein the gravel having been burned, grow very tall weeds." Wood was very scarce throughout the whole township, only a few groves of willow, spruce, and poplar were seen. Water could be found during the spring in almost every low marsh, but these soon dried up in summer, so that it became necessary to dig for water. Lippe thought well of this township: "Notwithstanding [some] disadvantages, about 1/2 of this township is of good farming land and my opinion is that (putting aside the costs for fire wood, and water) the most part of the township would in general be found good for agricultural purposes."

Thomas Cheesman surveyed township 7-5 in spring, and though he reports that it was not as wet as 7-4, he says the wet spots were more pronounced, and that at places there was one to two feet of water on the land. Consequently tall rank grasses grew at many places.

The cause of [the] flooding is the drainage of township 7 in the 6th range is brought down to section 23 by what is known in the country as a sully, where it terminates and water flows over parts of section 22 and 27-33. Similarly another cully empties itself into section 5, and spreads over a portion of that and 6, 7, and 8.

Cheesman reports that: "the greater portion of this township is level prairies, undulating slightly on the western side." (Off shore bars of Lake Agassiz.) There was little timber in this township, and that of inferior growth, since it was much damaged by fire. It consisted principally of poplar and willows, with tamarack in section 6 and 8.

Cheesman also surveyed township 7-6, and thought very highly of it. He described the northern two tiers as level prairie, except for the timbered parts shown in Figure 3. These woods grew on the Lake Agassiz beaches, described by Cheesman as, "moderately high gravelly land with some large granite stones intermixed." The southern part of township 7-6, "is undulating, intersected with cullies or ravines which effectually drain it of all surface water." Except for a few ponds these cullies (gullies) were dry in summer, but there were a few valuable springs here. Cheesman said the "soil was a deep clay loam, easily worked and well adapted for agricultural purposes." The beds of the gullies produced heavy crops of hay of superior quality. Poplar was the most common tree. As in other areas it had been much damaged by fire, and was young, though of vigorous growth. Three squatters had already settled in this township when Cheesman made his survey.

To the south of the correction line the land was not nearly so open. All these townships were more or less timbered, poorly drained, and heavily burdened with stones.



A.W. Lippe considered the northern (principally the northwest) part of township 6-5 suitable for farming, since it contained a large extent of prairie. Some wood still remained but fire had done extensive damage. Southward the country was described as undulating, and in Lippe's estimation the quality of the soil deteriorated, consisting of light sandy soil with an admixture of gravel. Boulders of large size were also frequently met with. Lippe said that recent fires had nearly completely destroyed the former timber, and been replaced by a second growth of young poplar and various weeds, which from time to time would probably become a prey to the same element. Lippe concludes his estimate of the southern part of township 6-5 with the statement: "I consider this part of the township as offering but slight advantages in an agricultural point of view." He was right!

David Sadler surveyed township 6-6 in the fall 1872. Most of this township was covered with brush, largely second growth poplar and willows. Sadler says that this township "at one time [was] thickly wooded with large poplar and tamarack. Bluffs that have escaped the fire still remain, the timber in which is of sufficient size for building purposes." This township, just as township 6-5, was definitely not completely forested. Sadler, in his traverse, lists poplars, willows, scrub, and most frequently prairie with bush. The surface of the township was described as rolling, and the land was thought to be of poor quality. The southern sections were too low and swampy, and the western sections, (containing some beaches) had too many boulders. In general the soil was described as light and mixed with sand and gravel. The northern tier of sections was considered most desirable for settlement; they were chiefly prairie, and the soil was good and free from stone. Also good clumps of trees for building timber were nearby.

William Burke surveyed township 5-5 and did not think too highly of it. He described it as being well timbered but containing very inferior soil for agricultural purposes.

Timber is chiefly poplar and willow of various dimensions with occasional heavy bush or scrub. Soil is generally of a sandy, gravelly, stony nature, which must render its successful cultivation a matter of some difficulty. A considerable portion of this township is covered with drift, consisting of large granitic limestone and other boulders. A fine meandering stream of fresh water, the East Branch of Rat Creek wends its shining waters through the south west corner of the township.

J.B. Richard thought even less of township 5-6 for settlement purposes. It was not as stony as township 6-6 but it was even wetter. In his description the patches of dry land are remarked on, a departure from the more usual practice of citing the wet areas.

Township is a level surface, its soil is totally unfit for farming purposes, alternating from wet and marshy to a coarse sandy and stony soil. The woods which cover its surface are also of a very inferior and stunted kind, the exception of a few spots where a very small proportion of tress can be found, good and large enough to be used in the construction of buildings.

Spruce was found in the eastern part of the township, the first mention of its occurrence in the Reserve. Every now and then tall, thick timber, especially poplar, is mentioned. Water of course was abundant.

John Grant surveyed township 4-6 in November and December so that he could not give a sound evaluation of the agricultural possibilities of the township. For example, most marshes and bogs are classified as hay marshes. His descriptions give the impression that this is a better township for agriculture than the two to the north. "Soil is generally a light clay loam except in the S.W. where it is stony and gravelly..." "On both banks of the East Branch of the Rat River there are some fine bottom lands which are well wooded with poplar." He says that "in the S.E. there are some fine hay meadows." In Grant's opinion the northern tiers were not quite as good, since they were well wooded with tamarack, poplar, and spruce. He did not praise township 4-6, nor did he damn it, like Sadler and Richard did townships 5-5 and 5-6.

### West Reserve

L. Kennedy reported in 1875 that township 1-1E

consists principally of beautiful undulating Prairie intersected...by the bed of the River aux Marais, which contains in some places ponds of water. Only timber in the townships grows along the said river, and is very limited, and barely sufficient for the sections on which it grows; dwarf oak and basswood with much scrub constitute its general character.

The township was thoroughly drained by various coulees, containing desirable grass in summer. Kennedy said that this township offered an excellent inducement for settlers because water could easily be obtained by digging, the Red River timber belt was within a convenient distance, and there was the prospect of a good market at Emerson. At the time of the survey two Anglo-Saxons were already squatting in this township.

Between the Principal Meridian and the Escarpment, the landscape consisted mostly of grassland, yet the surveyors found considerable variations. Kennedy said that township 1-1W:

comprises very rich soil well drained by watercourses, and commands a beautiful view of the Pembina River belt of timber to the South and also that of the Red River to the East. The only timber that this township contains stands in Sect. 5 & 8 and will soon be appropriated for building purposes. Generally the township is rolling prairie and adapted for immediate cultivation there being little or no low land.

In short, this was ideal farm land, open prairie, yet still not too far from timber. Kennedy gave similar descriptions of township 1-2 and 1-3, surveyed by him in 1875. He had an eye for both arable and livestock farming land, emphasizing that immediate cultivation was possible on the prairie, and that water for stock would have to be obtained in summer by sinking wells because the water courses were dry. He also mentioned that wild meadow and heavy reedy grasses were commonly found in the depressions, especially in township 1-3. There was timber in these townships.

In township 1-4 the character of the prairie was beginning to change—the Escarpment was ahead. Some of the run off from the Pembina Mountains accumulated here in pools. Kennedy says: "this township assumes more of a low character, some parts of it being well supplied with water in small lakes or ponds, and in two or three instances by pools in dry water courses." Consequently he believed that

the land was especially well adapted for stock raising, owing to the abundance of hay and water. In the southwest corner, flanking the Escarpment, Kennedy reported timber. But before we describe that area we will examine the reports on the townships to the north of those just described.

Very few comments were made on the terrain in the second tier of townships. Messrs. W. & D. Beatty surveyed these townships in 1872. Of township 2-1 they say: "level prairie, soil black loam,...all fit for settlement." Little more is said of townships 2-2, and 2-3. They mention that there is a heavy clay in the odd section, and that surface water can be found in the gullies. On the whole they are non-committal about the agricultural possibilities, probably because most of the surveyors had an eye out for livestock farming, and these townships had neither grass nor water. But the soil was always praised. Township 2-4 differed very little from the townships to the east, but there the Beattys reported that the terrain was slightly undulating in places and that, "two small islands of oak and black ash woods lie near the center." They say little more about township 2-5, but emphasize that "a belt of very fine oak woods, say 30 chains in width goes through the southerly tier of sections in which are laid off 26 wood lots."

In the third tier of townships practically the same sequence of landscapes was repeated, except that the soil was generally heavier and the drainage poorer (see Figure 1). John Grant surveyed these townships in 1872. Of township 3-1 Grant said:

This township is open Prairie principally level and flat, with heavy stiff clay soil forming a good Hay Land. In the S.W. portion the soil is a light clay loam with a gentle slope to the south. In the S.W. portion of the township there is a fine body of water abounding with game. [This was the large slough called Buffalo Lake.]

Grant's description of township 3-2 is essentially the same, again stressing the hay land and the abundance of water. He also mentions that ridges (Lake Agassiz beaches) were found in the centre of the township. This type of terrain continues into township 3-3, though at the time of the survey in August it appears to have been considerably wetter than the townships just described. There were absolutely no trees in township 3-3, and except for a small muskeg on the west side of the township the whole area was considered splendid arable land.

William Burke surveyed township 3-4, and in his report he gives the impression that it was not too well drained. In the northwest part of the township there was a belt of "splendid heavy timber of elm, oak and poplar." Burke concluded that "the land is well adapted for hay and grazing purposes but capable of being brought into high cultivation."

The surveyors were more impressed with the land near the Escarpment than with the open prairie as C.J. Bouchette's report in township 3-5 indicates.

I have to report most favourably of this township it being also a beautiful rolling country well watered by streams and springs, it has also fine shrubs of large oak very valuable for building purposes. The soil is a fine black mould, being covered with a rich growth of grass, very valuable for grazing purposes. In concluding I may say that it is a most desirable township and emigrants will not be disappointed with it.

High praise indeed!

The southwestern part of the Reserve, township 1-5 and 1-6, surveyed by L. Kennedy in 1875, is traversed by the Escarpment and provides more pronounced examples of the terrain described by Burke in township 3-5. Scrub and timber was encountered in section 1, township 1-5 and continued westward, because Pembina Mountain encroaches upon the southwest corner of the township, extending from section 33 in the north to section 2 in the south.

Towards the base of the mountain the soil gradually becomes lighter and boulders abound. The ascent for 1 1/2 miles is gradual by different terraces until finally a steep ascent of from 100-150' brings us to the first grand elevation which still further ascends to Section No. 5 on the International Boundary and from that point assumes the character of table land covered with dense scrub, poplars etc. and to the north poplar and oak groves.

In Kennedy's opinion, "This township in many places presents beautiful locations for settlement being well supplied with water and fuel, although some parts are difficult to access. The most desirable locations are in the vicinity of the foot of the mountains..."

Kennedy did not regard the land above the Escarpment as suitable for agriculture. This is evident from his description of township 1-6.

This township is entirely within the mountain range and is for the most part intersected by deep ravines of from 100-250' in depth occasioned by the various small streams which take their rise in the small marshes of lowlands met with at the top of the mountains. It is along these streams and ravines that the principal portion of the timber stands. The timber is principally poplar though there is some elm in the middle and southern portions of the township; the timber in the northern tier of sections is principally oak of fair dimensions.

He described the Pembina River (a glacial spillway) stating that "the valley is 1 to 3/4 miles in width, and has a depth of about 300'." He attributes the prevalence of fallen timber and abundance of grass to the many destructive fires that occur in the area.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the original *Surveyors Field Note Books* in the Surveys Branch, Department of Mines and Natural Resources, Winnipeg. All quotations are taken from the *Note Books*.



## Appendix B

### Vegetation, Soils and Terrain<sup>1</sup>

The Manitoba Central Lowland lies in the transition area of central Canada where the grasslands gradually give way to forest vegetation (Figures 3 and 5). In the eastern portion of the East Reserve there is sufficient precipitation to support woodland, but the West Reserve is somewhat drier and therefore is prairie. The difference in average annual precipitation between Morden and Sprague is only about three inches but this is great enough to cause this variation in vegetation.

**Table 34**  
**Precipitation and Temperature Statistics**

	J.	F.	M.	A.	M.	J.	J.	A.	S.	O.	N.	D.	Annual Average
	Morden												
precipitation	0.72	0.67	0.95	1.25	1.92	3.10	2.44	1.76	1.84	1.16	0.89	0.84	17.54
temperature	1	5	21	39	52	62	68	65	56	42	27	10	37
	Morris												
precipitation	0.77	0.73	0.96	1.03	1.63	2.84	2.49	2.05	2.28	1.37	1.08	0.67	17.9
temperature	0	4	19	38	54	64	70	67	55	41	24	8	37
	Sprague												
precipitation	0.88	0.89	1.04	1.29	2.03	2.99	2.76	2.36	2.20	1.51	1.44	0.87	20.26
temperature	2	4	17	36	51	60	65	61	52	38	22	5	34

(Department of Transport)

The difference in precipitation is also indirectly indicated by the fact that the depression in the grasslands of the West Reserve tend to be saline whereas similar depression in wooded parts of the East Reserve tend to be peaty and slightly acid. But the balance of factors controlling the natural vegetation is so fine in South Central Manitoba that a change in any one of a number of conditions will produce a change in vegetation.

This is particularly true in the West Reserve where there is only sufficient precipitation to support grass vegetation generally, but in some places the local soil climate is sufficiently wet to support trees. Along the floodplains of the creeks, for instance, trees find enough moisture to grow, and the broken terrain along the Pembina Escarpment is also forested. At Morden the annual average precipitation is less than at Morris but trees grown on the northern and eastern exposures of the dissected scarp, where there tends to be less evaporation and snow remains longer in spring. Once trees have taken hold they produce local cool moist soil conditions and so the trees have spread over the entire face of the Escarpment. On the lower slopes the trees are generally larger because the land is somewhat sheltered from winds causing a lower rate of evaporation, and also the lower slopes have the advantage of receiving additional water from the run off of the higher areas. The

higher slopes, indeed, often have a grass cover because of the loss of moisture through surface run off. Decrease in temperatures through higher elevations does not appear to be a critical factor here because west of the broken crest of the Escarpment grassland dominates.

The East Reserve is located where the grassland changes to woodland as a result of increased precipitation (Figure 3). Within the Reserve transition trees such as oak, willow and poplar are more common than the spruces which are associated with the wetter areas close to the Lake of the Woods, showing that this district is just on the margins of the forest zone. As a result changes in texture of the parent material cause local variations in soil climate which may produce changes in vegetation. For instance an aquifer charged with water in the sandy area of Southeastern Manitoba produces springs in township 7-6 permitting the growth of trees in the midst of prairie (Figure 3).

The soils of Southeastern Manitoba have been classified into three soil zones, all present in the East Reserve (Figure 35). The Black Earth soil zone is almost entirely confined to the seventh tier of townships. These soils were developed on the lacustral deposits of Lake Agassiz, in an area where there is a rise of only 75 feet in 18 miles, and two thirds of this in the eastern-most township. Hence the drainage improves from west to east. Township 7-4 is practically flat, only relieved from complete monotony by a few gently rising Lake Agassiz off-shore bars and silt covered gravel beaches, that impede the drainage towards the west and cause marshes to form in the inter-beach areas. Township 7-5 does not have the succession of ridges, but is handicapped because "foreign water" from the east is dumped on it in spring. The land is so flat that before drainage channels were dredged it used to take weeks for the water to move off in spring, so that permanent hay meadows resulted in some areas.

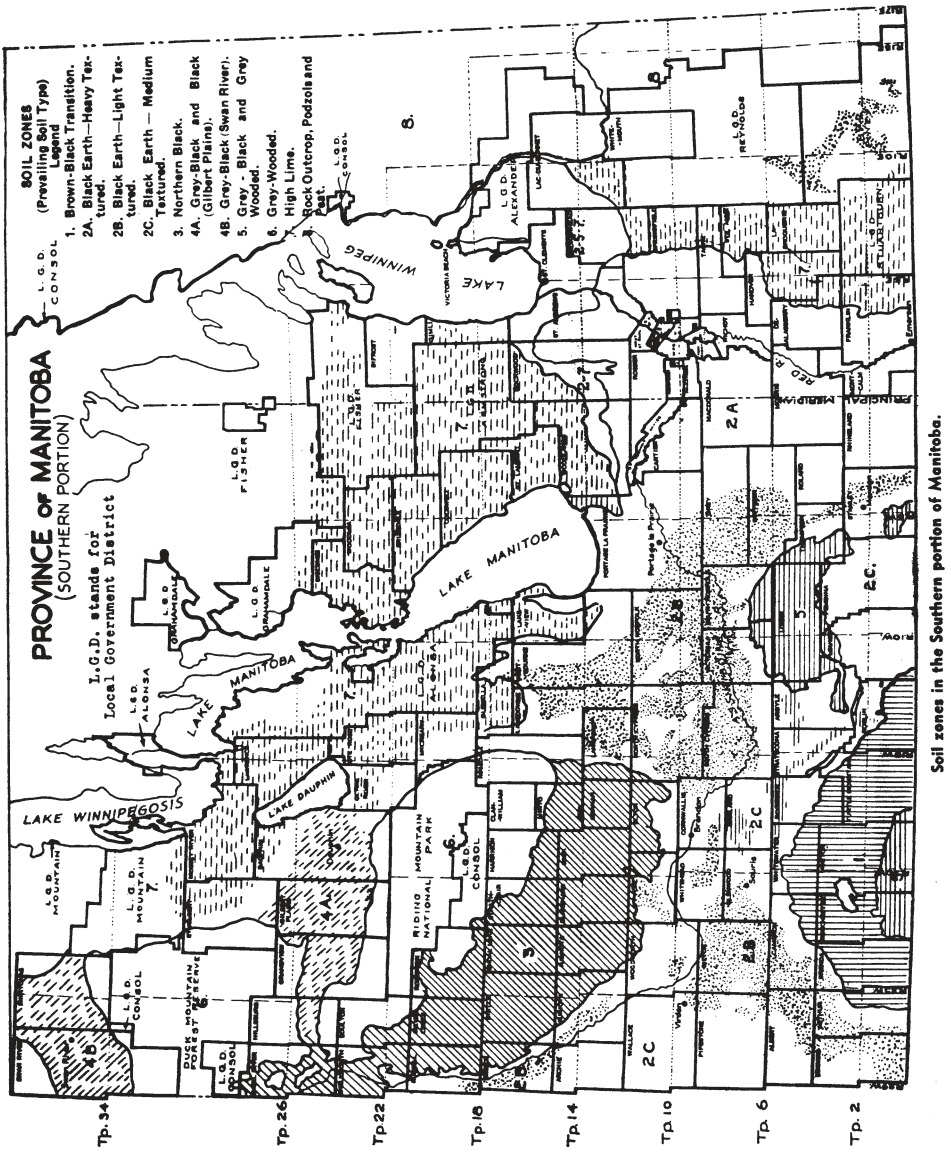
The Grey-Black Transitional soil zone thrusts an extension into the southern part of the township. Township 7-6 is still in the lowland but the land is rising, and there are sufficient natural channels to drain the water effectively and expeditiously, even in spring.

