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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE MENNONITES OF OKLAHOMA TO 1907

A THESIS

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

THE MENNONITES OF OKLAHOMA TO 1907

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

B. L. Howell

Clara E. McQuinn

BY *Marvin Elroy Kroeker*

MARVIN ELROY KROEKER

NORMAN, OKLAHOMA

1954

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was begun under the direction of Dr. E. B. Hale and was completed under the supervision of Dr. Lewis L. Woodell. I herewith express my sincere gratitude to them for their valued assistance.

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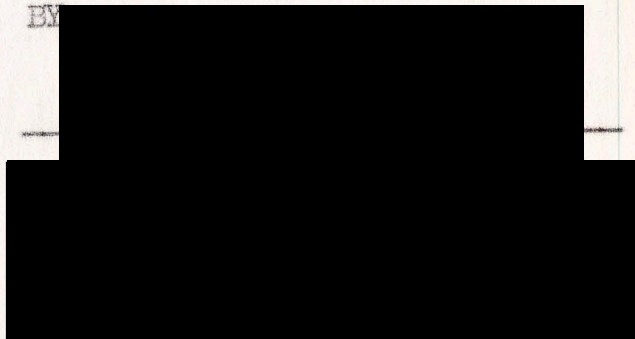
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter

I. EARLY HISTORY OF THE LUTHERANS IN
EUROPE AND AMERICA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was begun under the direction of Dr. E. E. Dale and was completed under the supervision of Dr. Morris L. Wardell. I herewith express my sincere gratitude to them for their valued assistance.

V. DENOMINATE SETTLEMENTS AND THE CHURCH IN
CANADA, MINN., IOWA, TEXAS, AND
CALIFORNIA

VI. DENOMINATE CULTURE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	v
Chapter	Page
I. EARLY HISTORY OF THE MENNONITES IN EUROPE AND EARLY MIGRATIONS	1
II. MENNONITE MISSIONS AMONG THE INDIANS IN WESTERN OKLAHOMA TO 1907.	16
III. MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS AND THE CHURCH IN THE CHEYENNE-ARAPAHO COUNTRY (1892-1907).	36
IV. MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS AND THE CHURCH IN THE CHEROKEE OUTLET (1893-1907)	54
V. MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS AND THE CHURCH IN CANADIAN, KIOWA, BEAVER, TEXAS, AND CADDO COUNTIES.	71
VI. MENNONITE CULTURE AND CONTRIBUTIONS	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

THE MENNONITES OF OKLAHOMA TO 1907

CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY OF THE MENNONITES IN

EUROPE LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Number of Mennonite Congregations by Branches in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Territory by 1907	53
2.	Number of Mennonite Congregations by Branches in the Cherokee Outlet by 1907	70
3.	Number of Mennonite Congregations by Branches in Canadian, Kiowa, Beaver, Texas, and Caddo Counties by 1907	75
4.	Number of Mennonite Congregations by Branches in Oklahoma Territory by 1907	76

1. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Horse, Indiana, 1861), 9-10.

2. Ibid., 90.

3. L. Wedel, Abtiss der Geschichte der Mennoniten, II, (Newton, Kansas, 1902), 92.

THE MENNONITES OF OKLAHOMA TO 1907

CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY OF THE MENNONITES IN EUROPE AND EARLY MIGRATIONS

The roots of Mennonitism reach back to the time of the Reformation and the Anabaptist movement. The various Anabaptist sects of the sixteenth century differed among themselves on some points but they were all separatists and independents.¹ On the whole there were two main streams in early Anabaptism dividing largely on the matter of nonresistance and the use of force. The majority belonged to the peaceful nonresistant group, and soon after 1535 they were the only type that survived.² One of these surviving groups later received the name Mennonite.³

The Anabaptist movement sprang up almost simultaneously in Switzerland, South Germany, Moravia, and Holland,

¹C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Berne, Indiana, 1941), 9-10.

²Ibid., 90.

³C. H. Wedel, Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten, II, (Newton, Kansas, 1902), 92.

and soon spread rapidly into other countries. Its adherents, in general, held to the principles of the evangelical faith in common with all Protestants; however, they stood for a more complete break from the Catholic Church than either Lutherans or Calvinists advocated. They sought a church that was not only completely independent from the dictates of an ecclesiastical hierarchy but also of political authority; a voluntary church composed of adult members admitted into membership by baptism, not as infants, but upon confession of faith.⁴

One of the chief leaders of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands was a former Catholic priest named Menno Simons (1492-1561). It was through reading, meditations, and observation that Simons began to question the Catholic position on infant baptism and the intermediary functions of the priests. In January, 1536, at the age of forty, he renounced the Catholic faith and associated himself with the nonresistant wing of the Anabaptists. During the next twenty-five years, Menno Simons worked so actively in the defense of the new faith that his followers were soon called after his name.⁵

⁴J. H. Langenwalter, Christ's Headship of the Church According to Anabaptist Leaders Whose Followers Became Menno-nites (Berne, 1917), 19-22.

⁵Harold S. Bender and John Horsch, Menno Simon's Life and Writings (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1936), 1-110.