The character of the country changes abruptly south of tier 7, where the Grey-Black transitional and the Grey Wooded soil zones are found. Even today a journey along the Piney Highway, which follows the line between townships 6 and 7, provides a glimpse of two different landscapes. To the north is an open, rather uninspiring, monotonous plain, to the south is a bush covered countryside, with a few farms scattered here and there. From northwest to southeast this southern area increases in elevation from 800 to 975 feet. It was covered at one time by glacial Lake Agassiz, but the present terrain is a complex of land forms.

Much of the southern area has an even surface: the result of the deposition of ground moraine beneath the ice sheet, followed by wave erosion during the existence of Lake Agassiz and finally by the deposition of a thin mantle of lacustral and alluvial deposits of sand, silt and clay. In places the surface is very stony because of the scouring action of the lake waves on glacial till which washed away the fine material and left the boulders. Beach deposits of sand and gravel are found in many parts of the area. Some beaches extend for miles and in pioneer times were used for roads through area which otherwise would have been nearly inaccessible.



Figure 35



These ridges are usually five to ten feet high and a few hundred feet wide. In many places the beaches have acted as dams and impeded the drainage.

Woodland has invaded the area, and forests became increasingly dense to the south and east, so that the area passes from the Grey-Wooded Transitional to the Grey-Wooded soil zone in the southeastern part of township 5-6. The area is characterized by relatively smooth though still undulating terrain, with aspen covered flats, oak on the gravel ridges, and open meadows in the poorly drained depressions.

The quality of the land in the East Reserve deteriorates from north to south. There is not much change in slope towards the south, but the poorly drained areas are of greater extent, bogs are more prevalent, there is a denser more vigorous growth of trees, and the soils are more leached and not quite as fertile.

The elevation of the Central Lowland at the foot of the Pembina Escarpment is about 1,000 feet, about 36 miles east at Emerson it is about 790 feet (Figure 2). The first 100 feet of this 210 foot drop occur within seven miles of the Escarpment, and the remaining 110 feet are spread over the next 29 miles. In the last 12 miles before the Red River there is only a drop of 25 feet. The Pembina Escarpment trends northwestward from the United States Boundary so that northwards the same differences in elevation are spread over a longer horizontal distance resulting in a very gentle gradient. As Figure 2 shows the contours parallel the trend of the Escarpment so that the drop in elevation is really towards the northeast, rather than directly eastward.

This extremely low gradient has caused serious drainage problems in the West Reserve. Streams simply have not had the time to cut continuous channels on the flat lake plain since the last glaciation. Accordingly the re-entrant streams issuing from the Escarpment maintain reasonably well defined courses for only about 20 miles and then their waters spread over the land in wide shallow floods. This problem is especially serious in the northeastern part of the Reserve where the waters from the west (and even from the southern part of the Reserve) tend to meet before continuing to the Red River. The two southern rows of townships on the Reserve are protected from these floods by the gentle slope to the north and by the Pembina River to the south which has a well defined channel right to the Red River.

The soils of the northern and eastern parts of the West Reserve are Black Earths formed from clay deposits laid down in the deeper waters of Lake Agassiz. This is very flat monotonous terrain. To the south lies the Altona-Emerson sub-area of the Central Lowland, with a surface consisting of lacustro-littoral and deltaic deposits (Figure 1). The terrain is smooth, but not entirely flat because the many depression channels formed by spring freshets, and some low sandy beaches, provide some micro-relief, especially towards the west. These Black Earth are lighter textured than the clays to the north. Right at the foot of the Escarpment there are some sandy textured Black Earth soils, and along the Escarpment itself there are Grey-Wooded soils.

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on field observations, interviews with Prof. J.H. Ellis, topographic maps, and J.H. Ellis and W.H. Shofer, *Report of Reconnaissance Soil Survey of South-Central Manitoba*, Manitoba Dept. of Agriculture, 1943, and W.A. Ehrlich, E.A. Poyser, L.E. Pratt, and J.H. Ellis, *Report of Reconnaissance Soil Survey of Winnipeg and Morris Map Sheet Area*, Manitoba Dept. of Agriculture, 1953.

## Appendix C

### The Mennonites in Russia<sup>1</sup>

The Mennonites are a Protestant denomination, followers of Menno Simons (1492-1559) after whose Christian name they have been called since 1542. Simons was a Catholic priest in Friesland, who got caught up in the general ferment of the Protestant movement of the early 16th century in Northern Europe. His teachings, by which the Mennonites can still be distinguished, include the rejection of infant baptism, swearing under oath, and the shedding of human blood. The last tenant has really been the important factor in causing the Mennonites to migrate from one country to another, because the Mennonites usually have preferred migration from one country to another to submitting to military service. Followers of Simons were found in two areas in the first half of the 16th century, Switzerland and the Netherlands. It was the Mennonites who were descended from the latter group who eventually found their way to Manitoba.

### Movement to South Russia

During the military despotism and religious persecutions of the Duke of Alva in the Netherlands (1568-1573), many religious refugees left the Low Countries. Poland permitted considerable religious freedom, and many sects, including the Mennonites, settled on the Vistula-Nogal Delta, in the vicinity of Danzig. Here the Frieslanders, experienced in constructing drainage works, were a decided asset because the delta had to be drained before it could be farmed. But still the Mennonites were molested. They prospered, and therein lay their difficulty, because frequent expropriations were made of their properties, and their business activities were restricted. There was no religious persecution, but the Mennonites were economically insecure, and never free from the merciless exploitation of the Poles. Conditions deteriorated further after the first partition of Poland in 1772, when the Mennonites came under Prussian rule. A few switched to the Lutheran faith to escape the Prussian restrictions, but most began to think of finding a new home. At this juncture in 1786, a timely invitation arrived from Russia to come and settle there.

Russia was in sore need of farmers. New Russia, as the southern part of Russia was then called, was populated by a few nomadic people, and some inefficient farmers living along the river banks, who contributed nothing to the Russian economy. The only way to stabilize this land and make it productive was to settle it with a permanent agricultural population. Russia did not have enough people to colonize the area, so Queen Catherine decided to issue manifestos inviting foreigners to migrate to Russia and develop these lands. The first manifesto was published in 1762, but the Mennonites as a group did not pay any attention to the invitation to settle in South Russia, until 1786, three years after the area had finally been wrested from the Turks. But the more uncertain the Mennonites' position in the Vistula-Nogal Delta became, the greater was the attraction to migrate to Russia.

Like most others, the Mennonite migrations always have been motivated in two ways; by an impelling force generated by local conditions, and by an attractive force, generated by the promises of the rulers of the new land and by its economic

potentialities. The first force has usually been the most important for the Mennonites. As a consequence the peace loving Mennonites, like other peoples who are not forceful enough to shape their own destinies, have had to be involuntary pioneers; yet to their credit it must be said that once they are engaged on an enterprise, they have always managed to do as well, or better, than others. But the fact remains that usually they are driven out by governmental decrees, and it is no zest for adventure which has led them on.

### Natural Conditions

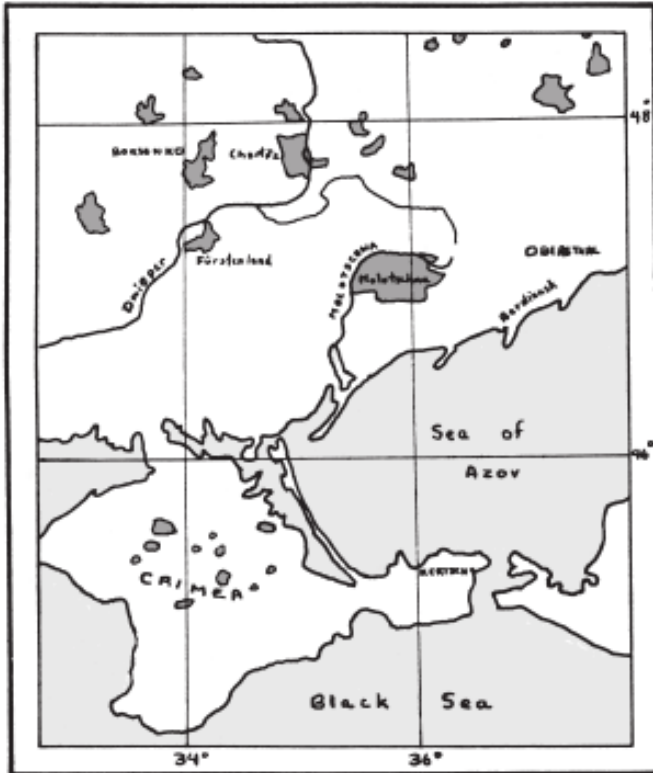
In moving from the North German Plain to the steppes of South Russia the Mennonites had to adjust themselves to a new environment, an environment similar to that which they later encountered in Manitoba. We can regard the Mennonite experiences in South Russia from 1786 to the 1870's as an intermediary acclimatizing stage where they gained the experience which later was to prove so useful in Manitoba. The Mennonite colonization of South Russia was a major step, environmentally speaking, on the way to Manitoba.

The Mennonites experienced a greater change in natural conditions in moving from the Delta to South Russia, than in moving from South Russia to Manitoba. The Vistula-Nogal Delta is a low lying area, much of it no more than 30 feet above the sea. It was a marshy area and as a result *Marschbufendörfer* had been widely established by the settlers. There is much more cyclonic activity in this area than in either South Russia or Manitoba, and the precipitation is not only higher (25-30" annually), but it is more reliable. Since this area is generally under the influence of Maritime Polar air it does not have the extremes of temperature of the other regions, which are dominated by cold, dry Continental Polar air masses in winter and by hot, dry Continental Tropical air masses in summer.

South Russia is not as cold in winter as southern Manitoba. Its mean January temperature is about 24 degrees Fahrenheit, considerably higher than the 0 degrees Fahrenheit mean January temperature of southern Manitoba. That of Danzig is 30 degrees Fahrenheit. South Russia is also warmer in summer. Its mean July temperature is in the low 70's, whereas that of Southern Manitoba is in the upper 60's, and that of Danzig in the low 60's. Manitoba can count on a frost free season of about 100 days. That of South Russia is considerably longer, ranging from 150 to 200 or more days, which is quite similar to the growing season of the North American corn belt. Annual temperature ranges summarize the differences in climate. In Danzig the mean annual temperature range is about 35 degrees Fahrenheit, in South Russia about 47 degrees Fahrenheit, and in Manitoba about 64 degrees Fahrenheit.

Precipitation is definitely lower in South Russia than in the Red River Lowland where about 20" of precipitation falls annually, with a pronounced summer maximum; almost 10" falls in June, July and August alone. In the Russian areas inhabited by the Mennonites the annual precipitation averages about 13.5 to 16". Of this about 10" falls from April to October. This is a favourable rainfall regime for agriculture and the summer concentration of rain is very similar to that of Manitoba. Precipitation in South Russia is so low that dust storms were common in the Mennonite settlements, something that is very unusual in southern Manitoba.

Figure 36



**MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS  
IN SOUTHERN RUSSIA  
c.1895**

60 Miles

From Peffermann's 1998, p. 12.

The natural vegetation of South Russia consisted of grassland. The great Russian Atlas calls it "feather grass chaco". The Mennonite settlements on the Dnieper also had some intrazonal vegetation on the lands bordering on the river. These lands were covered with meadow, and some brush and forest. The Russian grasslands were quite similar to those of Manitoba but not quite as rich. In South Russia the grass was not nearly as thick because the precipitation is less, evaporation greater, and the terrain is well drained with very few depressions. The southern part of South Russia is not a lacustral plain like the Red River Lowland, but is composed of alluvial deposits of Riss age. These deposits were not covered by the Wurm loess as so much of South Russia is, and the area is thoroughly dissected by stream channels, gullies and ravines. Surface water is scarce, the many waterways carry away the spring run-off quickly so that only the main streams flow in summer. Consequently the whole appearance of the landscape is markedly different from that of the Red River Lowland. In Manitoba the greater portion of the Mennonite lands range from 700 to 900 feet A.S.L. compared with the 300 to 400 feet of South Russia. But the Manitoba plain is a flat, depositional feature, whereas South Russia is an erosional and residual feature with extensive flat interfluves separated by sharply entrenched rivers.

In both Manitoba and South Russia the Mennonite settlements were established on Black Earth soils. The *Chortitza* and *Bergthal* settlements were on typical chernozems containing a moderate amount of humus, but the *Molotschna* and *Fürstenland* settlements lay further south (See Figure 36) and these soils contain only a low amount of humus. In fact, the *Molotschna* soils are very similar to dark chestnut soils.

Though the environmental conditions in Manitoba and South Russia are roughly equivalent they are not identical. Basically both are grass land areas with fertile Black Earth soils. Each is subjected to interior continental climatic conditions with great seasonal variations in temperature and a low and variable annual precipitation. Winter temperatures are definitely not as severe in South Russia as they are in Manitoba, but other than that Manitoba would appear to have the advantage in precipitation, in natural vegetation, and soils. Interviews with Mennonite farmers who have farmed in both South Russia and Manitoba bear out these conclusions based on climatic and soils reports. Yet in the opinion of a few individuals the milder winter and the longer growing season, which permit more fruit growing, cancel out the other physical advantages of Manitoba.

### Settlement

Mennonite migrations, from that of 1788 from the Danzig area to South Russia, until the migration of 1958 from Mexico to British Honduras, have all been similar. In each case delegates have been sent to look over the land and arrange for the terms of settlement before the main body of settlers move out. In all migrations the delegates have acted on behalf of a large number of people, a situation which has given them considerable bargaining power. The conditions for which the Mennonites have always asked (generally known as privileges), consist basically of the allotment of a contiguous block of land for all their people, permission to control their own affairs as much as possible, freedom of worship, and exemption



from military service. Further, since the Mennonite migrations have never been fortuitous movements, but always planned migrations of large numbers of people, the migrants have naturally tended to bring along their culture, including their land survey, their architecture, and even their land use practices. Many countries, including Russia, Canada, Mexico, Paraguay, and to some extent the United States have been happy to grant the Mennonites their demands, because they were thereby assured of getting a large number of experienced agriculturists.

The Prussian Mennonites settled in two large settlements in South Russia. From 1788 to 1796 approximately 350 families settled in Chortitza, the original settlement. After 1801, the Prussian Mennonites were subjected to harsher edicts, so another 365 Mennonite families migrated to the Molotschna settlement between 1803 and 1806. These were the two important migrations which established the largest settlements (Figure 36) though other Mennonites continued to come in until 1840. The Mennonites were not entirely satisfied with the lands they had been granted, but the Russian government turned a deaf ear to their complaints and they had to survive as best they could in this totally unfamiliar environment.

The Russian government did not grant land to individual Mennonites in the original settlements. Land remained the property of the state, but it was used as though it was the common property of the inhabitants of each colony or village. Each farmer had a right only to a definite share of the colony land, not to a definite plot. This system ensured the continued existence of the colony, because no farmers could disrupt the village by taking his land out of the colony.

There was little supervision by the Russians. The government gave each farmer 65 dessiatines of land (approximately 180 acres), and their officials designated the location of each colony, and laid out the boundary by metes and bounds. The land distribution was left to the colonists, and at first, naturally enough, they followed the system with which they had been familiar in the Nogat-Vistula Delta.

On the Nogat-Vistula Delta the lands had been wet, and all areas had been well supplied with trees, meadow, and water. Rural settlement there had been in *Marschufendörfer*, each farmer lived on his own rectangular block of land, and the various plots and houses of each settlement fronted on the main road. Farms stretched side by side in long narrow strips or *Gelange*, each supposedly containing everything needed for farming, meadowland by the stream, beyond which lay the arable, grazing and forest land. This is what the Mennonites probably hoped to transplant into South Russia and their first settlements were surveyed in this manner.

Eight villages were established in 1790 in *Chortitza*. At first the houses, mostly sod huts or *Semljanka*, were separated by a considerable distance, and each farmer lived on his own agricultural land as had been their custom. But this method of surveying land did not survive long enough to even establish whether it was suitable on the steppe. The Mennonites had barely had time to complete their initial settlement when the depredation of bandits, robbing them and even endangering their lives, forced them to move closer together into a more compact settlement so that they could protect themselves as effectively as possible.<sup>2</sup> Thus the move into compact *Strassendörfer* was accomplished early, and this form of settlement was adopted by all subsequent migrants from Prussia.



A precisely surveyed field system was slow in developing because it required many years of trial and error experimentation before a suitable land use for this area was discovered; until 1800 it sometimes even appeared doubtful whether South Russia could be farmed, as crop failure succeeded crop failure. In these years of subsistence farming the acreage cultivated remained small, and each village's arable land was all in one contiguous piece, or *Gewann*. All the farmers in a village tilled their fields close together in this *Gewann* as a protection against the nomads. Then beginning in 1801, instructions designed to improve the agricultural practices of the settlers of South Russia were issued by the Russian government. The Mennonites were asked to introduce the three field system and to experiment with different systems of farming.<sup>3</sup> There was little arable agriculture carried on at this time, and these instructions were not followed immediately. Economic pressure proved a much more powerful stimulus to systematize the surveys of the village lands. As arable agriculture became increasingly important in the 1830's and 1840's and as more land was broken, it became apparent that a more rigid survey system would have to be adopted. The Russians continued to issue instructions demanding that all the arable land in a colony be divided into three or more open fields, so that all the arable land in each colony was eventually divided into *Gewanne*, the simplest way of carrying out these instructions, and a continuation of their earlier practices in South Russia.

The *Gewannflur* itself was divided into various parcels by the settlers themselves. Forests, swamps, meadows and unarable area were reserved for common use. The arable land was divided into as many *Gewanne* as the particular characteristics of the land belonging to each village dictated—there never were less than the three fields. Each *Gewann* was then further apportioned into strips for individual use according to the number of lots in the village. The land was well adapted for this system. It was reasonably level, and it was grassland that did not require clearing. Further, it is important in surveying *Gewanne* that a fixed and practicable plan be ready from the first, and that a well organized community be there to implement it. Since the Mennonites had been allotted a limited area for the use of each colony beyond which it could not expand, the *Gewanne* survey ensured that there would be an equitable distribution of the arable land. This was important because the Mennonites did not periodically redistribute the land as was customary in the Russian *mirs*. Only in rare instances was the land redistributed, and then only if an initial mistake had been made in laying out the *Gewann*, so that a change would improve cultural practices in the colony.

If possible the village was located on a stream. Close by would be the common pastures and meadows, so that the livestock could be under the constant surveillance of the farmers to protect them from marauding nomadic rustlers. Beyond the grassland lay the three (or more) large *Gewanne*, laid out according to a rough land capability classification. Each farmer had one or more strips of land (*Kagel*) in each *Gewann* so that the land was equitably distributed. There were roads through each *Gewann* so that every farmer had individual access to his fields. Hence there was no need for *Flurzwang* where field operations had to be executed simultaneously by the whole community. Often this was done anyway, merely as a convenience, and not through compulsion.

By the 1840's every village in the Mennonite settlements was a *Gewann* village. Despite the factors favouring the *Gewann* survey in South Russia it appears evident that the shift from *Gelange* fields to *Gewann* fields was really a retrogressive step from the standpoint of agricultural efficiency in an area suited to extensive agriculture, as South Russia became after 1830. Fortunately there was one redeeming feature in the Mennonites *Gewann* village. Mennonites did not permit any undue fragmentation of holdings so that excessively small fields scattered through the various *Gewanne* did not commonly develop.