Simons was not the founder of a new church but was the organizer of the many scattered elements that made up the church already in existence. Williston Walker said: "As for the Anabaptist movement itself, it came, especially in the Netherlands, under the wise, peace-loving, antifanatical leadership of Menno Simons . . . to whom its worthy re-organization was primarily due, and from whom the term Mennonite is derived."⁶

The Mennonites viewed the Bible as the new law in church and state. This concept had as little sympathy with other reformers of the day as with Catholics.⁷ Thus both Catholic and reformers treated the Mennonites as heretical, disloyal, rebellious, and untrustworthy subjects of the state. In 1529 a decree of the Diet of Spyrres provided that all Anabaptists should be executed without trial. The attitude exemplified in this decree prevailed extensively in the various countries where Mennonites were found. Ernest H. Correll, an authority on early Mennonite history, estimated that in the sixteenth century alone some five thousand died a martyr's death.⁸

⁶Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York, 1947), 366-368.

⁷Ibid., 368.

⁸Ernest H. Correll, Das Schweizerische Taufmennonitentum (Tubingen, Germany, 1925), 10.

The Mennonite doctrines, as expressed in their early declarations of faith, are generally accepted by Mennonites today. They adhere to the principles of autonomy of the churches, freedom of conscience, separation of church and state, adult baptism, nonresistance, and practical piety. They are opposed to the judicial oath and going to courts of law. Many practice nonconformity to the world.⁹

The refusal of the sect to bear arms has from the beginning been a source of misunderstanding which has expressed itself in various forms of religious and economic oppression. It has been a prime factor in causing the different groups to migrate from place to place seeking a "city of refuge" where they might be able to practice their faith in peace and quietness. A great many of these migrations ultimately terminated in America.

The Mennonite immigrations into North America may be divided into three rather definite periods. They are: (1) 1683-1776; (2) 1820-1860; and (3) 1873-1880.¹⁰

Four major factors were responsible for Mennonite immigration during the period 1683-1776. They were: (1)

⁹Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 115-118; also summarized in Edmund George Kaufman, The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites of North America (Berne, 1931), 8. Hereafter cited as Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites.

¹⁰There have also been rather extensive migrations following the global wars of the twentieth century but these are beyond the scope of this study.

the desperate economic conditions in Europe following the numerous wars of the eighteenth century;¹¹ (2) the outlawing in Germany of the Mennonite sect after 1648;¹² (3) heavy taxation;¹³ and (4) William Penn's trip to Germany influencing people to settle in Pennsylvania.¹⁴

The first permanent Mennonite settlers in America reached the New World on the ship Concord on October 6, 1683. The group consisted of thirteen families from Crefeld, Germany, and comprised a total number of thirty-three persons.¹⁵ Penn's quest for settlers in Germany had resulted in the formation of the Frankfort Land Company with Francis Daniel Pastorius as its chief agent. Upon the arrival of the Crefeld group in Pennsylvania, land was purchased from the company. Here the colonists built the village called Germantown, the first German settlement to be founded in America.¹⁶ Additional arrivals from Holland and Germany soon increased the size of the original settlement. The first public protest against slavery on record in America was

¹¹Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 544.

¹²Ibid., 313.

¹³A. B. Faust, The German Element in the United States, I (Boston, 1909), 30, 53-72.

¹⁴Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 536-537.

¹⁵Smith, The Mennonites of America (Scottsdale, 1909), 101.

¹⁶Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 537.

issued in 1688 by Mennonite and Quaker colonists in Germantown.¹⁷

In 1702 the Mennonites began to move westward from Germantown, starting a settlement along Skippack Creek.

This colony became the germ of other settlements in Bucks, Berks, Northampton, Montgomery, and Chester counties, Pennsylvania.¹⁸

On October 10, 1710, a small group of Mennonites purchased ten thousand acres of land north of Pequea Creek in what is now Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The total cost of this land was five hundred pounds sterling, plus one shilling quitrent annually for every one hundred acres.

Sensing the possibilities of this vast area the group sent Martin Kendig, one of the investors, to Europe to invite oppressed friends and kinsmen to move to the region. The general economic distress and religious persecution prevailing in Switzerland and Germany from 1708 to 1711 induced many Mennonites to accept Kendig's proposal to immigrate. As a result the Pequea settlement extended rapidly into adjoining counties.¹⁹

¹⁷Ibid., 540.

¹⁸Ibid., 546.

¹⁹Ibid., 546-547.

²¹Ibid., 530.

Before the end of the colonial period groups from the original settlements had expanded into New York, Maryland, and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Smith has estimated that in all there were some 2,500 Mennonites living in America by the time of the American Revolution.²⁰

Following the War of 1812 there was a great influx of European emigrants into America. This was largely due to the economic distress following the political revolutions in Europe and to the economic expansion and growing prosperity of young America. In addition to the causes that stimulated the immigration of other groups between the years 1820-1860, the Mennonites were particularly concerned about the military requirements being made upon them during the Napoleonic wars and the years following.²¹

The first Mennonite group to embark for America during the period 1820-1860 was from Switzerland. Benedict Schrag, the pioneer of the movement, had journeyed into the Northwest Territory as early as 1817 to prepare the way for the settlers. In 1820 the group, under the direction of Schrag, started a settlement in present Wayne County, Ohio. The enthusiastic reports of the settlers brought other emigrants from the area of Canton Bern, Switzerland. In 1833

²⁰Ibid., 548.