The Mennonite settlements developed by themselves, almost entirely undisturbed by the Russians. A form of local self-government, later introduced into Manitoba, was introduced by the "Instructions of 1801" mentioned previously. Each village was under the authority of a *Schulz* or Reeve, elected by the landowners of the village to whom he was responsible. The *Schulz*, often with the help of the ministers, managed village affairs. Matters concerning an entire settlement were dealt with by an assembly of *Schulzes* from each of the villages, presided over by a member elected from this group called the *Oberschulz*. Government was simple. Each village was responsible for collecting the taxes demanded by the State, for maintenance of the local roads, schools, and churches, and for discipline in the village. Under these conditions a very self-sufficient people developed. German was spoken in the homes, a few Mennonites knew Russian, and they worshipped in peace. They were largely unaffected by outside affairs, especially since transportation facilities were poor (indeed the Mennonites were unaffected by the railway right until the time of the migration to Canada).

At first there was little social differentiation among the Mennonites themselves, although there was always a tendency to feel superior to any of the neighbouring Russians. But land use was the only source of wealth, and after a time a cleavage developed between the landowners and the landless, the latter living as cotters on the outskirts of each village. This increasing pressure on the land was an important reason for the migration to Canada.

All the Mennonite communities were conservative. The family was always patriarchal, traditions were strong, and beliefs and patterns of behaviour were rigid and dogmatic. There was little modernism since contact with the outside world was limited. Right down to the 1870's there were no trading centres among the Mennonites; the only form of settlement was the nucleated farm settlement. Trading was done by cash or barter among themselves, by annual or semi-annual journeys to the grain ports of the Black Sea or to some of the larger Russian interior centres, and most important of all, goods were frequently brought to the settlements by Jewish peddlers. There were a few artisans in some of the villages and one or two Mennonites did a little trading, but at the time of the migration to Manitoba no commercial class had developed. Mennonites were farmers, and trade was looked on with disapproval. Yet there was room for individual initiative in agriculture. Amongst any group of people agricultural progress is usually in the hands of the large enterprising landowners. The leading Mennonite farmers were the best and most enterprising in Russia, and they lifted the entire Mennonite area up along with themselves, until it was generally recognized that the Mennonite settlements were the most progressive farming districts in all Russia.

### Agricultural Development

The Mennonite agricultural trials in South Russia provided them with the experience which later enabled them to settle in southern Manitoba without too much difficulty. The first permanent Mennonite settlement in South Russia dated from 1789. For the next eleven years the government subsidized many of the Mennonites, because there was no staple which had an assured outside market at that time. Both government and colonist began to wonder whether a farming settlement could be established, because subsistence agriculture was clearly impossible on the Steppe.

Crops were destroyed by drought and grasshoppers, winters were cold and much of the livestock which had been brought along was lost. The Mennonites were getting nowhere because they were isolated farmers with little contact with the outside world, and with few markets and those at a long distance. They needed some authoritative leader with a wide vision to direct them until a market developed which would take their products. The appointment in 1800 of Contenius, a Russian States Counsellor, to the post of "*Vormundschaftskontor für Ausländische Ansiedler*", really an agricultural extension service position, proved to be of great importance to the Mennonites. It is doubtful whether the Mennonites could have really made the adjustment to the new environment if it had not been for the help of men such as Contenius (later they showed their appreciation by naming one of their villages after him). Contenius (as did all the Mennonites) realized that the area needed a light product which could be transported easily, so he commenced to stress sheep raising in order to produce wool for export. This was part of a general program for improving the sheep industry in South Russia. Through the efforts of Contenius the government advanced the funds that made it possible for the Mennonites to become noted sheep raisers. By the 1820's the average Mennonite farmer had about 125 to 150 sheep, and some had flocks numbering thousands. The wool was easily transported and found a ready market in the mills of Ekaterinaslaw, and the wool markets of Poltava and England. The peak production was reached in the 1830's. After that there was considerable competition from Australian and South American wool in the European market, accompanied by a decline in wool prices.

Sheep alone did not save the Mennonite settlements in the crucial early years. Mennonites introduced the East Frisian cow as a dairy animal to South Russia and crossbred it with the cattle already there. Dairy products such as butter and cheese found a ready sale in Berdiansk, Sevastopol, Kerch, Taganrog and Ekaterinaslaw. Cattle were driven to market to be sold as beef. Mennonites also bred horses, crossing their horses with the best Russian stock.

As the Mennonite population continued to increase it became evident that greater returns had to be realized from the limited land at their disposal. Sheep raising required too much land, so the Mennonites began to make adjustments in their land use. They were able to do this because a general agricultural adjustment was underway in South Russia in the 1830's. South Russia was on the threshold of arable agriculture. Centres of commerce on the Black Sea and the Sea Azov were being developed. Berdiansk, the grain port for the *Molotschna* Mennonites was founded in 1830, and therefore the opportunity for growing wheat, the Mennonites

first commercial crop, was at hand. As Western European countries such as England, Holland, and Belgium lowered or abolished their tariffs on grain there was more emphasis on grain growing in South Russia. Other factors helped too. There was an increase in world grain prices, and internal communications in South Russia were improved. The livestock industry continued to be important in the Mennonite economy until well into the 1850's, but it ceased to be dominant after the decade of 1830. Grain growing had been taken up with a will, and livestock raising readily became subordinate as shown in Table 35.

**Table 35**  
**Mennonite Income in Russia 1841 & 1852**  
(in rubles)

	<u>Chortitza</u>		<u>Molotschna</u>	
	Livestock	Grain	Livestock	Grain
1841	56205	21767	56555	105881
1852	27970	75744	44519	286593

(from Rempel, *Mennonite Colonies*: 127)

Finally, in 1830 the Mennonites were embarked on the agricultural enterprise that they were to carry to Manitoba. But in Manitoba matters were far simpler for them than they were in Russia. When they came to Manitoba in 1874 there was a commercial grain market waiting for them – they just had to supply the product. In Russia the Mennonites arrived before the wheat market developed, and they had to pass through a stage of livestock raising before they started growing grain. Thus they had to start pioneering all over again in an effort to learn how to grow grain in a semi-arid climate. Contenius had helped the Mennonites get established in South Russia by introducing them to sheep raising. Another man, a Mennonite named Johann Cornies from *Molotschna*, provided the agricultural leadership after Contenius died, and he developed many of the agricultural practices which the Mennonites brought to Manitoba.

Cornies was appointed permanent chairman of the *Verein zur Fordersamen der Landwirtschaft und Gewerbe*, a Board of Trade and Agriculture, in 1830, and held the position until his death in 1848. Through this office Cornies wielded an astonishing authority in the Mennonite communities and he could well be called the father of Mennonite grain growing because in that time he introduced the Mennonites to agricultural techniques which they followed, whether in Russia or Canada, right until the 1930's.

When Cornies took office in 1830 no proven techniques of growing grain on the steppes had been evolved. After much observation Cornies came to the conclusion that fallow was the best way to accumulate the moisture that was needed to get a crop through the dangerously dry summers, and he made black fallow obligatory in *Molotschna* in 1835. He refined this technique further in 1838 when he intro-

duced a four year rotation into the *Molotschna* settlement.<sup>4</sup> The usual rotation consisted of fallow the first year, followed by barley, wheat, and then rye and oats. Many Mennonites objected to the fallow, some wanted to grow potatoes or forage crops on it, but Cornies was uncompromising, and insisted that the low precipitation did not permit anything but absolute fallow. By 1838 too, Cornies had made up his mind that every *Molotschna* farmer must devote at least 25 of his 65 dessiatines to grain. Cornies by these methods not only led but pushed the Mennonites into grain farming far more quickly than if they had learned the techniques independently by trial and error methods. Dry farming paid dividends too. Other areas in South Russia had crop failures, but the *Molotschna* Mennonites could still obtain a crop. In 1845 the above improvements were brought to the *Chortitza* area, but those Mennonites never managed to catch up with the more progressive farmers from *Molotschna*.

Cornies maintained a close control over the agricultural practices of the Mennonites. A set of 59 Regulations governing the farming activities of the Mennonites were prepared and enforced by the *Landwirtschaftlichen Verein*. The detailed nature of the regulations makes them read almost like a course in agricultural economics and farm management. No admonition was omitted to ensure that the farmer tilled his land in the most efficient manner, and the regulations would still be of constructive use today.<sup>5</sup>

Grain was readily marketed through ports on the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, so that the acreage cultivated increased rapidly. In 1850 there were about 25 dessiatines of arable land per farm in the Mennonite settlements, and by 1875 this had increased to 32-34 dessiatines per farm.<sup>6</sup> Spring wheat was the main crop. Winter wheat was grown but it was subject to winter kill. Barley, oats, rye, potatoes and tobacco were also important crops. Corn and flax were never very important. Yields were considerably below those later obtained in Manitoba probably because of the lower rainfall and higher summer temperatures.

The Mennonites who came to Manitoba were familiar with implements similar to those by North American farmers in the 1870's. The basic implements for preparing the seed bed were the plow and harrow, though gang plows (called "buggers") with three or more shares, were introduced in the 1840's. Generally the buggers were used for working fallow. Harvesting was done with the scythe, reapers were not on the market until the 1870's. Both the flail and the practice of pulling a wagon over the sheaves of grain had been used for threshing until the 1840's, when these techniques were replaced by the threshing stone.

Cultural practices were simple. Crops were sown by hand, and the land was then ploughed and harrowed smooth. Sometimes the plowing came first. Fallow was worked about three times during the year. Manuring was rarely done as there was usually not enough manure available, since it was also used for fuel. Each farmer had the right to use his land as he pleased, but it usually proved expedient to cooperate, and plant similar crops over a whole *Gewann*. After Cornies' death agricultural practices began to deteriorate as strict control over the farmers was relaxed. Agricultural expansion in the 1860's was also partly responsible. In order to plow large acreages quickly buggers were used instead of a single furrow plow, a method which resulted in slipshod ploughing. Some farmers abandoned fall

ploughing as advocated by Cornies, and ploughed in spring or not at all. Less and less land was left in fallow by the 1870's, and farmers in some villages, especially *Chortitza*, even stopped fallowing their land. Competition for markets was not enough, and the wheat buyers' standards not sufficiently high to keep the level of agriculture at that insisted on by Cornies. Thus the Mennonites who came to Manitoba tended to be rather easy going in their practices, and not as eager to make improvements as they would have been if they had experienced more commercial competitive farming in Russia. There definitely was a lack of initiative among the farmers after Cornies died. Perhaps he had stifled it because he had brooked no interference, making his progressive methods compulsory.

Cornies had also regulated other features of Mennonite besides the farming practices. He insisted that trees be planted in the villages and along some of the roads, to stop snow drifting in winter. Houses and fences had to be painted, building construction standards were improved, and fire hazards such as wooden chimneys were prohibited. Most of the buildings in the steppe were of necessity built of locally manufactured brick. Each village gradually assumed a uniform appearance through its length, in the orientation of buildings on the lots, the design of the houses, and so on, and also one village became similar to another. This tendency towards uniformity was also transferred to Manitoba.

The Mennonites along with other Germans, did manage through trial and error, and through the guidance of men like Cornies, to grow grain for a commercial market on the steppe. Their work is best appreciated when it is compared with the achievements of the Russians who lived along side them, and who lived at a subsistence level at best. August Freiherr von Haxthausen wrote in 1847,

In all of Russia there is no area with such a uniformly high agricultural development as in Molotschna. They [the Mennonites] could be a yardstick for the Government, and a model for all Russian peoples, in how much man can achieve through diligence, knowledge, and organization. Above all however, they are the example for the Government in how the steppe and all of South Russia can be improved by farming and building, and especially by planting trees in the steppe—and that is the most important part for Russia's power and internal politics. If all of South Russia had this development, then Moscow and St. Petersburg could not be the leading cities any longer, but would have to give their functions to Charkov, Ekaterinaslaw, and Odessa.<sup>7</sup>

J.G. Kohl, who was travelling in Southern Russia in 1849 has similar comments to make about the settlement:

The richest of all the colonies [German settlements in Russia] are those on the Sea of Azov, on the banks of the Molotschna. Of the richness and the 'luxus' in Molotschna—one speaks of it as if it were a province—one hears of it everywhere. ...as the Czar Alexander went on his last journey to Taganrog through Molotschna, he cried in astonishment, "Children, we do not have to travel to Germany anymore, we have more than Germany has in our kingdom."<sup>8</sup>

Kohl was not carried away quite so easily as the Czar, and he adds that the Mennonite settlements are not as fully developed agriculturally as the German farming areas are, and remarks that, "Sie schmeckt ein wenig nach der Steppe."<sup>9</sup>

Mennonite agriculture reached great heights under Cornies. But, after he died the farmers displayed no desire to adopt new techniques, failing to realize the

necessity for keeping abreast with modern agriculture, not just modern machinery. In the 1870's they fully believed that they were following the best possible agricultural techniques, because they stood head and shoulders above all their neighbors. This superior attitude was also carried to Canada, where the methods of Cornies lingered on for many years. There was however, none of his desire to experiment and look about for better crops and farming methods, always with the aim of seeking the optimum use for the land.

<sup>1</sup> The most conclusive account of the Mennonite settlements in Russia, including many statistical tables, is in D.C. Rempel: *The Mennonite colonies in New Russia: A study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914*. (Ph.D. Dissertation Stanford University, 1934; unpublished.) I am heavily indebted to this dissertation in writing this chapter. Many lengthy interviews with Mr. J.J. Hildebrand, North Kildonan, Manitoba, provided me with much additional material, and many valuable insights into Mennonite agriculture in South Russia.

<sup>2</sup> J.P. Van der Smissen, *Petermanns Mitteilungen*, 1898: 171.

<sup>3</sup> Rempel, *Mennonite Colonies*: 113.

<sup>4</sup> D.H. Epp, *Johann Cornies: Zuge aus seinem Leben und Wirken*, Berdyansk, 1909: 57.

<sup>5</sup> A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien: Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte und Statistik der ausländischen Kolonisation in Russland*, Odessa, 1887, Appendix: 22-25.

<sup>6</sup> Rempel, *Mennonite Colonies*: 243.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Epp, *Johann Cornies*: 60.

<sup>8</sup> J.G. Kohl, *Reisen in Sudrussland*, Dresden, 1841: 243.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 247.



## Appendix D

### Inspection of Land and the Migration

#### Inspection of Land

The official Mennonite delegation of twelve men was shown through Manitoba in 1873. The delegates arrived in Winnipeg on June 16, 1873, and were well received; the newspapers had stressed that they should be warmly welcomed because the country needed immigrants.<sup>1</sup> At a reception tendered by Manitoba government officials they were informed about the advantages of the province: grapes were indigenous to the prairies, iron and coal were found in Manitoba, and so on, but the Mennonites were more interested in grain farming, and enquired about shipping distances and other relevant factors.<sup>2</sup> They wanted to see the country for themselves.

On June 18 a party of 24 persons in five wagons left Winnipeg to inspect the land which had been reserved for them. The company travelled via the Dawson Road to Ste. Anne, where the delegates spent the night in the Hudson's Bay Company store, a building which is still standing. One of the delegates remarked in his journal that though it was the second half of June, it appeared that it was still impossible to work the land, and this at a time when crops were beginning to ripen in South Russia.<sup>3</sup> On June 20 they started down the eastern side of the Reserve, but there are only meagre descriptions of the country in the one journal that has been published, and in the newspaper accounts. Springs, good hay meadows, a couple of creeks, and a meeting with one of the English squatters, are mentioned, but no evaluation of the land is given. However, it was a fairly rugged trip because the wagons were stuck a number of times, and the mosquitoes were troublesome. The most direct evidence of the delegates' opinion of the country is given by the fact that after spending only two days in the Reserve, and after having seen only four townships they decided to return to Winnipeg. They were farmers who were not fooled by the nature of the country, and five of the delegates left Manitoba without examining any other land.

On June 23, the seven remaining members of the delegations were taken to see the land lying between Winnipeg and Riding Mountain. They proceeded westward just north of the Portage Plains, and then angled northward toward the Gladstone of today. The Mennonites were very pleased with this country, since the soil was very rich and the grass luxuriant. "The ground is level and there is a good, black soil."<sup>4</sup> Another two delegates turned back at the present village of Arden, to return to North Dakota and examine land there. The remaining five delegates, representing the most conservative Mennonite sects continued their journey to Riding Mountain. From there they returned to Winnipeg via the Saskatchewan Trail, examining various farmsteads on the way.

After their return from Riding Mountain the delegates went on another trip to the East Reserve to "inspect the southern portion of their reserve which they had not seen before."<sup>5</sup> They left Winnipeg for North Dakota on July 8, after a stay of 23 days in Manitoba. The decision of the four conservative delegates to recommend Canada to their congregation has been discussed in Chapter 2.

### The Migration

The Mennonite migration to Canada was gratifying to both the parties involved. Canada needed farmers; it had recently acquired the "North West", and wanted to make it economically viable by introducing an agricultural population. This would affect the whole Canadian economy because industry was just beginning in Ontario and Quebec, and the development of the West would create a home market. Canada was in such need of immigrants that it was willing to finance the trip of the Mennonite delegates to North America, and even provide a \$100,000 loan to the settlers in 1876.

The Mennonites, on the other hand, had to migrate because there was a danger that the privileges they had enjoyed under the Russians until 1870 were going to be withdrawn. It was announced in 1871 that their right to military exemption was to be revoked and military service, or some form of alternative service, was going to be required of all young men. At the same time it was announced that the Russian language would have to be taught in the schools, and this was another blow to the Mennonites because to their way of thinking the German language had to be retained if the Mennonite religion was to survive. These Russian actions shocked the Mennonites and they immediately began to look about for a place to migrate. The idea of migration had become an automatic defense mechanism, as it was to prove again in migration *from* Canada in the 1920's and 1940's. Though these new regulations precipitated the migration, there were factors working in the Mennonite community itself which had slowly prepared fertile ground for the idea of migration. By 1870 the Mennonites had established themselves as very successful farmers. As the Mennonite population increased, settlements had been pushed into various parts of South Russia that lay well beyond the limits of the original colonies (Figure 35).

These new colonies did not fully relieve the pressure of population, and in some of the colonies several farms had been divided into halves beyond which fragmentation was not permitted. Even then there were many landless people. They were given small lots in the villages, and earned their living by working as labourers.

There was continuous friction for many years after 1850 between the landowners and the landless. A few large landowners not only farmed their own land, but also rented large areas of crown land which could otherwise have been distributed among the landless Mennonites. The controversy over what should be done with the crown land raged for 19 years, until 1869, when it finally was decided, under instructions from the Russian government, that the land should be turned over to the landless Mennonites. This struggle left a bitter aftermath and E.K. Francis has shown how the strained social situation in the Mennonite settlements contributed to the desire to emigrate.<sup>6</sup>

The Mennonites sent deputations to the government at St. Petersburg as soon as they learned that their status in Russia was to be changed. Simultaneously they began to look for a country to which they could migrate, and they appeared to be so determined that the Russian government sent representatives to try and persuade these highly valued settlers not to leave. As a result many Mennonites who had intended to migrate changed their minds when they realized that the Russian

government would offer some compromises and not extend the military service to the Mennonites.