²¹Ibid., 580.

the colony of Bluffton was established in present Allen County, Ohio. In 1838 a group from the original Wayne colony started a settlement near the present city of Berne, Indiana. All of these communities, established far out on the frontier, grew to considerable proportions as the Swiss Mennonites continued to arrive.²²

Another group of Mennonite home-seekers arrived from Alsace-Lorraine and Bavaria. Settlements were made in Butler, Fulton, and Wayne counties, Ohio; Lewis County, New York; Waterloo County, Ontario, Canada; Lee and Henry counties, Iowa; and in Woodford, Tazewell, Livingston, McLean, and Bureau counties, Illinois. This group, totaling approximately 1,500, was composed entirely of Amish Mennonites.²³ Other groups coming from Bavaria, Hesse-Darmstadt, and Holland brought the total number of arrivals during this forty year period to more than 3,100.²⁴

The great Mennonite exodus from Russia occurred during the third period of immigration, 1873-1880. For the story of the Russian Mennonites it is necessary to go back to the time of Catherine II.

²²Ibid., 581-582.

²³Ibid., 588-594.

²⁴Ibid., 584-585, 594.

In 1800 Catherine II, Empress of Russia (1762-1796), in 1763 acquired a vast amount of territory from the Turks. Wishing to colonize the newly obtained region, Catherine II advanced very liberal inducements to German farmers to settle this new frontier. In 1786 a special invitation was extended to the Mennonites of West Prussia.²⁵ The Mennonites in Prussia had originally been driven from Holland and were at this time again facing severe restrictions upon their religious liberties. Catherine's offer, therefore, was given immediate and serious consideration.²⁶

The Russians offered the Mennonites the following liberal terms: (1) complete religious freedom; (2) exemption from military service; (3) sixty dessiatine (175 acres) to each family; (4) tax exemption for ten years; (5) a monopoly on distilleries within their settlements; (6) free transportation to the provinces; and (7) a loan of five hundred rubles to each family.²⁷ Official verification of the terms resulted in the migration of more than four hundred Mennonite families to the region of the Chortitza River by 1800.²⁸

²⁵p. M. Friesen, Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland 1789-1910 (Halbstadt, Russia, 1911), 72.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Wedel, Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten, III, 128-129.

²⁸Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites (Berne, 1927), 24.

In 1800 Paul I renewed the special privileges, whereupon additional groups settled upon the rich bottom lands of the Molotschna River. By 1840 there were over 1,600 families living in the two colonies.²⁹

For almost a century these industrious agrarians lived in peace and prosperity upon the steppes of Russia. Virtually existing as a state within a state, they maintained their German language and Mennonite customs. In 1870, however, the Russian government decided that a thoroughgoing Russianization program for her polyglot empire was necessary. The Mennonites, to their great alarm, learned that the new policies would end military exemptions and the use of the German language. Three special committees were dispatched to St. Petersburg between the years 1871 and 1873 to implore for the continuation of their special privileges, but no assurances were forthcoming.³⁰ For many, this left only one alternative--another immigration.

After considering various possible new home lands, a delegation of twelve men journeyed to North America to examine conditions. The investigating committee toured the United States and Canada during the months of May, June, and

²⁹ Friesen, Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland 1789-1910, 74.

³⁰ Ibid., 493, 495-496.

³¹ Carlisle S. Young, "A Record concerning Mennonite Immigration, 1873", American Historical Review, LXXX (April, 1964), 521.

July, 1873.³¹ While in this country, some of the delegates visited President Ulysses Grant and presented him with the following petition:

To the President of the United States of America:

"We as a delegation of Russia with the intention to migrate to the United States of America, petition the President of the United States of America on the following points. For at least fifty years we want to be entirely free from all military obligation. After fifty years we are willing to pay the amount that all the rest of the Mennonites or peoples whose Confessions of Faith are against their taking up arms pay. Otherwise we are willing to pay all taxes and submit to all the laws of the United States like other citizens, that is, as long as they are not against our conscience or belief. The military question drove us from Russia and we are seeking for a land where we can live peaceable according to our faith. We also ask the esteemed and excellent President of the United States whether it may be permitted to live in colonies or villages, to have our own schools where we may teach the German language, whether we will be free from holding public offices such as judgeship, etc., and from sitting on juries. On what condition will government land be given and how many acres will be given to one person? Will we as Mennonites be excused from taking an oath? Will our Yes or No be accepted by the government instead of the oath? Our Confession of Faith does not allow us to swear or take an oath. In case the government should later try to compel us to do something against our Confession of Faith, will we have a right to move out of the country? For all these questions we ask a definite answer from the excellent President of the United States of America so that we as a delegation will be able to tell our oppressed people in Russia something of the privileges of America.

"Paul Tschetter
"Lorenz Tschetter"³²

³¹Leonard Sudermann, Eine Deputations Reise von Russland nach Amerika (Elkart, Indiana, 1897), 62-65.

³²Gertrude S. Young, "A Record concerning Mennonite Immigration, 1873", American Historical Review, XXIX (April, 1924), 521.

This petition was presented to President Grant on July 27, 1873, who was at Long Branch, New Jersey, at the time. The following answer was received by the delegates in September after they had returned to Russia:

"Washington, D.C.
"September 5, 1873

"To the Mennonite Delegation
"Of Russia to America:

"The Honorable President of the United States of America gave me your petition to look over and as there are several questions of importance involved in your petition, I was not in position to answer it without consulting authorities. . . . We say to your requests that holding office or sitting on jury, or managing school affairs are matters under the control of the state in which you settle The President of the United States of America, cannot excuse you from those laws enacted in the state that you are living in. The President of the United States of America cannot make you any promise in connection with your request for entire exemption from military service for fifty years, nor for dealing with you after that as suggested in your petition. But we are sure--and it will prove true--that the United States of America will not be entangled in any great war for the coming fifty years that would make it necessary to molest you. But in case there should come a great war, I have not much doubt but that then Congress would find itself justified in finding a way to honor your faith without releasing you from the duties of citizens. Excuse the delay in my answer, as I had to have a personal talk with the President in order to be able to write his opinion or reply.