There was a very definite cleavage in Russia between the Mennonites who wanted to migrate and those who were intent on staying. P.M. Friesen, a Mennonite historian, who remained in Russia, bitterly maintained that the Mennonites who left Russia knew nothing of Russia, and wanted nothing of it, except its rich soil and the Czar as a symbol of their special rights.<sup>7</sup>

This does not appear to be a harsh judgment. (Later the Mennonites had a similar attitude in Canada). Consequently the more conservative, the more insular Mennonites, left Russia in the 1870's and settled in North America. The migrants numbered about 18,000 out of a Russian Mennonite population that has been estimated at between 45,000 to 100,000.<sup>8</sup>

The Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde delegates' account of their journey to North America and their successful negotiation with the Canadian government immediately created an enthusiasm for emigration among the conservative congregations. Apparently the Mennonites at home in Russia considered the actual terms of settlement more important than the reports on the condition of the land—which seems to have taken for granted as being quite adequate.<sup>9</sup>

The Mennonites immediately began to prepare for the migration. Their property, their machinery, and their household effects had to be sold, passports had to be obtained, supplies had to be packed, and all this in less than a year, because the first group of emigrants had to leave in June of 1874. There was considerable difficulty in selling the land and their goods at a fair price, first because it was a forced sale, and second because so much had to be sold at once that prices were depressed.

The Mennonites left by train from Taganrog, their nearest station, and travelled to Hamburg, where most took a ship to Liverpool. From there they were brought to Quebec City by the Allan Line. The Canadian Department of Agriculture maintained local agents at Hamburg and Liverpool to help the Mennonites, and immigration agents at Quebec and Toronto took charge of the Mennonites in Canada. An interpreter accompanied every group of Mennonites that left Quebec, to help them on their way, and the Ontario Mennonites also proved extremely helpful, even keeping some of the poorer migrants over a winter to enable them to earn some money before they continued to Manitoba.

The Mennonites proceeded from Collingwood to Duluth by boat, then by railway to Moorhead, and completed the journey by Red River steamer. It was a long and difficult journey from Russia, and much of it was made under very poor conditions, even on the last stretch. On the Red River, for instance, some Mennonites were placed on barges carrying iron rails and transported to Fort Garry in the middle of summer without any shelter whatsoever, a journey which took at least 50 hours. But very few mishaps occurred and few people died. Indeed, the observers along the route always commented on the healthy, robust appearance of the Mennonites.

<sup>1</sup> The June and July, 1873 issues of *The Manitoban* and the *Manitoba Weekly Free Press* carry detailed accounts of the activities of the delegates on which the following discussion is based.

<sup>2</sup> *The Manitoban*, June 21, 1873.

<sup>3</sup> Leonhard Sudermann, *Eine Deputationsreise von Russland nach Amerika*, Elkhart, 1897: 35. He was, of course, referring to Russian winter wheat.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*: 42.

<sup>5</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, July 5, 1873.

<sup>6</sup> E.K. Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, 1789-1914; a Sociological Interpretation", *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. 25 (1951): 173-182.

<sup>7</sup> P.M. Friesen, *Geschichte der Alt-Evangelischen Mennoniten Bruderschaft in Russland (1784-1910) in Nabmen der Mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte*, Halbstadt, 1911: 499.

<sup>8</sup> See Footnote 17 in Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Klass Peters, *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten und deren Auswanderung aus Russland und Einwanderung in Manitoba*, Hillsboro, n.d.:16.

## Appendix E

### John Lowe's Letter to the Mennonite Delegates

Letter from John Lowe, Secretary, Department of Agriculture to the Mennonite delegates from Russia who had expressed an interest in settling in Manitoba. There is a copy of this letter in the P.A.C. (File 3129 2A, No. 50730, Department of the Interior). The letter actually constitutes the agreement that the government made with the Mennonites, because the Canadian government did not want to do it through an *Order-in-Council*, which might be construed by the Russian government as an invitation for the Mennonites to settle in Canada. Mennonite is spelled Menonite throughout the letter.

Department of Agriculture.  
Ottawa,  
26 July, 1873.

Gentleman: Messrs. David Klassen, Jacob Peters, Heinrich Wiebe, Cornelius Toews (Mennonite Delegates from S. Russia).

I have the honour under instruction of the Hon. the Minister of Agriculture, to state to you in reply to your letter of this day's date, the following facts relating to advantages offered to settlers, and to the immunities afforded to Menonites, which are established by the Statute Law of Canada, and by orders of His Excellency the Governor General in Council, for the information of German Menonites having intention to emigrate to Canada via Hamburg.

1. An entire exemption from any Military Service is by law and Order-In-Council granted to the denomination of Christians called Menonites.

2. An Order-In-Council was passed on the 3rd March last to reserve eight Townships in the Province of Manitoba for free grants on the condition of settlement as provided in the Dominion Lands Act,—that is to say—“Any person who is the head of a family, or has attained the age of 21 years, shall be entitled to be entered for one quarter section, or a less quantity, of unappropriated Dominion Lands, for the purpose of securing a Homestead right in respect thereof.”

3. The said reserve of 8 Townships is for the exclusive use of the Menonites, and the said free grants of one quarter section, to consist of 160 acres each, as defined by the Act.

4. Should the Menonite Settlement extend beyond the 8 Townships set aside by the Order-In-Council of March 3rd last, other townships will be in the same way reserved to meet the full requirements of Menonite Immigration.

5. If, next Spring the Menonite Settlers on viewing the 8 townships set aside for their use, should prefer to exchange them for any other 8 unoccupied Townships such exchange will be allowed.

6. In addition to the free grant of a 1/4 section or *160 acres* to every person over 21 years of age, on the condition of settlement, the right to purchase the remaining 3/4 of the section at \$1.00 per acre is granted by law, so as to complete the whole section of 640 acres which is the largest quantity of land, the Government will grant a Patent for to any one person.

7. The Settler will receive a Patent for a free grant, after three years residence, in accordance with the terms of the Dominion Lands Act.

8. In the event of the death of the settler, the lawful heirs can claim the Patent for the free grant, upon proof that settlement duties for three years have been performed.

9. From the moment of occupation the settler acquires a "homestead right" in the land.

10. The fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Menonites, without any kind of molestation or restriction whatsoever and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools.

11. The privilege of affirming, instead of making affidavits is afforded by law.

12. The government of Canada will undertake to furnish Passenger Warrants from Hamburgh to Fort Garry, for Menonite families of good character, for the sum of \$30.00 per adult person over the age of 8 years, for persons under 8 years, half price, or \$15.00, and for infants under one year \$3.00.

13. The Minister specially authorizes me to state that this arrangement as to price shall not be changed for the seasons of 1874, 1875, and 1876.

14. I am further to state that if it is changed thereafter, the price shall not, up to the year 1882 exceed \$40.00 per adult, and children in proportion, subject to the approval of Parliament.

15. The immigrants will be provided with provisions in the portion of the journey between Liverpool and Collingwood, but during other portions of the journey they are to find their own provisions.

John Lowe  
Sect. Dept. of Agriculture.

## Appendix F

### The Mennonite Stove

The Mennonite stove was usually built of air dried bricks, each measuring 4x4x8 inches. The stove was 6 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 6 feet high, and so located that it could be fired from the kitchen. On the opposite end it projected into the *Vorderhaus*, so that it heated two or three rooms. The stove was built on a foundation of logs or stone, on which a bed of solid brick, one foot thick, was laid to serve as the firebed. The walls were four inches thick, and the top was either arched or (more commonly) flat and supported by iron cross bars. The stove was divided into three chambers; the lower had a height of about 22 inches, the middle 20 inches, and the upper 16 inches. The division between the lower and middle chambers was made by setting iron plates into the sides of the stove; that between the middle and upper chambers was also of iron plates and supported a floor formed of brick. At the near or kitchen end of the stove an iron door, set in a frame of iron, was placed in the lower chamber and was used for firing. At the far end of the stove the upper and lower chambers were connected by a flue, and at the near end of the upper chamber immediately above the iron door, a pipe was placed, connected to the chimney. Heat generated in the lower chamber passed through the flue into the upper chamber then along it to the pipe, so that the middle chamber, used for baking purposes via a door in the side wall of the stove, had a stream of hot air passing below and above it. The stove was plastered on the outside, and then painted or white washed. Temperatures were very uniform; the fire had to be stoked only twice in 24 hours, and the stove was never permitted to become cold from autumn until spring. In summer the stove was not used because the Mennonites had acquired iron cooking stoves when they first came to Manitoba.





## Appendix G

### Threshing Records, East Reserve, 1881

Very few early agricultural records have been kept by Mennonites, but J.J. Cohoe, a threshing machine operator of Clearsprings, Manitoba, kept a record of his threshing activities in 1881<sup>1</sup> Threshing started on September 1 that year. Cohoe usually spent one day at each farm, and sometimes even managed to thresh the crops of two farms in one day, which gives an idea of the small acreages involved, especially when the low capacity of the machines of that time and the time required to move them are taken into account. Cohoe did the threshing for 51 farmers that season, finishing early in December. Most of the farms grew wheat, oats and barley, but a few had only one crop – particularly oats, which indicates that the farmer was just starting. Cohoe threshed 8,732 bu. of wheat that year; the maximum crop was 868 bu., and the next highest was 358 bu., but the average crop was only 171 bushels. Oats was actually the biggest crop. A total of 12,338 bu. of oats were threshed, and averaged 242 bu. per farm. Only 2,879 bu. of barley were threshed, averaging 56 bu. per farm. These farmers certainly were not bonanza farmers, and even when they had a good crop they had a difficult time making ends meet.

<sup>1</sup> Manuscript Note Book, formerly in the possession of the late William Cohoe, Clearsprings, Manitoba, who loaned it to me in August, 1955.



## Appendix H

### Travellers' Impressions of the West Reserve 1875-1885

Non-Mennonites' opinions and descriptions of the Mennonite settlements and the habits of the people are very interesting and illuminating. The general conclusions which were usually arrived at were well expressed by W.A. Loucks, a Manitoba farmer, while testifying before the Select Standing Committee on Colonization and Immigration in 1879:

Mennonites are a thrifty hardy race of people...They are great producers, and in competing side by side with our people can undersell them at the market price. They are a valuable class of people, whether they will do anything after they have acquired money which they are getting and whether they will be any good to the country afterwards with regard to investing capital in it is another matter.<sup>1</sup>

All travellers were willing to acknowledge the marvelous strides which the Mennonites had made on the prairie, or on the marshes and ridges of the East Reserve, but it is quite obvious that they were regarded as a "foreign" element, and were looked on as curiosities. A Mennonite was not an individual person to Canadians, but merely a representative of an eccentric group, and his behaviour and way of life was subjected to a naive scrutiny. W.H. Barneby, an English traveller, said in 1884 that there was an undoubted prejudice against the Mennonites in Manitoba, and he showed that many false statements were being made about them.<sup>2</sup>

In the published descriptions of the Reserve, the nucleated settlements, and the *Gewanne* and *Kagel* were (with two outstanding exceptions) only touched upon, and neither disapproval or approval were registered, or even an adequate description given. Villages were usually described as appearing fairly neat from a distance, but that on closer inspection they were not too clean. The travellers sometimes complained of a lack of tidiness in the houses, but just as often the Mennonites would be commended for the clean, neat interiors of their homes. One frequent criticism was poor ventilation:

We dine in one of the quaint, bad smelling, thrifty Mennonite houses. We try to give them a lecture on ventilation, but, being too practical in illustrating our idea, it does no immediate good, and we have to console ourselves by thinking that the good seed sown will bear fruit some time.<sup>3</sup>

Barneby was one of the few people who approved of connecting the house and barn.<sup>4</sup>

The Mennonites were considered to be a frugal people. Actually they were very poor and had little money to spend, and much of their trade was even done by barter. Many people were willing to sell them horses in 1881, but all that they could get in return was farm produce.<sup>5</sup> W. Fraser Rae visited the West Reserve in 1880, and described the Mennonites quite fully, albeit rather harshly. His comments, however, are informative, and though they are probably exaggerated, there is probably some justification for each of his statements. The importance of his description lies in the fact that it indicates what most non-Mennonite settlers thought of the Mennonites at the time.

They are temperate, but they are not water drinkers on principle. They relish a glass of whiskey and still more a glass of brandy if they can enjoy it without payment. Their chief objection to strong liquors is having to pay for them. They also delight in a pipe, if tobacco be supplied to them gratis.<sup>6</sup>

Rae continues this account, calling them avaricious and niggardly, and says: "They are morbidly suspicious of persons who do not belong to their body and, when dealing with strangers, they drive bargains which are so hard as to verge on sharp practice."<sup>7</sup>

It is true that the Mennonites, once they had bought their first supplies were unusual pioneers as far as their spending habits went. They had nothing of the free handedness that characterized so many pioneers. In Russia they had, as a matter of course haggled with Jewish peddlers and merchants, and later they did this among themselves, so to drive a sharp bargain was one of their habits. As a result unjustified comments like the following crop up in Rae's book, "to get money is their chief aim in life – and their whole enjoyment consists in labouring for that object."<sup>8</sup>

Rae visited William Hespeler and had some conversations with him regarding the Mennonites, and at times Rae's observations are so penetrating that it is hardly conceivable that he can have made them after only a few days stay in the Reserve. The following observations may well have been supplied by Hespeler, who didn't get along too well at times with some of the overly ambitious Mennonites.

Even the charity of the Mennonites has its dark side. The poorer brethren are assisted by the richer, but the richer take care lest the poorer should be so well paid as to grow independent and make their own terms. Rich Mennonites are thoroughly convinced of the advantage of employing cheap labour.<sup>9</sup>

Rich, domineering Mennonites definitely attempted to control the economic life and also some of the social life of their fellow villagers in the nineteenth century. Even today rich Mennonites take advantage of the reluctance of many Mennonites to leave their community to obtain employment elsewhere, and use them as a source of cheap labour.

Very little was said by most travellers of the Mennonite settlements, and that little was usually wrong. The Marquis of Lorne gave an address in Birmingham in 1883 that contained some of these erroneous ideas about the Mennonite farming system.

Their villages generally number 30 to 40 families, and it is their invariable custom on securing lands, to hold a council, at which they decide what portions of all the lands belonging to each head of a family are best adapted to the growth of wheat, potatoes, corn and other crops—in short the land is treated as being the property of the community rather than of the individual. Out of this huge wheatfield or whatever crop it may be, each family is assigned one long strip to be cultivated by that particular family, and when the harvest is reaped the whole result is "pooled", and divided equally between the families comprising the whole community.<sup>10</sup>

Quite clearly, most of this is incorrect, but it represents some of the ideas which the Canadians held of the Mennonite agricultural system at that time.

Professor Henry Tanner, an English agriculturist, visited the West Reserve in the early 1880's and gained a far more accurate impression of the settlements than

any other observer.<sup>11</sup> He was especially concerned about the fact that there was a basic flaw in the strip farming system; it existed only by convention and not on a legal basis. Tanner was the proponent of a modified form of nucleated settlement in the West, and consequently was quite enthused over the Mennonite experiment.

In the village system of the Mennonites, we see the advantages of associated homes, and by adopting the alterations which their experience has shown to be desirable, we have a practical guide for locating workmen under conditions of immediate comfort, and progressive prosperity.<sup>12</sup>

I have found only one other author who agreed with Tanner, and found some value in the Mennonite nucleated settlements. This was W.H. Barneby who believed that the settlements could serve as models, and could well be copied in other parts of the West. Barneby said that, "...other settlers have much to learn from them [Mennonites], both in their method of working the land, and in the general form of settlement which they adopt."<sup>13</sup>

Many travellers were not very impressed with the Mennonites agricultural practices, though all admitted that these people were making a living in an area which other settlers had not had the sense to recognize as valuable agricultural land. But there was no agreement about the character of Mennonite farming. One author said in 1880 that the Mennonites were not overly clean in their farming operations, and weeds were said to be abundant because of careless cultivation.<sup>14</sup> Yet W.H. Barneby said four years later that he considered their system of farming better than any he had previously noticed, and their crops the best that he had ever seen.<sup>15</sup> On the whole then, it would appear that the Mennonites were fairly successful in comparison with other settlers, during the first decade of settlement: "...many stories are told of their untidiness, however, that may be, they have at present [1880] by far the best houses and most crops in the country."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Evidence of William A Loucks before the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization, *Canada: Journals of the House of Commons*. Appendix 1, 1879, 69.

<sup>2</sup> Barneby, *Life and Labour*: 359 and 368.

<sup>3</sup> *Southern Manitoba and Turtle Mountain Country*, Winnipeg, 1880: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Barneby, *Life and Labour*: 362.

<sup>5</sup> *Manitoba Weekly Free Press*, September 19, 1881.

<sup>6</sup> W. Fraser Rae, *Newfoundland to Manitoba through the Canadas, and the Maritimes, Mining and Prairie Provinces*, New York, 1881: 239.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Views of the British Association and Others, Information for Intending Settlers*, Department of Agriculture, Ottawa: 16.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Tanner, *Successful Emigration to Canada*, Ottawa, 1885.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 27.

<sup>13</sup> Barneby, *Life and Labour*: 359.

<sup>14</sup> *Reports of Tenant Farmers' Delegates on the Dominion of Canada as a Field for Settlement*, Department of Agriculture, Ottawa, 1884: 72

<sup>15</sup> Barneby, *Life and Labour*: 359.

<sup>16</sup> *Reports of Farmers' Delegates on the Dominion of Canada as a Field of Settlement*, Liverpool, 1880: 104.



## Appendix I

### Grain farming in 1900

The clearest presentation of the actual farming conditions at the turn of the century in the West Reserve are contained in a long article in the *Nordwesten* of May 8, 1902, written by William Harvey, a real estate and insurance agent who was familiar with the Mennonite farming conditions. Harvey may have overemphasized some points, but he did reveal the existence of important problems in the Mennonite economy. Harvey claimed that the Reserve was not as prosperous as it appeared to be. Some Mennonites, he wrote, had overcome great early difficulties and became prosperous, whereas others had become bankrupt in Manitoba, sought new land further west, and started over again. Before these migrations the price of land in the Reserve had become inflated because of the demand. Yet once the migrations started many more people departed than had been anticipated, and this, together with some poor crops after the bumper harvest of 1899, had caused a severe drop of land values in the spring of 1902. At the same time many Mennonites who bought land when prices were inflated couldn't pay for it, with the result that there were debt sales by 1902, and land often fell into non-Mennonite hands. Harvey estimated that only 15% of the farmers in the Reserve were free from debt. It is impossible to say how reliable this estimate was, but the very low figure is indicative of the problem. He said that in the past year (1901) land values had gone down \$500 to \$750 per quarter section (just the reverse of the land values in the rest of the province) because of the previous artificial boosting of prices which resulted from the Mennonite practice of keeping to themselves.

Harvey also maintained that Mennonite agricultural practices would have to be improved. It was absolutely necessary to introduce livestock of a better breed, since the "land needed nourishment after steady mining." Dairying should be started, and weeds should be eradicated.