"With great respect, Your obedient servant,

"Hamilton Fish"³³

The Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company played a major role in the Mennonites' immigration to America

³³Ibid., 521-522.

at this time. The company had acquired a vast land grant across Kansas, and by 1873 had built its line the length of that state.³⁴ The company officials, interested in seeing the land sold and developed as quickly as possible, established a land department with A. Z. Touzalin as its head. Touzalin appointed C. B. Schmidt as a foreign agent. The purpose of the department was to induce people to move to the Santa Fe lands in the West.³⁵

Schmidt came into contact with the Mennonite delegation in 1873 and aroused the interest of the group in the Santa Fe lands. In 1874 he made a special trip to the Mennonite colonies in southern Russia. The liberal inducements offered by the railroad company were met with widespread enthusiasm.³⁶

The following factors initiated the great emigration of this period: the Mennonites' fear of militarization; the idea that the German language was inseparable from their religion; the optimistic report of the delegation to America; the apparent willingness of the United States Government to recognize their faith; and the generous inducements of the

³⁴L. L. Waters, Steel Trails to Santa Fe (Lawrence, 1950), 45.

³⁵Ibid., 222-227.

³⁶Carl Bernhard Schmidt, "Reminiscences of Foreign Immigration Work for Kansas", Kansas State Historical Society Transactions, 1906, IX, 485-497.

Santa Fe Railroad Company. In 1874 the first large contingent of emigrants, 1,900 strong, arrived in Topeka, Kansas. Their peculiar dress and strange tongue made them quite an attraction to the people of that capital city.³⁷ Arrangements were immediately made for the purchase of vast areas of land from the Santa Fe Company. Within a short time the germ of Mennonite culture was being implanted upon the prairies of central Kansas. It was this pioneering group that introduced the hard variety of Red Turkey wheat that has transformed the plains region into the bread basket of the nation.³⁸

By the end of the 1873-1880 period of immigration some 18,000 Mennonites had left Russia for North America. Eight thousand settled in Canada and ten thousand in the United States. Over one-half of this latter group located along the frontier line of Kansas, while the remainder established homes in Nebraska, Minnesota and the Dakotas.³⁹

The exchanging of the steppes of Russia for the prairies of the Middle West was attended with many hardships. There were droughts, dust storms, grasshoppers, panics and other difficulties. By sheer endurance the Mennonites overcame all obstacles and gradually became independent and prosperous.

³⁷Waters, Steel Trails to Santa Fe, 232.

³⁸Ibid., 235.

³⁹Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites, 129.

The Mennonites arriving in America from 1683 to 1880 came from many scattered countries with diverse social backgrounds. Differences in language, social practices, interpretations of minor doctrines and methods of church discipline caused many divisions among them. As a result there are today some twenty separate bodies of Mennonites in the United States and Canada.⁴⁰

The first Mennonites to penetrate into present-day Oklahoma were missionaries sent out by the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America. The General Conference Church was organized in 1860 with the avowed purpose of unifying the various Mennonite groups into one common organization. Although the unification effort met with little success, the General Conference, as a separate branch, maintained a substantial growth after 1863.¹

The General Conference group came to be regarded as one of the more liberal Mennonite factions. They remained theologically conservative but showed more tolerance in their social practices. Unlike many of the branches they prescribed no dress restrictions. Marriage to unbelievers and the holding of public offices were also permitted. In general, they were not as fearful of contamination by the outside world as the other Mennonite groups.² Early congregations

⁴⁰See Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 596ff.

where concentrated in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas.

In 1873 the General Conference churches appointed S. S. Haury, newly ordained missionary, to investigate the possibilities of opening a mission field among the American Indians.

CHAPTER II

MENNONITE MISSIONS AMONG THE INDIANS

IN WESTERN OKLAHOMA TO 1907

The first Mennonites to penetrate into present-day Oklahoma were missionaries sent out by the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America. The General Conference Church was organized in 1860 with the avowed purpose of unifying the various Mennonite groups into one common organization. Although the unification effort met with little success, the General Conference, as a separate branch, maintained a substantial growth after 1863.¹

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¹Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 676-684.

²Ibid., 692.

were concentrated in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas.

In 1875 the General Conference churches appointed S. S. Haury, newly ordained missionary, to investigate the possibilities of opening a mission field among the American Indians.³ In the fall of 1876 Haury visited the Osage, Pawnee, Sac and Fox tribes of northeastern and central Indian Territory.⁴ In July, 1877, his quest for a mission site led him to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes in present-day Oklahoma. Haury spent two months in constant contact with the Indians in an effort to gain a foothold among them. He made his home in a tent loaned to him by Chief Powder Face of the Arapaho tribe.

Following an interview with John Miles, head of the Cheyenne-Arapaho agency at Darlington, Haury reported to the Mennonite mission board as follows:

Next spring, perhaps in April, God willing, I shall again return to the Indians, there to settle among the Arapahos. First . . . erect a small building . . . then endeavor by the Lord's aid to learn the language My reasons for selecting the Arapahos are these: more preliminary work has been done among the Arapahos; they seem to be more willing to receive a missionary than the Cheyennes. The Indian agent here has also advised me to begin my work with the Arapahos. But above all I feel myself drawn more to this tribe⁵

³Verhandlungen der Allgemeine Konference der Mennoniten, 1875 (Elkart, 1875), 52.