The replies to the above article generally did not attempt to refute the charges; the general run of correspondence just accused Harvey of too great a pessimism. Two Mennonites, however, replied in well thought out letters (*Der Nordwesten*, May, 22, 1902). One said that Harvey was right in many respects, but, and this is highly important because it reveals the Mennonite attitude, he thought that Harvey was wrong in recommending mixed farming, because the Mennonites would have adopted it if it actually would improve conditions! This writer claimed that grain farming was more lucrative, and gave some examples of how Mennonite farmers had lost money on hogs, or on cabbages. Apparently he didn't grasp the point, and probably very few other Mennonites did, that the land had to be cared for, not just used year after year without putting anything back into the soil. The other correspondent also acknowledged the seriousness of the problem, and the existence of the debt situation. This Mennonite thought that perhaps mixed farming should be tried. He believed that the salesman, especially the machinery agents, were the most to blame for the financial situation. Many Mennonites, he said, had been ruined by buying threshing machines, which they never would have bought if it hadn't been for the agent, and the same held true for other machines and for horses and land.

By 1900 the Mennonites were riding in the worst traditions of commercial farming; they had over-capitalized to such an extent that they were in trouble. This trouble proved to be only temporary because wheat prices went up by 1905, and kept on rising through World War I. For a time at the turn of the century it had appeared that the Mennonites might be facing disaster through over-specialization but the advance in wheat prices obscured the situation again, and wheat farming continued supreme.

## Appendix J

### Population 1901 to 1956<sup>1</sup>

#### East Reserve

From 1901 to 1956 the population of Hanover Municipality increased from 3,438 to 6,684 (compare Figures 37 and 43). This growth is not due only to natural increase. Migrations were taking place, and during the 55 year period more Mennonites and non-Mennonites moved into the East Reserve than moved out.

Of the 3,438 people in Hanover in 1901, 2,373 were Mennonites. There were about 300 Ukrainians, another 233 German Lutherans, and about 150 settlers of British descent. The Ukrainians and Lutherans were recent arrivals, and the migration of Ukrainians was still underway in 1901. The Mennonites had begun to move out of Hanover in 1901 and into the adjoining French municipalities, especially into the low lying lands north of Hanover. In 1901 there 468 Mennonites in La Broquerie Municipality (which included the present Ste. Anne Municipality), and 67 in Tache. Only five Mennonites had moved beyond the western boundaries of Hanover.

It is quite possible that Hanover would have decreased in population from 1901 to 1911 if it had not been for the continued Ukrainian migrations into the southern part of the municipality (Figure 38). Some of the best Mennonite farmers were drawn away from the bush farms of Hanover, by the lure of the better homesteads of the Far West. Many families moved to the Saskatchewan and Alberta Mennonite settlements, and a few even moved to the United States to join relatives living in Kansas. The push into the French municipalities to the north also continued, and in 1911 the first river lot in the Seine was purchased by a Mennonite. There has been no further penetration into the French area since then, only a consolidation of Mennonite holdings between Hanover and the Seine, until Mennonites own almost all the land for a few miles beyond Hanover (See Figures 42 and 44).

Hanover's population rose sharply to 4,795 in 1921, as the migrations to the West were halted by the War. The marginal areas in Hanover showed the greatest changes. The drainage works, combined with the high wheat prices of the war years, finally affected township 7-4, and boosted its population after 1916 (Figure 38). In the extreme south, township 4-6's population increased from 41 in 1911, to 307 in 1921, as the Ukrainians moved in from township 5-6 (Figure 39). There were 42 Mennonites in La Broquerie to the east of Hanover in 1921, 266 in Ste. Anne, and 420 in Tache (Figure 42). The push had also started to the west of Hanover, and there were 98 Mennonites in Ritchot, and 65 in De Salaberry.

In the twenty years from 1901 to 1921 the population of Hanover increased by 1,357, from 1921 to 1941 it increased by 3,395. There were various causes for this difference. Until 1921 there had been migrations into Hanover, but also movements to the West and beyond the borders of the municipality. After 1921 the migrations tended to be into the municipality. A number of Mennonites from the southern townships planned to join the *Chortitza-Fürstenland* and *Sommerfelder* migrations to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920's, but in the end they never left the

Figure 37

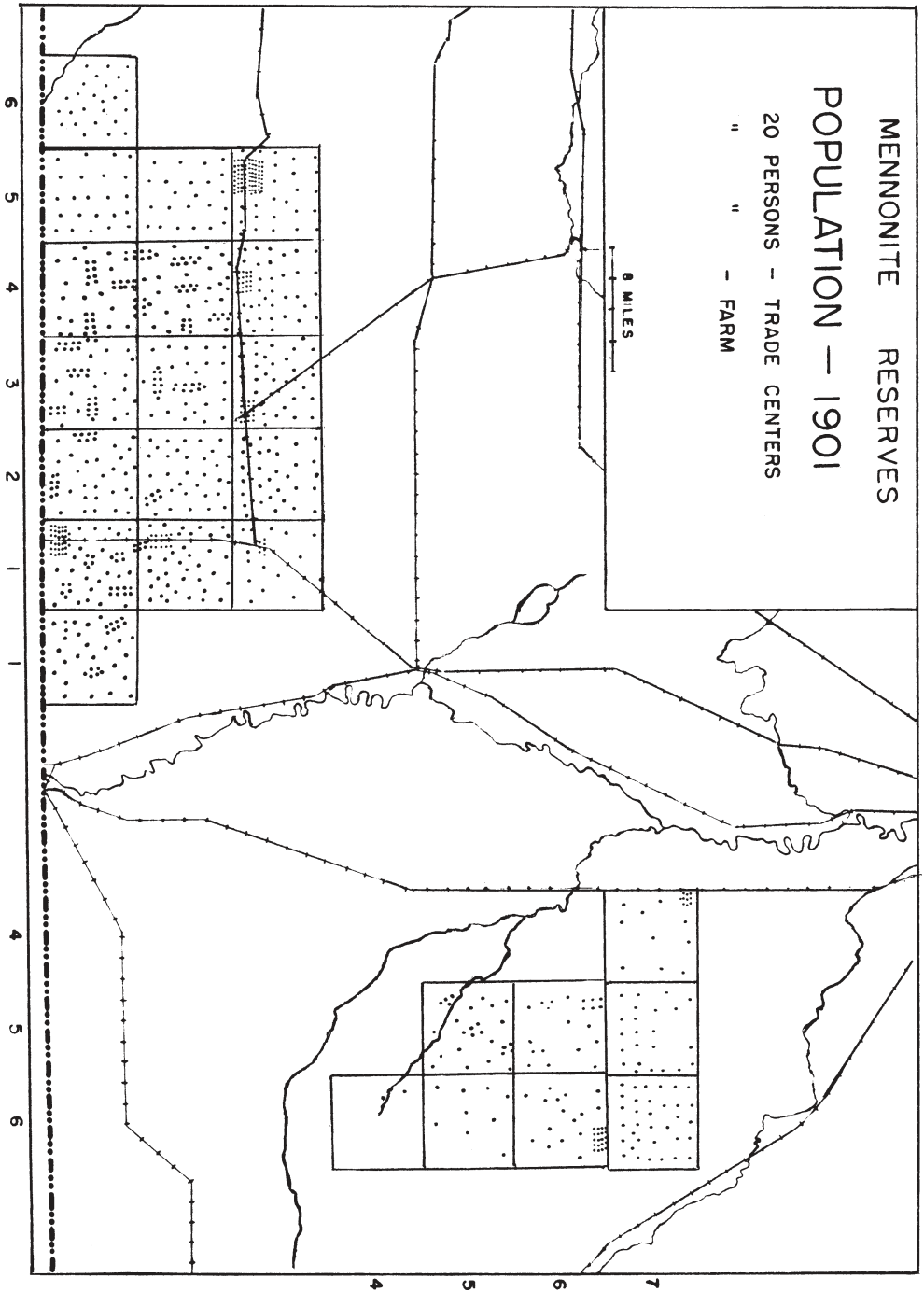
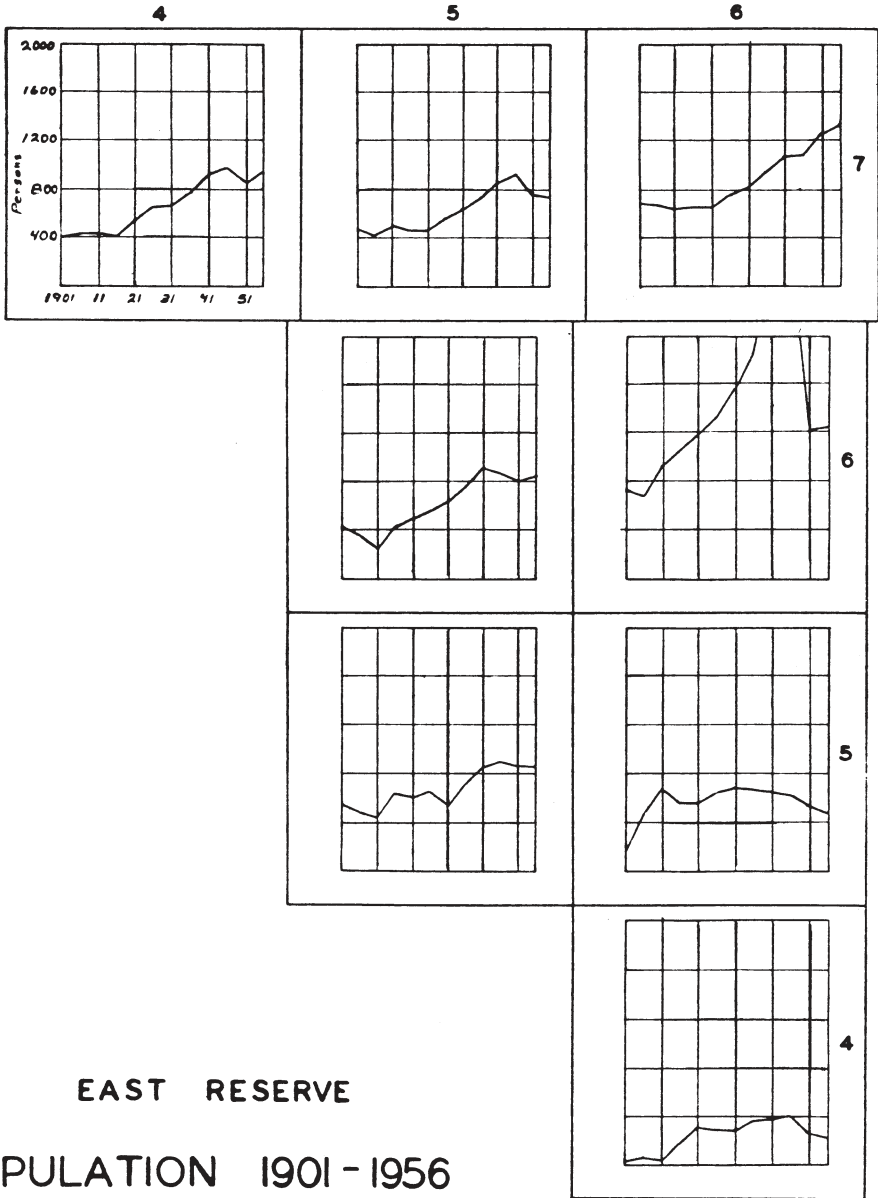


Figure 38



EAST RESERVE

POPULATION 1901 - 1956

RURAL

3 miles

Figure 39

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EAST RESERVE  
POPULATION BY TOWNSHIPS 1901 - 1956  
INCORPORATED PLACES ( )

municipality. In the district east of Niverville a small number did leave Canada for Paraguay. But in their relative isolation the East Reserve Mennonites were not nearly so aware of the encroachment of the “world” as those in the West Reserve, and the struggle over the public schools never reached a high pitch anywhere in Hanover. Also, many of those inclined to migrate did not have the money. Consequently only a few emigrated, but there was a reshuffling of people within the municipality. Many Mennonites moved out of township 5-5 between 1926 and 1931, and settled in the northern part of Hanover (Figure 39). There was little expansion to the north of the Reserve, simply because most of the available land in the French municipalities had already been occupied.

But there were some diverse Mennonite migrations into Hanover between 1921 and 1941. Many *Russländer* Mennonites settled in the Grunthal area in township 5-5, taking the place of the conservative Mennonites who had moved farther north. These *Russländer* Mennonites also settled in other parts of Hanover, but their main concentrations were near Grunthal. Many Mennonites who had migrated to Mexico and Paraguay from Manitoba did not like those countries, and returned to Canada. They were penniless and the depression was just starting. These people therefore came to Hanover and settled in the southern part of township 5-5, and also moved in the adjoining part of De Salaberry, where they accounted for the main increase in the Mennonite population of De Salaberry, from 65 in 1921 to 368 in 1931. This area was known from then on as ‘the Chaco’. These two groups of Mennonites were joined by a third group in the 1930’s, when some refugee farmers moved in from the West Reserve. Many of them moved into De Salaberry where the Mennonite population climbed to 696 in 1941.

From 1941 to 1951 Hanover only showed a modest increase of 535 people, all of which was gained by 1946, because from 1946 to 1951 there was a drop of 18 persons. From 1941 to 1946, even to 1951, there was an adjustment of population within the Reserve, because some of the townships had been over-populated when the displaced Mennonites arrived in the 1930’s. The adjustment was made possible during World War II and later work was plentiful again, and there was a steady stream of labourers to Winnipeg, and even to Steinbach, which had been growing steadily since 1936 (Figure 39). In fact, Steinbach and the other trading centres were the only growing places in the municipality. Elsewhere rural depopulation was taking place.

Most of the decrease in the rural population of Hanover was due to a migration of approximately 700 conservative Mennonites to Paraguay in 1948.

Figure 39 shows the drop in population in townships 6-5, 7-5 and 7-4 from 1946 to 1951. Some of these Mennonites returned the next year, repeating the story of the 1920 migration, and new “Chacos” have been established near Steinbach, and New Bothwell.

The population of Hanover was 6,570 in 1951 (6,696 in 1956), comprised of 5,247 Mennonites, 589 Ukrainians, 467 German Lutherans, and a few other minority groups. Since 1951 there has been no major population change. Steinbach has grown steadily as more and more of Southeastern Manitoba has come into its trading hinterland. The northern townships seem to be holding their own fairly well, after the rural depopulation of World War II and immediately afterwards. The



intensive land use supports a large population. The young people are being attracted to the city, but there is little decrease in population, because enough younger folk stay to operate the farms, and an equilibrium appears to have been reached. In the southern townships there has been a decline in population, because the young people are not willing to follow in their fathers' footsteps, and continue living in the very meagre fashion characteristic of the area. This trend may change as soon as the land use is stabilized.

### West Reserve

Rhineland Municipality had a population of 9,891 in 1901. There were 8,864 Mennonites in Rhineland, and one large minority group of 534 German Lutherans. The Lutherans lived in the trading centres, and in the Rosenfeld district. Another 1,812 Mennonites lived in Stanley. To the north in Morris municipality there were 1,007 Mennonites, so the expansion into the poorly drained land was well underway. About half of the Mennonites in Morris, however, lived in the Scratching River settlement (Figure 42). The general distribution of the population definitely reflected the history of settlement, as shown in Figure 37.

In the twenty years between 1901 and 1921 there were significant population changes within the Reserve (Figure 40). The migration to the Far West continued until World War I, and caused a definite decrease in population in the older settlements, although township 1-4 bounded right back when Haskett was founded in 1907. Drainage made it possible to settle the northern townships. It was ideal wheat land and showed a marked increase in population after 1911. The similar areas north of the Reserve, in Morris, were also attracting Mennonites, and there were 1,988 Mennonites in Morris in 1921 (Figure 42).

In the decade from 1921 to 1931 the migrations from the West Reserve to Mexico occurred, and at the same time the *Russländer* Mennonites replaced the departing conservative Mennonites. About 3,800 conservative Mennonites migrated from the Reserve, but not as many *Russländer* Mennonites came into the Reserve, so that Figure 41 shows a decrease in population in many of the older townships. In 1921 there were 4,450 Mennonites in Stanley, but only 4,323 in 1931; in Rhineland the figures were 7,924 and 7,715 respectively. But the newly drained lands in Morris were still being occupied, because by 1931 there were 2,449 Mennonites in the municipality.

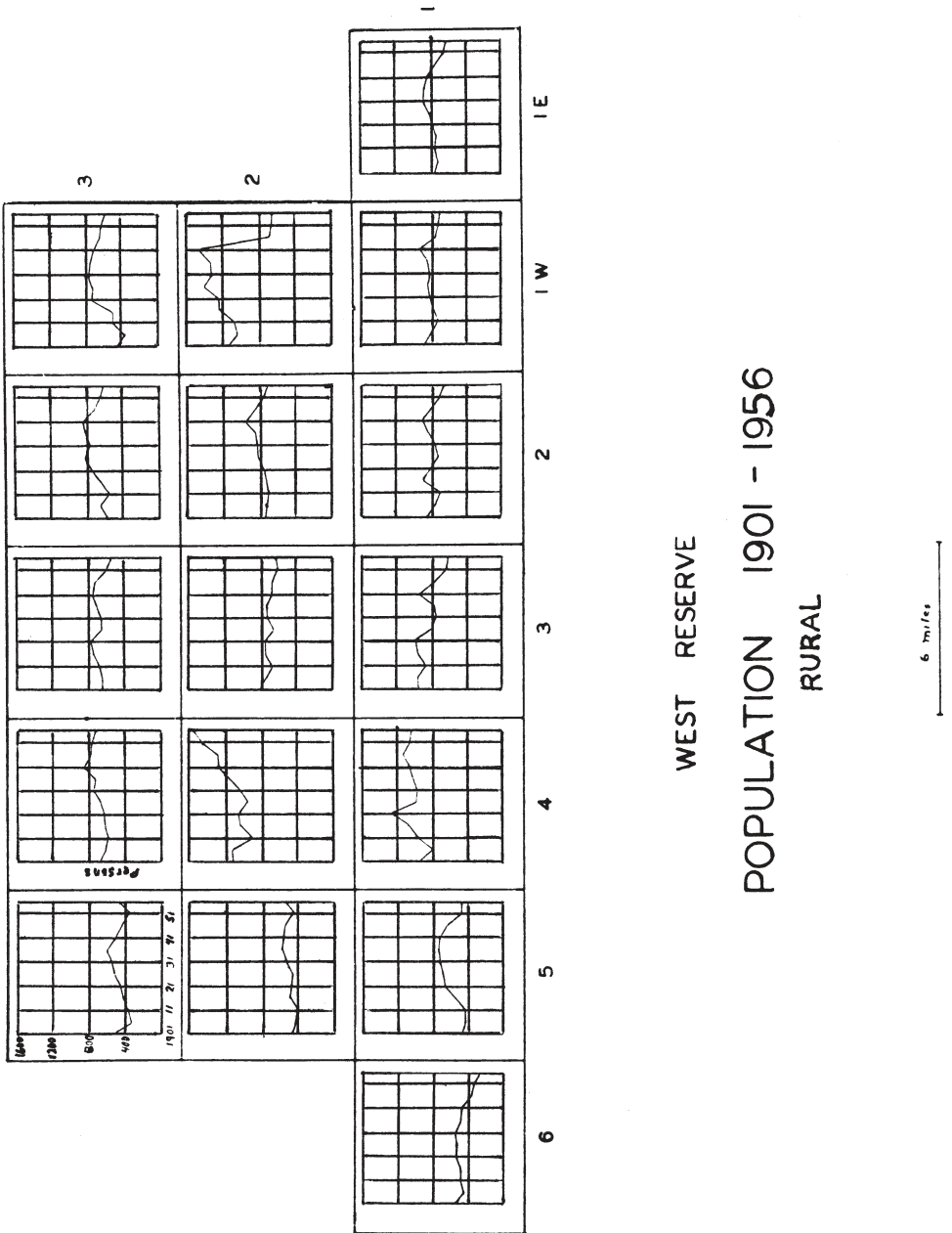
During the 1930's there was a movement of people to Hanover, but since the numbers were relatively small, the migration was more important for Hanover than for the West Reserve, where it did little to alleviate the population pressure. During World War II there was a slight decrease in population in both Rhineland and Stanley as work became available in the cities (Figure 41). Many of the young men too, were in either the conscientious objector camps, or in the armed forces. After the war there was a migration of *Sommerfelder* Mennonites from the Altona area to Paraguay, and there was a considerable drop in population as shown in Figure 40. The land vacated by the approximately 1,000 Mennonite emigrants was immediately taken over by other Mennonites in land-hungry Rhineland.