⁴H. P. Krehbiel, History of the Mennonite General Conference, I (Newton, 1898), 248. Hereafter cited as History of the General Conference.

⁵Ibid., 250-251.

The board approved this plan and in 1880 the mission work was begun.⁶ On May 18 of that year Haury and his wife left Halstead, Kansas, for the mission field. After a journey of four days in a light, pony-drawn, spring wagon they arrived in Darlington, Indian Territory. With the cordial assistance of Agent Miles and his wife, the couple was soon settled in a government building at the agency.⁷

Plans for the construction of a mission and industrial boarding school were formulated at once. In the following spring work on the project was begun. Cornelius Duerksen, C. J. Wedel, and other volunteer workers arrived from Mennonite communities in Kansas to aid in the building project. Since there were no railroads in the region, much of the necessary building material had to be converted from local raw resources, thus entailing a great deal of tedious labor. Before the end of August, however, the building was completed.⁸ The editor of the Cheyenne Transporter, an early day newspaper printed in Darlington, described the three-storied wooden structure as "one of the most substantial in the Territory, reflecting credit on Rev. Haury and the Mennonite church."⁹

⁶Ibid., 282.

⁷Ibid., 284.

⁸Ibid., 284-285.

⁹Cheyenne Transporter, November 10, 1881.

The school opened in October, 1881, and soon a near capacity of nineteen Arapaho youths were enrolled.¹⁰ The infant enterprise, however, experienced a stunning setback on February 19, 1882, when fire destroyed the entire building and most of its contents. The material loss was estimated to exceed seven thousand dollars. In addition four lives were lost, including the missionaries' infant son and adopted Indian daughter.¹¹

In a special session the Mennonite mission board decided to rebuild the school at once. The various congregations of the General Conference rallied to the cause and within a few months five thousand dollars had been collected.¹²

During the construction of the new building, Miles informed the mission board that Camp Cantonment, located about sixty miles northwest of Darlington, was to be abandoned by the Government. He suggested that free use of the vacated buildings could possibly be secured if the mission desired to expand its work in that direction. When informed that the board's treasury would be empty after the completion of the present rebuilding project, Miles persuaded the Government to appropriate five thousand dollars toward the construction

¹⁰U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1882 (Washington, 1882), 62. Hereafter cited as Report of Indian Commissioner.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 291.

of the school at Darlington. This left the mission board enough money to begin a second station at Cantonment.¹³

In September, 1882, the post buildings at Cantonment were transferred to the Department of Interior for school purposes. Shortly thereafter the Government sanctioned use of the site and buildings for school and mission activities sponsored by the Mennonites.¹⁴ In line with this expansion program a number of new workers arrived on the field during the year. Prominent among the arrivals were H. R. Voth, O. S. Schultz, and A. E. Funk.¹⁵

By fall the new brick school edifice at Darlington, capable of accomodating about fifty children, was completed.¹⁶ Voth was placed in charge of the Darlington station and Haury was delegated to develop the Cantonment field.¹⁷ Eventually arrangements were completed for a school and an Indian hospital at the latter station.

For a number of years the mission-contract schools at Darlington and Cantonment had as many pupils as they could accomodate--Darlington about fifty and Cantonment about sixty-five.¹⁸ Although stressing religious instruction, the rudi-

¹³Report of Indian Commissioner, 1883, 68-69.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 294.

¹⁶Cheyenne Transporter, December 26, 1882.

¹⁷Ibid., February 10, 1883.

¹⁸Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 304.

ments of a general education were not neglected. Special consideration was also given to vocational training. The girls were taught sewing, mending, knitting, and the general duties of housekeeping. The boys learned to farm, garden, take care of livestock, split and saw wood, and perform other vocational tasks.¹⁹ The following statement concerning the principle underlying this type of work has been given by J. van der Smissen, a member of the conference mission board.

It is exceedingly difficult to effectively preach the Gospel among people who have been weaned from all wholesome, regular work The Indian does not think of the morrow, nor . . . know anything of the fascination the earning of an independent livelihood has The Government does much . . . for the literary education of the Indian; but experience has made it clear that the civilization of these people must be accomplished in an altogether different manner. . . . Our workers desire to accustom the Indian to work, to get them to love work, to teach them the blessings of labor, and while constantly giving them spiritual care, also, as far as can be done, train them into settled useful citizens.²⁰

Beginning in 1886 a hundred-acre farm was operated in connection with the Darlington school. In its first year of operation nearly one thousand bushels of corn was produced by the pupils under the direction of the industrial teacher.²¹ A similar type of farm was in operation at the Cantonment school. Other crops successfully grown on the two farms in-

¹⁹Report of Indian Commissioner, 1886, 124-126.

²⁰Quoted in Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 297.

²¹Report of Indian Commissioner, 1886, 124-126.

cluded oats, millet, potatoes, turnips, sugar cane, broomcorn, and melons. Horses, mules, cattle, hogs and chickens were also raised.²²

To expedite the acquisition of the English language the school children were forbidden to speak their native tongue, except while playing or while in their private rooms. Daily devotional services and classes in Bible reading were held. For further religious instruction Foster's Gospel Story was used as a classroom text.²³ Meals were conducted on a family basis with the teachers, hired help, and school children enjoying the same table privileges.

In 1882 a beginning was made in placing Indian boys into Mennonite homes in Kansas for the purpose of giving them first-hand training on the farm. Agent Miles had given his approval of this plan, stating that in this way "the youths will learn more of home life and home duties than will be possible for them to learn in any of our boarding schools."²⁴ In 1885 an industrial Indian school was arranged for in conjunction with the Kansas Mennonite Conference school at Halstead. The purpose of the school was to give the Indian students an industrial and Christian training far removed from the easy-going tribal environment which was thought to be det-

²²Ibid., 1887, 79-80

²³Ibid., 1886, 124-125.

²⁴Ibid., 1882, 57.

rimental to their progress toward civilization. Fifteen youths from the agency were enrolled at Halstead during the first year. In 1837 the school was transferred to a farm southeast of Halstead where it was privately operated by Christian Krehbiel, a prominent Mennonite minister.²⁵

The direct educational activities of the Mennonites through schools covered a period of approximately fifteen years. The Cheyenne Transporter editorially commented in 1832: "Too much credit cannot be given the Mennonites for the energy displayed in their . . . work at this agency, and under the able direction of Mr. Haury and his co-workers, every obstacle has been overcome and the good work continued."²⁶ A visitor at the Darlington mission school in the spring of 1833 reported that she was much impressed with the school. She expressed the wish that all the Indian children in the Territory might have "as good a home and pleasant surroundings as the children of this school have."²⁷

Captain R. J. Pratt, upon the occasion of his visit to the agency in the interest of his Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Indian school, also expressed approval of the flourishing schools maintained by the Mennonites.²⁸ Agent D. B. Dyer re-

²⁵Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 306-309.

²⁶Cheyenne Transporter, December 26, 1832.

²⁷Ibid., March 27, 1833.

²⁸Ibid., January 13, 1834.

ported in 1884 that the two government schools maintained on the agency "were certainly little credit to teachers, Indians, or anyone else connected with the work." He added, however, that this statement did not apply to the Mennonite schools which, "although having a small number of pupils, have been quite successful Their work is a life one, to better the condition of the poor people Their services are exceedingly valuable."²⁹

Until 1887, the educational training of the youth was the main mission emphasis. Work among the adults, however, was not entirely neglected. As early as 1883 Haury undertook the establishment of an Indian colony in Cantonment by persuading as many Indian families as possible to move into the mission compound with him. He soon managed to gather a community of Indians together and thus was able to teach them agriculture and other civilized pursuits, as well as give them the Gospel.³⁰ When it appeared that the region was too arid for farming, Haury directed the energy of the group toward stock raising. One thousand dollars was appropriated by the mission board for the purchase of a herd of cattle. This venture was not only to help support the work but was also to serve as a means of training the Indians to self-

²⁹Report of Indian Commissioner, 1884, 75.

³⁰Ibid., 1883, 68.

sufficiency.³¹ This undertaking, however, never grew to large proportions and was later abandoned.³²

Regular Sunday church services were held at both stations for the Indians who came from the surrounding camps to hear the Gospel. The services were translated into the Indian dialects by interpreters who had attended Carlisle.³³ In addition to his heavy school duties Voth conducted a camp class in Darlington for the adults. The class met three times a week and consisted principally of agency employees who were beginning to realize the utility of an education.³⁴ For many years the Mennonites were the only group carrying on religious activities at the agency; therefore, Voth made zealous efforts to minister to both Indian and white.

In 1887 the mission board decided to put more emphasis upon the evangelization of the adult Indians. Missionary J. J. Kliwer was appointed to this task. About sixty miles west of Darlington was a large Arapaho settlement located along the Washita River, near the present Corn community. In this distant Indian haven Kliwer established a new mission station in July, 1889.³⁵

³¹Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 294.

³²Kaufman, Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites, 143.

³³Report of Indian Commissioner, 1886, 125.

³⁴Cheyenne Transporter, April 12, 1883.

³⁵Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 310-311.

A further step in the program to reach more adults was taken in 1891 when Rudolph Petter, a native of Switzerland, was appointed to work among the Cheyenne Indians at Cantonment.³⁶ Petter's translations of the Cheyenne language have made him internationally famous as a philologist. His Cheyenne-English dictionary is said to be one of the most extensive works of its kind ever published. It first contained more than fifty thousand words, but since its original publication several thousand more have been added. Petter has also made extensive translations of the books of the Bible, all translations being made from the original Hebrew and Greek.³⁷ Dr. James Mooney, in a Smithsonian Institute publication of 1907, calls Petter "our best authority on the Cheyenne language". In further tribute to the missionary he states: "In addition to his scholarly training by which he is able to preach with almost equal fluency in French, German, English and Cheyenne, it may safely be asserted that no other white man who ever came to the Cheyennes commanded more of their respect and affection."³⁸

³⁶G. A. Linscheid, "Historical Sketch of the General Conference Mennonite Mission Enterprise in Oklahoma", Mission Quarterly, V (June, 1930), 13.

³⁷Kaufman, Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites, 145.

³⁸James Mooney, "The Cheyenne Indians", American Anthropological Association Memoirs, 1907 (Lancaster, 1907), 439.

Beginning in 1889 certain events transpired that had great effects upon all mission activities in Oklahoma. On April 22 of that year the Oklahoma District was opened to white settlement. The mission station at Darlington was located only one mile from the western boundary of the newly opened lands. As a result, the Indians were now brought into close contact with the whites. With the white man came railroads, plows, wire fences, and other destroyers of Indian civilization. These new and captivating forces immediately seemed to crowd out much of the interest the Indian formerly had exhibited in the Gospel. Another event of great import was the Government's decision to allot the Cheyenne-Arapaho land in severalty and open the surplus areas to white settlement. The inspection and choice of lands by the Indians caused so much moving around that the mission work was temporarily brought to a standstill.