In recent years the population of the larger centres has been increasing, just as in Hanover (Figure 41). Rural depopulation seems to have reached its climax, and

the farm population probably will not decrease much more. The Mennonites have continued to expand beyond the borders of the Reserve as shown in Figure 44. There has been no significant expansion at any time into Montcalm Municipality to the east, where there were 264 Mennonites in 1901, and only 98 more in 1951. But there has been a steady advance to the north and west. In 1931, Stanley Municipality was 73% Mennonite, in 1951 it was 82% Mennonite, and the advance has been carried beyond Stanley, although not in a continuous wave. Mennonites are taking over more and more farm land in the Red River Lowland from the Anglo-Saxons, and this may be expected to continue if the Mennonites maintain their interest in scientific agriculture. Within the Reserve itself there are only small groups of non-Mennonites. Figure 44 reveals the Hutterite holdings south of Plum Coulee and the only other large group besides the 6,231 Mennonites in Rhineland in 1951, were 296 Lutherans.

<sup>1</sup> Based on quinquennial Censuses of Canada, 1901-1956, and the Municipal Records of Hanover, Rhineland, Stanley, La Broquerie, Ste. Anne, Ritchot, Tache, De Salaberry, Montcalm, Morris, and Roland Municipalities.

Figure 40



WEST RESERVE  
POPULATION 1901 - 1956  
RURAL

6 miles

Figure 41

1901		1906		1911		1916	
445	641	612	662	577	680	750	625
469	1,118	1,142	755	407	653	704	1,097
512	460	940	955	493	939	888	1,082
438	3	368	712	701	724	756	744
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1921		1926		1931		1936	
469	637	778	771	711	746	674	775
482	1,073	767	738	1,312	1,040	711	831
512	689	1,227	993	824	784	786	769
794	812	817	848	823	882	823	882
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
1941		1946		1951		1956	
574	838	752	815	702	774	614	655
581	1,258	679	962	1,478	1,490	606	791
472	1,002	414	878	910	496	1,059	656
856	856	750	768	750	308	654	654
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

WEST RESERVE  
POPULATION BY TOWNSHIPS 1901 - 1956  
INCORPORATED PLACES ( )

Figure 42

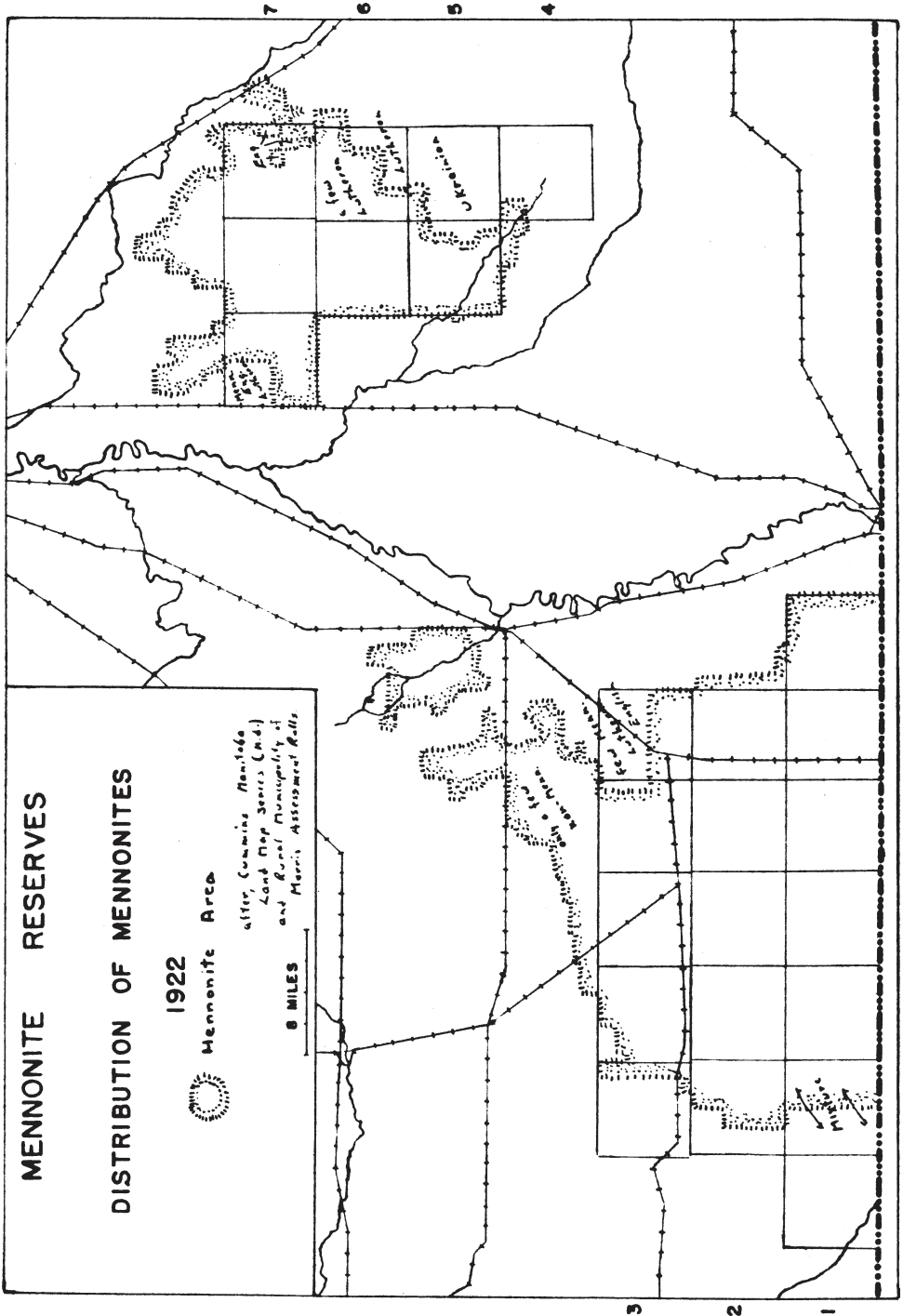


Figure 43

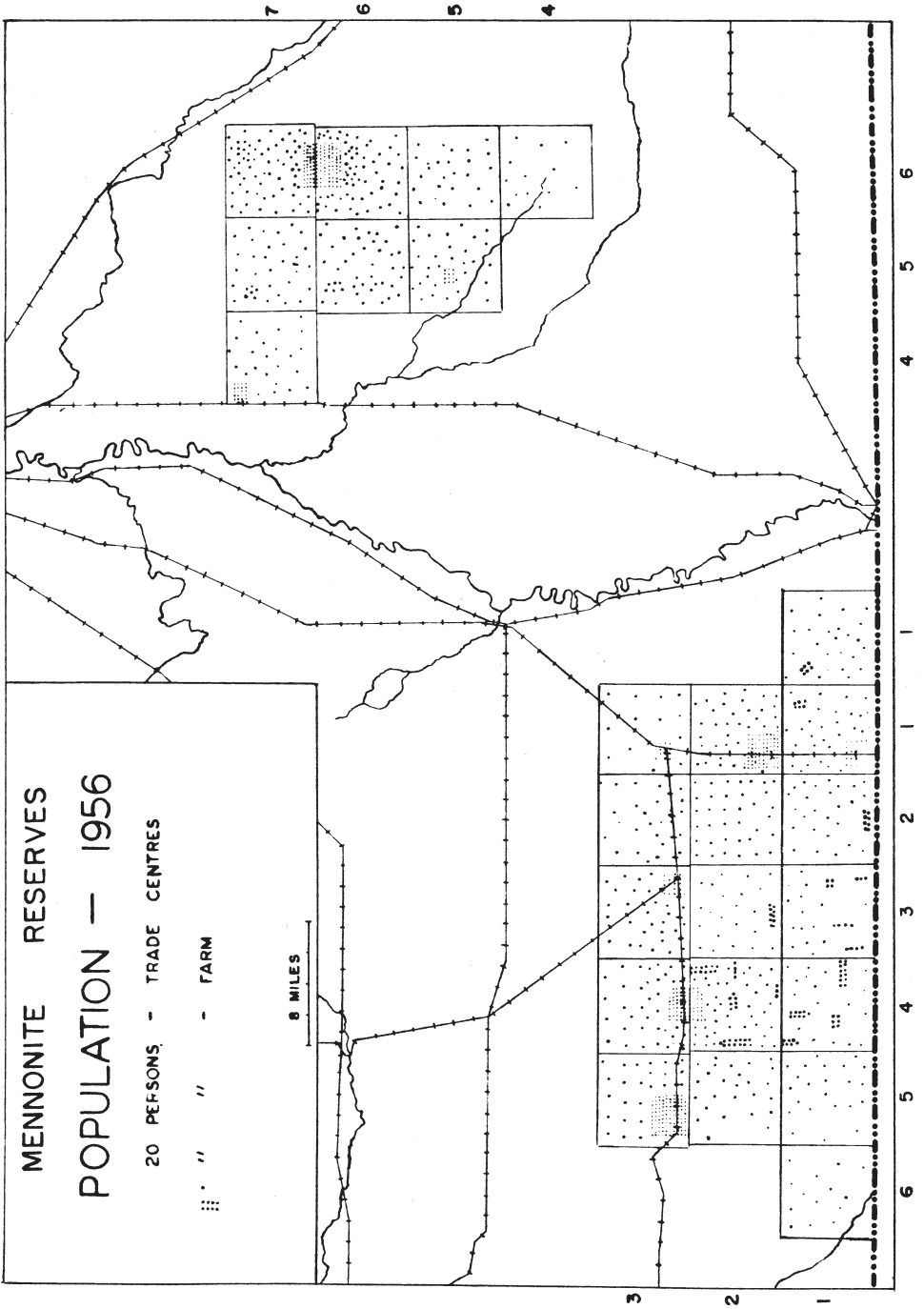
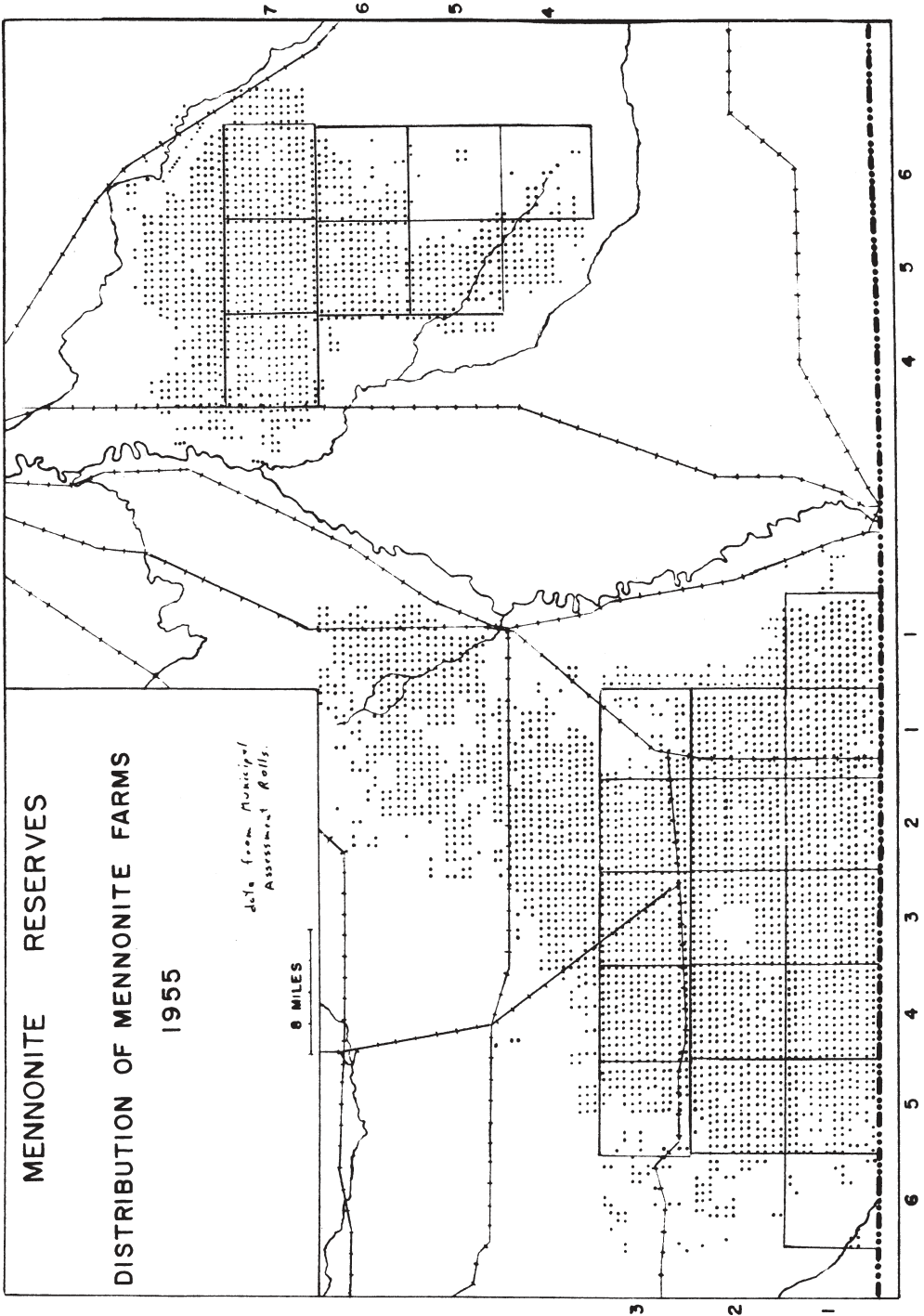


Figure 44





## Appendix K

### Notes on Rural Society in the Mennonite Areas

Much of the strength of the pioneer Mennonite settlements stemmed from the fact that the Mennonites transferred a fully formed, fully functioning society from Russia to Manitoba. Whole families and villages entered the new life together. The authority of the head of the household extended to all phases of life from the religious to methods of working the land, and this made a very efficient pioneer working force. Even the women worked in the fields while the men were out delivering grain or hauling timber.

The Mennonites' sober stern life was in complete contrast to the pioneer social life about them. In Morden or Clearsprings, for example, there were many Anglo-Saxon bachelors, and for a few years they comprised a "frontier" society, something the Mennonites never had. Local papers of the time are full of accounts of escapades, trips back east to look for wives, contests, fairs, and so on. Mennonites never had the opportunity to relax at the agricultural get-togethers and dances which were an important part of rural Manitoba life in the nineteenth century. The Mennonite society was really unique; the Mennonites did not participate in any social activities except conversation. Aside from the church, and the welfare activities associated with it, there were no social organizations whatsoever. If the existence of community organizations is taken as a measure, then Mennonite society was very immature, and as a consequence Mennonites were quite inexperienced at working together in formal organizations. Municipal government is an exception. It is only in recent decades that the cooperative movement, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Agricultural Societies, have started to overcome these attitudes. Even now it is almost impossible to start a community project unless it has some aspect of economic value, and newcomers often have their fingers burned when they come to Mennonite communities with ideas on recreational facilities that they want to implement.

These differences were also carried into the trading centres. Morden, for example, was a complete contrast to the Mennonite centres. Travelling companies of actors and musicians visited the town. There were dances, suppers and parties, musical clubs were organized, tennis and whist were played, and everyone fished and hunted. Gretna was on its way towards this society because of its strong non-Mennonite element, but none of the other West Reserve centres saw the like of this kind of life, which flourished in the province before the automobile and the radio. In the Mennonite centres there were no grounds or lawns even suggesting tennis or croquet and the other trivialities that help life run pleasantly and socially in its less serious moments.

The Mennonites were regarded by their neighbours as completely different people, but this attitude gradually waned with the years as the more tangible distinctions of architecture, accent, and attitude to the world became attenuated and the Mennonites were absorbed into the general stream of Canadian life. The break-down of the traditional Mennonite way of life, or the shedding of what the non-Mennonites would call idiosyncrasies, began as soon as the Mennonites settled in Canada. Better communication and the trading centres upset the former

life. There was a movement to the trading centres and to new forms of earning a livelihood, and also by the 1890's there was a migration of conservative Mennonites from the West Reserve to new agricultural areas in the North West Territories.

It is hard to judge accurately the effect of these early migrations and those after World Wars I and II, on the Mennonite society, but they did greatly speed up the integration of the Mennonites into Manitoba rural society. Most of the blind obedience to authority, characteristic of the Mennonites in the rural areas, went with the migrants. Mennonites already in the centres, and the potential leaders and businessmen, did not go. Consequently a reservoir of positive leadership for the future remained; only the lagging Mennonites of the rural areas who had been hindrances to integration of the group were drawn off.

Non-Mennonites in areas adjacent to the Reserves still differentiate between themselves and the Mennonites, and with some justification. Mennonites still tend to be more puritanical and also pursue the task of making a living more energetically than their neighbours. The concentration of Mennonites makes it easy to transfer the attributes of an individual or class of individuals to the entire Mennonite group, as is often done, especially by the French Canadians on the borders of the East Reserve.

## Appendix L

### Relative Importance of the Trading Centres

Not enough studies have been made of rural Manitoba, as yet, to fit the trading centres of the two Reserves into a province-wide scheme, but it is possible to compare the centres of the Reserves, and also to assess their relative importance. There is no one adequate basis on which the relative importance of different centres can be compared, especially where no adequate data is available. My attempts at comparing the hinterland of the centres at different times are shown in the series of maps of trading areas. But there is another method for comparing centres that has interesting possibilities. The gross postal revenues for the various centres are a way of measuring the comparative strengths of the centres for any particular year. They cannot be used for a detailed analysis but they do reveal long term trends. For example, the drop in importance of Emerson is clearly shown by the following gross postal revenue figures: 1881, \$3,085; 1886, \$1,505; 1891, \$1,200.<sup>1</sup> By 1886 Morden had moved ahead of Emerson with a gross postal revenue in the Reserve. Gretna, interestingly enough, caught up with Emerson by 1891 and then even passed it, but during most years Emerson has managed to stay ahead of Gretna.