In selecting their allotments the Indians usually chose adjoining areas along some river or stream, permitting them to live in close conjunction with other members of their tribe. Large groups settled near the Cantonment and Washita missions. Settlements of considerable size were also made at Hacoenaom (Clinton), and Red Moon (Hammon); consequently arrangements were made to establish new mission stations at these places. Darlington, on the other hand, was virtually deserted. The work at this initial station dwindled to such

an extent that it was finally abandoned in 1902.³⁹

The land on which the Washita Mission was located, as well as the sites of several proposed missions, became subject to the general homestead law. In order to hold these stations it was necessary for the missionaries to homestead the land in their own names. The station on the Washita River was taken in this manner by Kliewer, while J. S. Krehbiel homesteaded a plot for a new station near the Red Hills, in present Blaine County.⁴⁰

The Hacenaom Cheyenne mission was established in 1894 near the present city of Clinton. M. M. Horsch, G. A. Linscheid, and J. H. Epp were pioneer missionaries on this field.⁴¹ The arrival of J. B. Ediger in 1907 established the work on a firm foundation.

Red Moon Mission was established on an eighty-acre tract near the present town of Hammon in 1898. Within a few years H. J. Kliewer, the first missionary, ministered to approximately two hundred Cheyennes in the area.⁴²

³⁹Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, II, 9-12.

⁴⁰Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, I, 315-319.

⁴¹Ibid., II, 9-12.

⁴²Mennonite Year Book and Almanac for 1901 (Quaker-town, 1901), 30.

The Washita Mission, later called Shelly, continued to function until 1897. During that period the surrounding area was settled by Kansas Mennonites. The station was discontinued when Kliewer, the missionary, became the pastor of one of the Mennonite churches in the region. The fate of the Red Hills Mission was very much the same. It continued to operate under the direction of J. S. Krehbiel until the coming of the white settlers. Many of the first settlers were Mennonites and when they established a church in Geary, Krehbiel accepted the pastorate. The Indian mission was discontinued in 1897 but many Indians attended the Mennonite church after that date.⁴³

The year 1907 found the Mennonite missionaries viewing the future with optimism. Church membership among both tribes was climbing; native Christians were being appointed evangelists; and new out-stations were in the process of formation.⁴⁴ The entire missionary program seemed geared to render many more years of service to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians of Oklahoma.

Mennonite Brethren Conference

The Mennonite Brethren Church was a second Mennonite branch which began mission activities in Oklahoma before statehood. This division of the Mennonite sect found its be-

⁴³Ibid., 29.

⁴⁴Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, II, 15.

ginning in the apparent decline of the religious and moral values of the Mennonite colonists in nineteenth-century Russia. On January 6, 1860, a small group from the existing Mennonite body drew up a document which decried the religious decay of the order and declared the formation of a new church. The group was especially vehement in denouncing the strict formalism and ritual that they felt had become attached to conversion and church membership. Immersion was adopted as their method of baptism and stress was laid upon an actual "experience of salvation"; otherwise the faction did not depart drastically from the existing church doctrines. In theology and social practices the church leaned to conservatism in Russia and later continued the trend in America.⁴⁵

Members were warned to dress plainly so as not to imitate the "world". Attendance at "worldly" amusements such as dances, shows, and ball games was strictly forbidden. Smoking and drinking intoxicating beverages was also outlawed. Discipline was rigidly applied. After the Mennonite immigrations of 1873-1880 the main Mennonite Brethren congregations were found in Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and in Canada.⁴⁶

⁴⁵John J. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1950), 1-20.

⁴⁶Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 665-666.

The groundwork for the missionary efforts of the Mennonite Brethren among Oklahoma Indians was laid in 1889. The leaders of the Mennonite Brethren churches of the United States and Canada, in October of that year, appointed a three-man committee to investigate the possibility of opening a mission among one of the Indian tribes of the West.⁴⁷ Since this was the initial effort of the church in the area of missions, events at the outset moved rather slowly. The actual search for a field was not begun until the summer of 1891, after a missionary candidate had presented himself to the conference. Then when it appeared that a field could be opened among the Hopi or Navajo tribes of either Arizona or New Mexico, action had to be further postponed because of the sudden illness of the proposed missionary.⁴⁸

In 1893 Henry Kohfeld of Hillsboro, Kansas, presented himself to the church as a missionary candidate. The following year Kohfeld and the mission committee, in a further search for a field, visited the Deyo Baptist Mission near the present city of Lawton, Oklahoma. E. C. Deyo, founder of the small mission to the Kiowas, informed the group that there were no missions among the Comanche Indians of the area. He

⁴⁷Konferenzbeschlüsse nebst Konstitution der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde von Nord Amerika, 1883-1919 (Hillsboro, 1920), 87. Hereafter cited as Konferenzbeschlüsse der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde.

⁴⁸Ibid., 145-146.

suggested that the Mennonites establish a work among them if possible.