Among the more strictly Mennonite centres of the West Reserve, Gretna had the largest revenue until 1911 when Winkler passed it, and then in 1916 Altona also shot ahead of Gretna. Winkler held the lead from 1911 right down to 1951 when Altona went ahead of it. All the centres had a great increase in revenue in the period from 1941 to 1951, with Altona growing more than any other centre. Table 36 shows the revenue figures for recent years.

**Table 36**  
**Gross Postal Revenues, West Reserve-1936-1951**

	Gretna	Altona	Rosenfeld	Horndean	Plum Coulee	Winkler	Morden
1936	\$ 1853	\$ 2448	\$ 894	\$ 912	\$ 1589	\$ 3848	\$ 7248
1941	2396	3405	1183	588	3234	5162	9563
1946	4145	8483	1879	971	3230	9619	12567
1951	4244	13420	2073	1185	3424	11728	15446

In the East Reserve, Steinbach has always been well ahead of the other centres so that nothing is learned by comparing the centres at various early stages. But what is interesting is that over the same period of years shown in Table 37, Steinbach shows the greatest increase of any centre, not even barring Morden, in either Reserve.

**Table 37**  
**Gross Postal Revenues, East Reserve-1936-1951**

	Steinbach	Niverville	Grunthal	St. Pierre	La Broquerie
1936	\$ 2745	\$ 636	\$ 412	\$ 1794	\$ 775
1941	4829	720	522	2340	921
1946	11411	1247	1591	3103	1410
1951	17141	1370	1705	4021	1489

<sup>1</sup> All the figures cited in this appendix have been obtained from: *Canada: Sessional Papers*, Annual Reports of the Postmaster General 1881-1951.

## Appendix M

### Notes on Social Characteristics of the Larger Centres

There are great differences in the social structures of the larger trading centres. In Morden, the Mennonites are increasing in number, but most of the community projects are still organized and run by the Anglo-Saxons. But compared to the Mennonite society of the Reserve as a whole, the Morden Mennonites must be considered quite far advanced as far as theatre going (a handy criterion to use), and general participation in the lighter side of Canadian life is concerned. Distinctions between Mennonites and non-Mennonites in Morden are declining, since other more pertinent distinctions exist within the town. The professional and moneyed people are on one side, the labouring group on the other; certainly nothing unusual in Manitoba small town society.

In Winkler, the battle of integration is still going on. Socially Winkler is split down the middle into the firmly evangelistic church-going Mennonite group, and the non-church-going-Mennonites, who comprise an important part of the business element of the town. The latter are looked upon with disapproval by the others. In between the two groups are the German Lutherans and a few other non-Mennonites. In normal life there is no friction between the two extreme Mennonite groups—at least no more than between the different Mennonite congregations. Occasionally, however, even the divisions between different congregations appear in other matters than religion. In municipal elections, for instance, some Mennonites will prefer to vote for a Lutheran, even though they may disapprove of his social life, rather than cast a ballot for a Mennonite of a different congregation. The Chamber of Commerce is one organization where the different elements are beginning to learn how to work together, but the 'you-were-seen-going-to-the-theatre' type of disapproval still exists. There is no immediate change in sight.

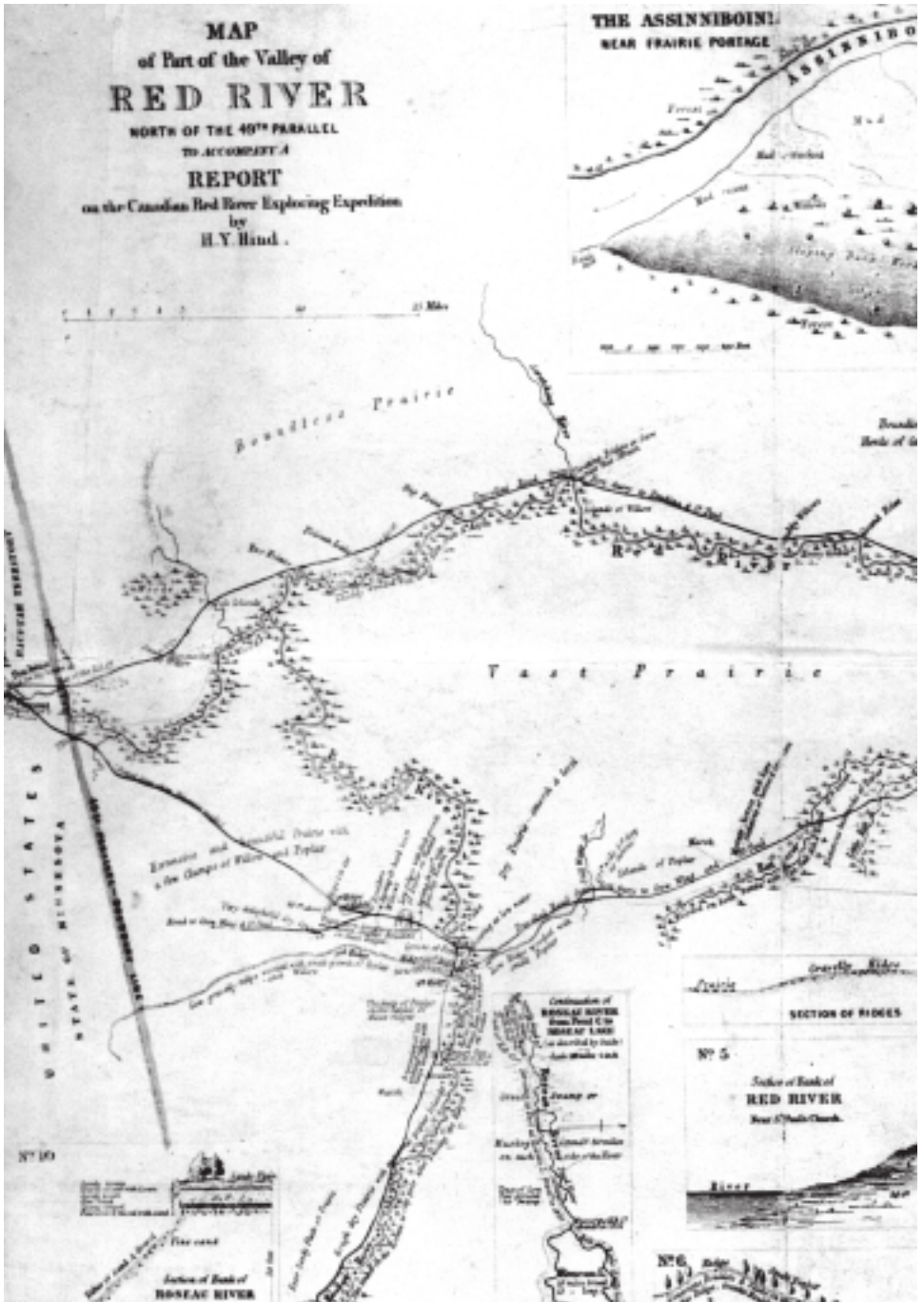
Altona has achieved a far more satisfactory social life. The two extremes found in Winkler still exist, but here there is a large, intelligently tolerant, middle group that more or less form public opinion. Mennonite moderation is still emphasized, but the uncompromising objection to non-Mennonite ways that is found in Winkler, and that leads to excesses on the other side, is not as strong in Altona. Altona is a strict, well balanced little town, similar to many throughout Manitoba, and non-Mennonites enjoy living in this essentially Mennonite community.

Steinbach has easily the most complicated society of any of these towns. Position and money count for much more in Steinbach than in any of the other towns. Descendants of the village founders, and they are numerous, have a condescending attitude towards all newcomers, Mennonite or otherwise. In none of the towns is there such a pronounced employer-employee break as in Steinbach. Socially, money is becoming more and more significant. Religious organizations span the gap to a certain extent, but even here a prestige Mennonite denomination is developing, trying to attract the important business people of the town. Finally, on the outside are the non-Mennonites who are stationed in Steinbach by the banks, the government, and the public utilities organizations. They are never accepted into Steinbach life at their face value as human beings, as they are in Winkler and

Altona, but are generally classified with the ostracized “beer parlour crowd”—into which group they are often involuntarily forced to withdraw. If these outsiders have children, they tend to worry over the advisability of bringing them up in Steinbach, because they realize that they are not leading a normal community life. The religious strength of Steinbach is increasing under the impact of repeated revival meetings (in 1955 all but four business proprietors on Main Street had recognized the wisdom of joining a church), but there are indications that the Mennonites are getting somewhat more liberal, somewhat more Christian, in their attitude to non-Mennonites, so that in time life for the newcomer in Steinbach won't be quite so isolated. In 1955 the non-Mennonite in Steinbach feels the way Mennonites felt for many years in Morden.

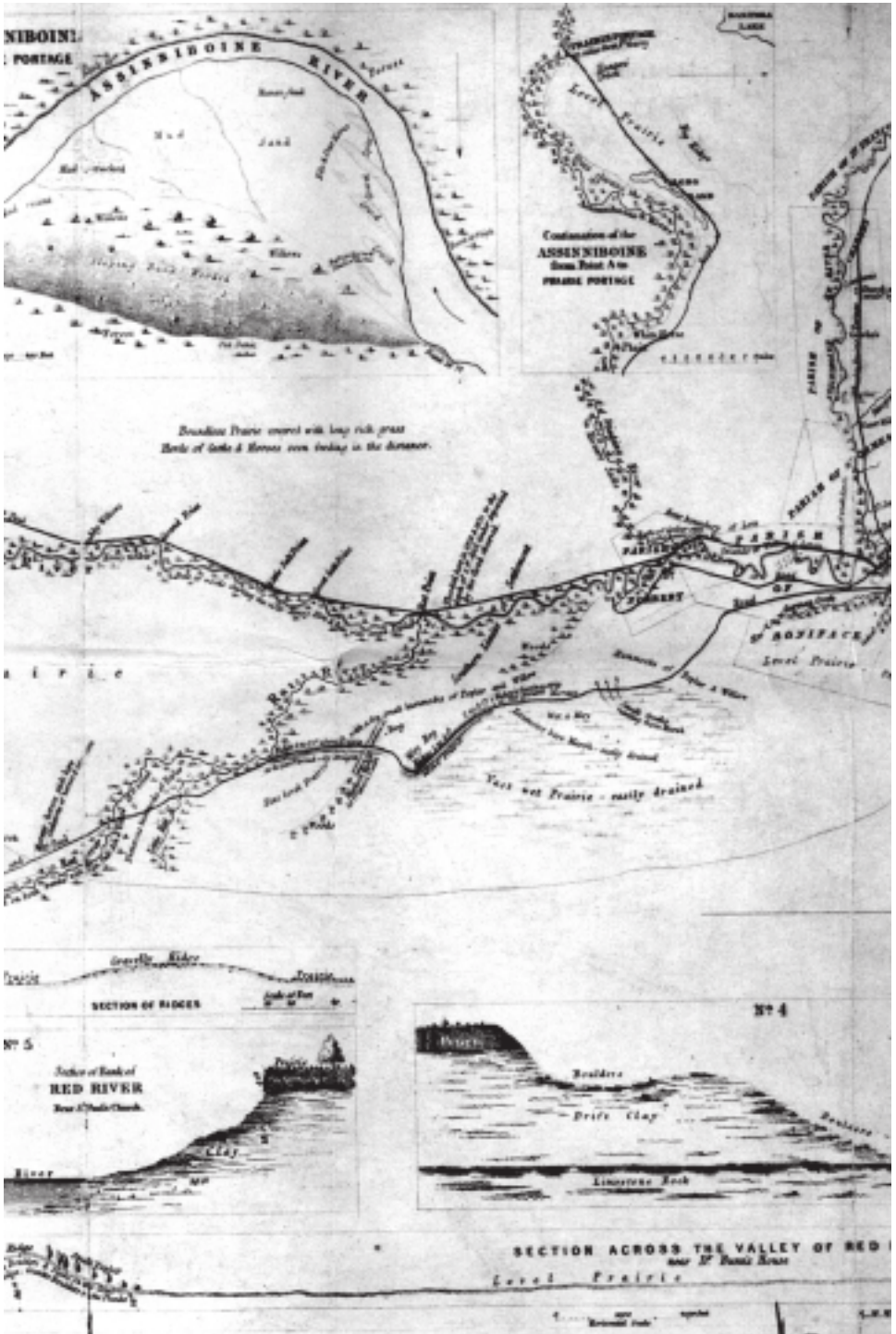
# Appendix N

## Assorted Maps & Plates

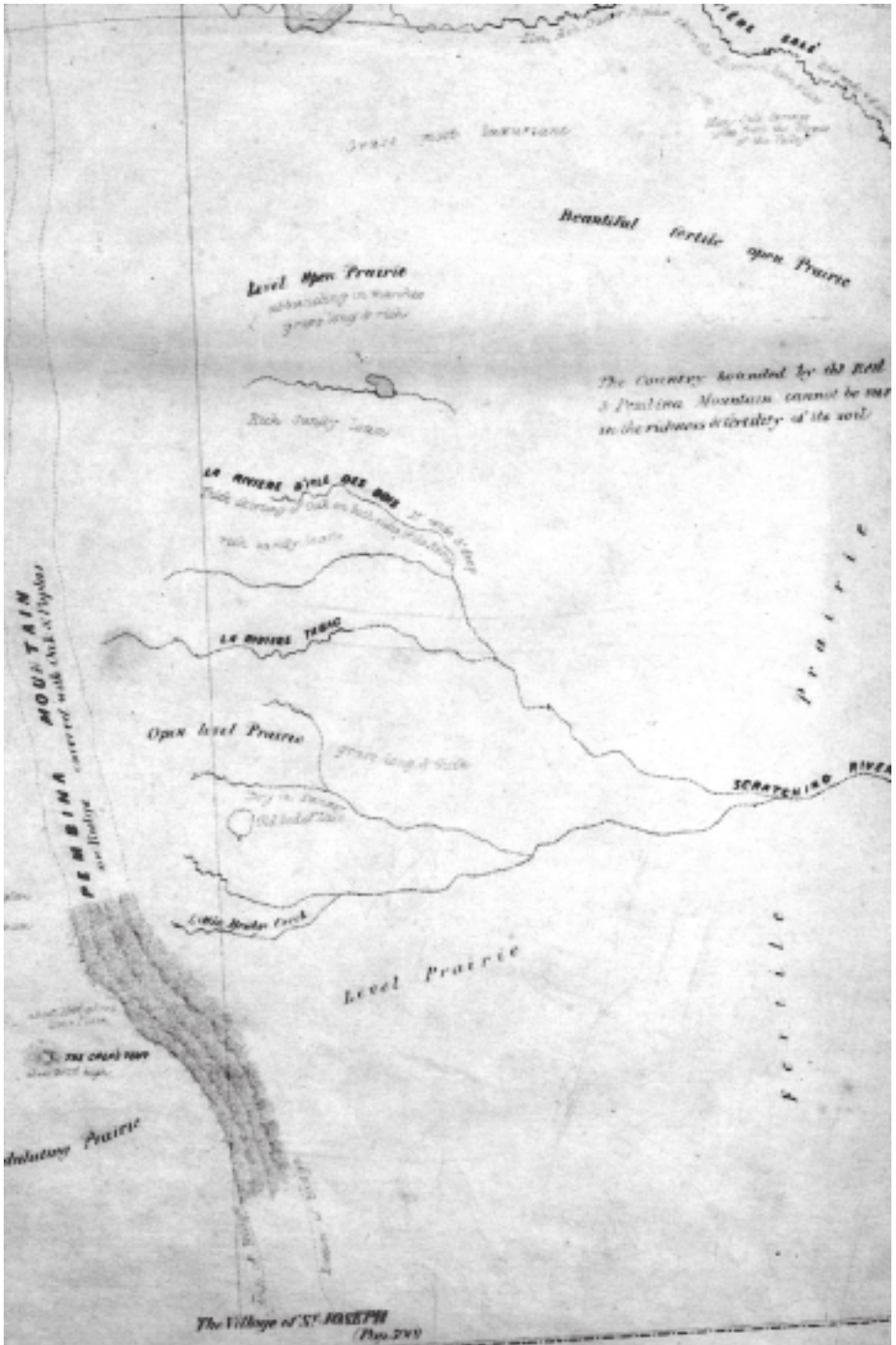


1P. Hind: East Reserve Country 1858

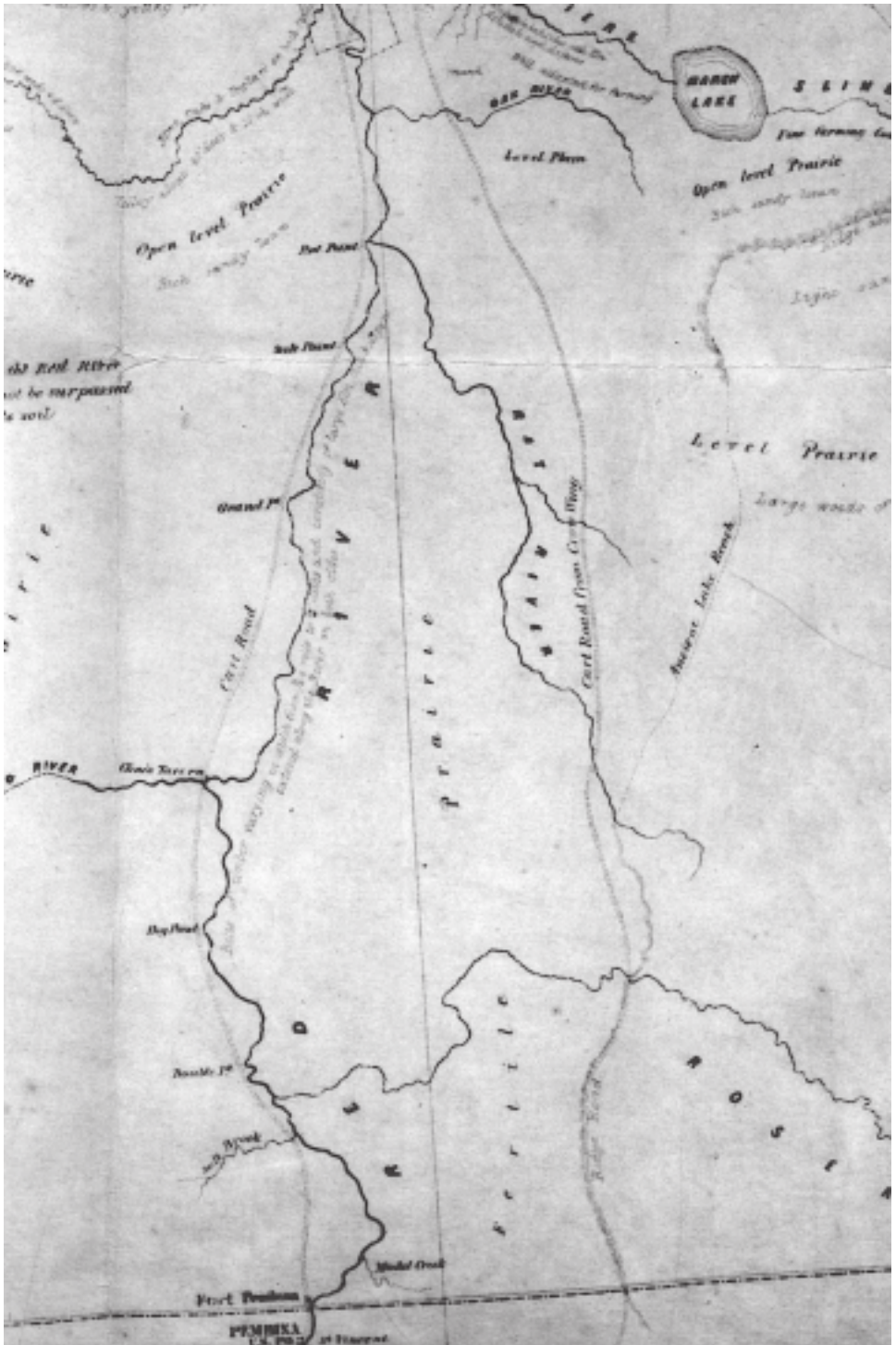




1P. Hind: East Reserve Country 1858 (Continued)

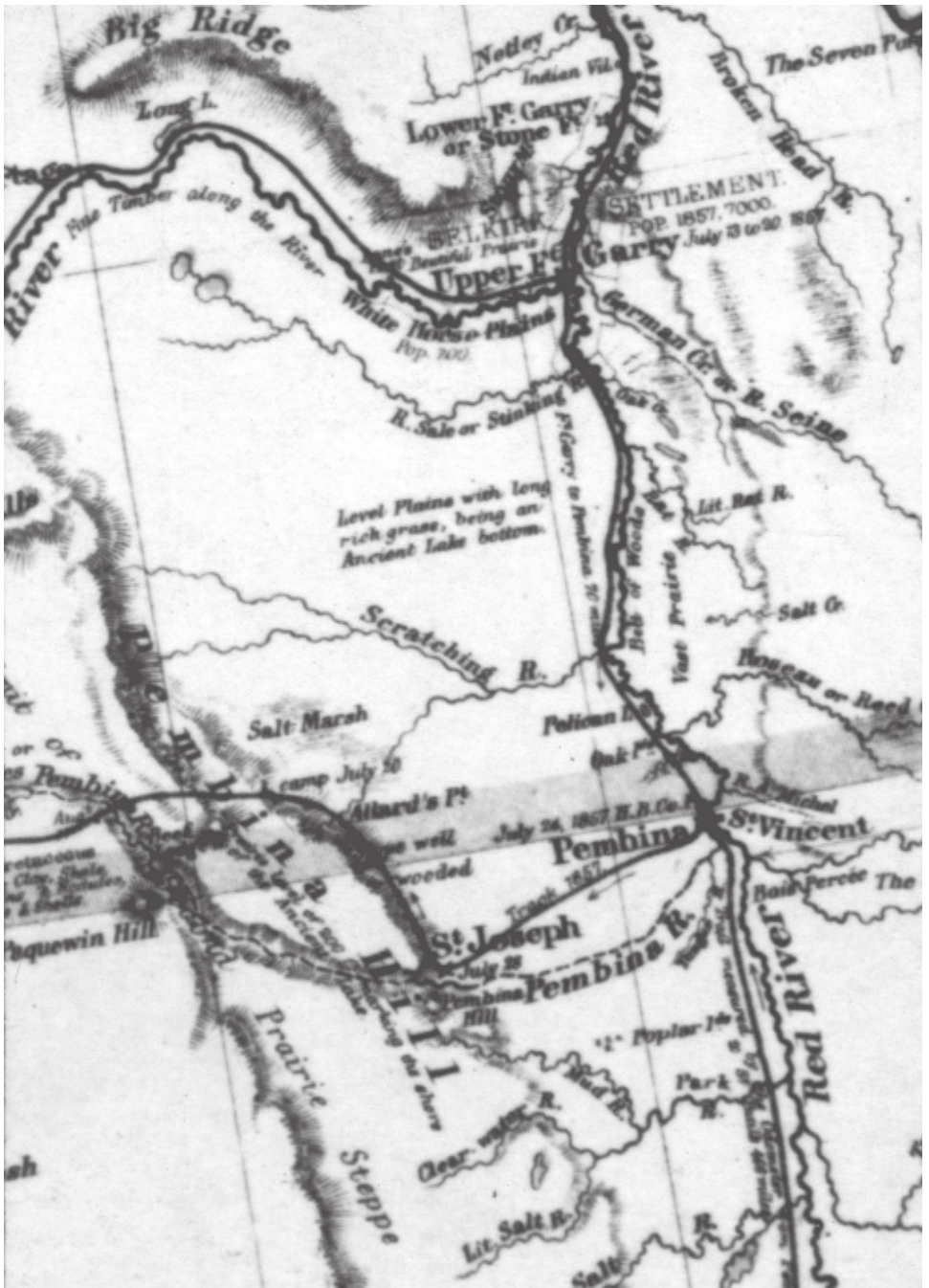


2P. Hind: West Reserve Country 1859

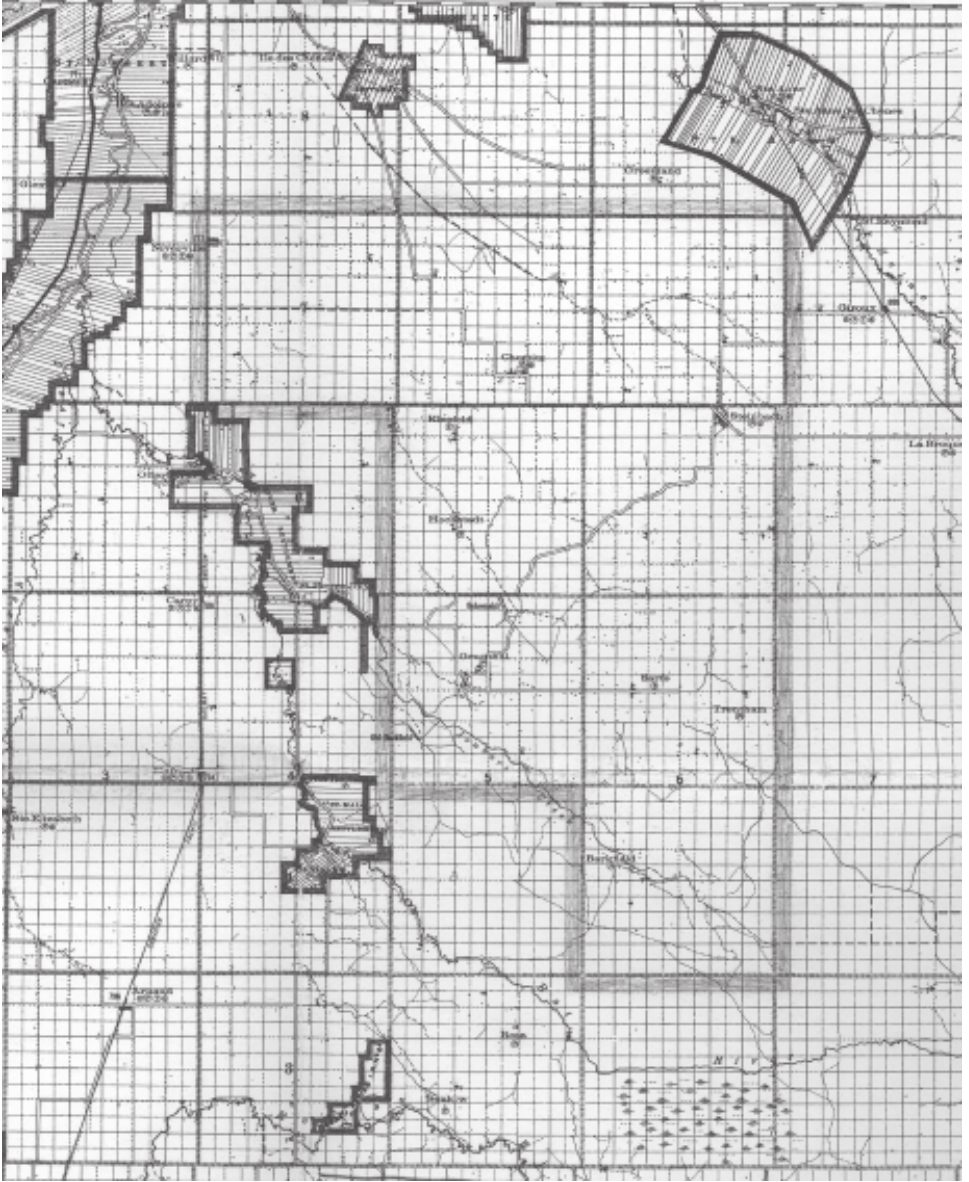


2P. Hind: West [and East] Reserve Country 1859



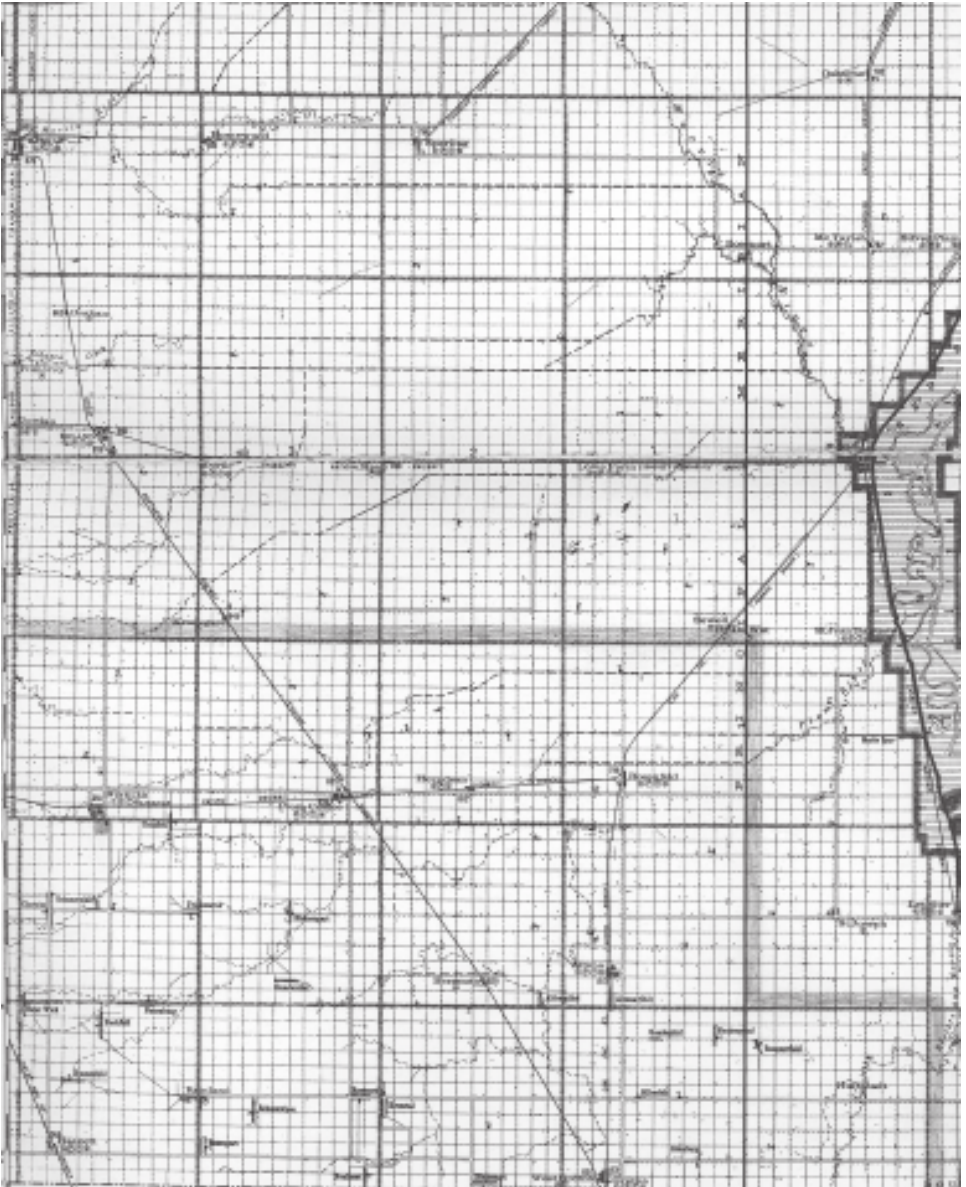


3P. Palliser: Red River Valley 1860



4P. [Southern Manitoba] Sectional Map





4P [Southern Manitoba] Sectional Map



*1P. Bergfeld*





*2P. Blumenfeld, 1946*



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## VIII. LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED 1955-1960

The following list only includes those persons who supplied me with more significant data. Many more people were interviewed.

K.R. Barkman, Steinbach, Merchant.

Alexander Berriault, Ste. Anne, Retired farmer.

Frank Brown, Winkler, Teacher.

John Braun, Rosenfeld, Grain buyer.

Theodore Chornoboy, Grunthal, Implement dealer.

H.A. Cochlan, Morden, Merchant.

William Cohoe, Giroux, Retired farmer.

A. Dack, Morden, Druggist.

Eugene Derksen, Steinbach, Publisher.

John Dreidger, Grunthal, Merchant.

Edward Dudman, Niverville, Retired merchant.

William Dyck, Niverville, Lumber dealer.

J.A. Ellis, Winnipeg, Soils scientist.

D.K. Friesen, Altona, Publisher.

Harry Friesen, Winkler, Town clerk.

John Friesen, Winnipeg, Land assessor.

T.E. Friesen, Altona, Businessman.

J. Fast, Kleefeld, Retired farmer.

Henry Giesbrecht, Blumenfeld, Retired farmer.

- George Goossen, Steinbach, Pool hall proprietor.  
J.A. Griffiths, Winnipeg, Engineer.  
P.S. Guenther, Steinbach, Potato grower.  
H.H. Hamm, Altona, Retired municipal clerk.  
Klaas Heide, Blumenfeld, Retired farmer.  
Edward Hoepfner, Ste. Anne, Grain buyer.  
J. Hooge, Plum Coulee, Retired farmer.  
E.T. Howe, Altona, Agricultural representative.  
Louis Jackman, Plum Coulee, Merchant.  
A.J. Janzen, Gretna, Retired farmer.  
Frank Kehler, Altona, Town clerk.  
Jacob Klassen, Steinbach, Hospital administrator.  
Peter Klassen, Blumenfeld, Retired farmer.  
Benjamin Klippenstein, Winkler, Teacher.  
A.A. Kroeker, Winnipeg, Farmer.  
C.T. Kroeker, Steinbach, Bulk oil dealer.  
Mrs. C.T. Kroeker, Steinbach, Housewife.  
Isaac Kroeker, Steinbach, Bulk oil dealer.  
K.T. Kroeker, Steinbach, Manitoba Sugar Company field man.  
Joseph la France, St. Pierre, Agricultural representative.  
E.B. Loewen, Winkler, Promoter.  
J. Loewen, Neuhorst, Farmer.  
P.J. Loewen, Blumenort, Merchant.  
Robert Loewen, Steinbach, Funeral director.  
Fern Paquin, Steinbach, Agricultural representative.  
J. Penner, Altona, Federated Cooperative field man.  
P.K. Penner, Steinbach, Transfer operator.  
Victor Peters, Winnipeg, Teacher.  
Henry Poetker, Winnipeg, Teacher.  
C.S. Prodan, Winnipeg, Agronomist.  
Eric Putt, Morden, Plant Scientist.  
H.W. Reimer, Steinbach, Merchant.  
J. Reimer, Linden, Storekeeper.  
J.A. Reimer, Steinbach, Retired meat packer.

- J.C. Reimer, Steinbach, Farmer.  
K.J.B. Reimer, Steinbach, Retired farmer.  
Peter Reimer, Steinbach, Merchant.  
Edmar Rempel, Steinbach, Flour mill proprietor.  
George Rempel, Winkler, Retired farmer.  
George Robertson, Grunthal, Rancher.  
Edward Salway, Steinbach, Manitoba Power Commission.  
John Schellenberg, Steinbach, Municipal clerk.  
J.J. Siemens, Altona, Retired farmer.  
Leonard Siemens, Winnipeg, Agronomist.  
Raymond Siemens, Altona, Farmer.  
Isaac Sirluck, Winnipeg, Retired merchant.  
Douglas Stevenson, Morris, Agricultural representative.  
David Stobbe, Altona, Municipal clerk.  
Peter Thiessen, Winnipeg, Teacher.  
J.J. Toews, Steinbach, Retired farmer.  
J.R. Walkof, Winkler, Farmer.  
J.B. Warkentin, Winkler, Retired teacher.  
J.J. Warkentin, Winkler, Farmer.  
Jacob Wedel, Chortitz, Teacher.  
C.W. Wiebe, Winkler, Medical doctor.  
Howard Winkler, Morden, Gentlemen.  
Albert Wittick, Niverville, Retired grain buyer.

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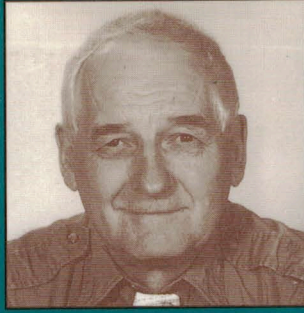
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JOHN H. WARKENTIN

This is a reprinting of a classic work by noted Canadian historical geographer John H. Warkentin. Warkentin, a native of Lowe Farm and Steinbach, both in Manitoba, undertook this study for his 1960 doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto. He went on to teach geography at United College (Winnipeg), the University of Manitoba and York University in Toronto. Prof. Warkentin is the author and editor of numerous historical geographies, atlases and articles. He is married to Germaine Warkentin and they are the parents to one daughter, Juliet. The Warkentins live in Toronto.

"In Canada few rural areas have a hidden landscape where one form of settlement has replaced another....In Western Canada, the predominant landscape is the one that developed under the regular rectangular survey. But within this region there are two relatively small areas in which one settlement pattern *has* been abandoned for another. These are the...East and West Reserves, settled in the years from 1874 to 1880 by approximately 7,000 Mennonites who migrated from South Russia [present-day Ukraine] to Manitoba...Perhaps nowhere else in North America has a peasant culture from Europe been so completely re-established....These settlements, as a consequence, offer an interesting and important study in the geography of Canada, because they reveal how nucleated farm settlements fared amidst North American prairie agriculture....This thesis is an endeavour to explain the changing geography of the Mennonite Reserves of Manitoba...from the 1870's to 1955 when the field work was done...The thesis [is] simply a study of the changing geography of the Mennonite Reserves of Southern Manitoba....[a] geographical expression of the agricultural settlements of Western Canada [that] includes the farming and trading settlements, together with their fields, pastures, farmsteads, barns, street layouts, business premises and residences, and also the transportation and drainage facilities." John H. Warkentin, 1960