The committee delegated Kohfeld to make investigations. From the Indian agent at Fort Sill Kohfeld learned that the Government would be willing to grant a 160 acre tract of land for a mission, providing the Mennonites could obtain the permission of the Indians themselves. He warned him, however, that other denominations had failed in the same purpose because of the antagonistic attitude of Chief Quannah Parker and his tribe.⁴⁹

Throughout the summer of 1894 Kohfeld remained on the Indian reservation seeking to gain the favor of the Comanches. Many of the Indians agreed that a "Jesus man" and a "Jesus house" might be all right but they felt that neither should be found too close to their camps, nor upon their lands.⁵⁰

After months of fruitless effort the missionary decided to appeal directly to Quannah Parker. Together with an interpreter he went to Chief Parker's camp located about two miles east of where Indianahoma now stands. While waiting to see the chief, Kohfeld, through his interpreter, stated his

⁴⁹J. F. Harms, Geschichte der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde, (Hillsboro, 1924), 285-286. Hereafter cited as Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde.

⁵⁰Ibid., 286.

purpose to Topay, one of the wives of Quanah Parker and Tessiky, the wife of an influential tribal member.

When Quanah Parker arrived Topay said to him, "My dear husband, we have lived together twenty years and have been happy. Here is Jesus man, sent from God to build a Jesus house and teach us the way to heaven. If you hinder him, I shall never be happy again."⁵¹ After a brief conference with several tribal members Chief Parker took the missionary on horseback to a group of post oak trees and announced: "Here build Jesus house."⁵²

The following year, 1895, the Mennonite Brethren Conference accepted the land grant of 160 acres offered to them by the Government for mission purposes. Eight hundred dollars was appropriated for building expenses at the new Post Oak Mission and an annual salary of five hundred dollars was voted for Kohfeld and his wife.⁵³

By November a small church and a residence for the missionaries had been erected on the site designated by Quanah Parker. Plans for the establishment of a mission school were also made; however, due to insufficient funds the project was soon dropped.⁵⁴

⁵¹A. J. Becker, "Short History of Post Oak and Mexican Missions", Zionsbote (Hillsboro, Kansas), November 28, 1945.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Konferenzbeschlüsse der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde, 175.

⁵⁴Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 288.

The work of bringing the Gospel to the war-like Comanches and teaching them higher standards of living was a slow and tedious process. Included in the mission retinue were home visitations, special camp meetings, women's sewing classes, and all day services on Sunday.

In the fall of 1901 Rev. and Mrs. A. J. Becker were added to the Post Oak missionary staff. A short time later D. C. Peters arrived to aid in the work.⁵⁵ The Kohfelds remained at Post Oak until 1907. By that time several other denominations had established missions among the Comanches so that the Post Oak Mission itself did not develop extensively. After 1907 the Conference decided to support only one missionary couple and a few personal helpers.

Becker adjusted himself so well to the Indian way of life that the Indians came to look upon him as their "spiritual father". In 1903, Mrs. Becker was appointed a field matron by the Government, a position which she was to hold for twenty-eight years.⁵⁶

For many years Quanah Parker held an aloof attitude toward the mission workers. Later, however, he and the Beckers formed a close friendship. It was upon Quanah Parker's

⁵⁵A. E. Janzen, "The Story of Post Oak Mennonite Brethren Mission to the Comanches", Foreign Missions (August, 1946), 12-18.

⁵⁶Ibid., 13.

request that the body of his mother, Cynthia Ann Parker, was removed to the Post Oak cemetery. Before the remains were to be buried the Chief asked Missionary Becker in which direction the cemetery would be extended. When Becker told him that it would be built out toward the east, he gave orders to bury the body on a little knoll to the east of the ground. He then informed Becker:

That is where I too want to be buried. Like I have been a leader to my people during life, I want to continue to be their leader after my death. For that reason you shall bury me towards the east at the head of the Comanches who have died and lie buried here.⁵⁷

The Mennonite Brethren Post Oak Mission was the first mission to be established among the Comanche Indians in Oklahoma. It opened the way for other denominations to also work among the tribe. It helped speed Christianity and civilization to one of the last tribes to submit to white domination. Therein lies a part of its importance to Oklahoma history.

⁵⁷Ibid., 37.

CHAPTER III

MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS AND THE CHURCH IN THE CHEYENNE-ARAPAHO COUNTRY (1892-1907)

The Dawes Act of 1887 paved the way for the opening of the Indian reservations in present-day Oklahoma. It was in accordance with the terms of this act that lands were allotted in severalty to the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes in the western part of the territory. On April 19, 1892, the remaining three million acres of land was opened to white settlement by a run. This opening was not typified by a wild rush into the region since much of the land was not considered to be very desirable.¹

Included among the earliest homesteaders in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Territory were numerous hopeful Mennonites. A majority of them were recent Russian immigrants and their descendents who had as yet not attained their own homes in Kansas or Nebraska.² Their settlements extended into the three counties later called Blaine, Custer, and Washita.

¹Roy Gittinger, The Formation of the State of Oklahoma (Norman, 1939), 197-198.

²Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church, 79-80.

On April 19, 1892, three separate groups of Mennonites began settlements in present Blaine County. John Horsch, F. M. Pletcher, Henry A. Lehman, and Rev. J. S. Krehbiel, an Indian missionary from Darlington, homesteaded near the present site of Geary.³ Another small group settled on claims in the vicinity of the Cooper post office near present-day Watonga. A third group of families went westward from Hennessey and helped form the Okeene community.⁴

Homes of lumber or sod were hastily constructed by the settlers and then the virgin prairie was readied for the planting of crops. Lumber and seed were obtained, often on credit, at El Reno, Kingfisher, or Hennessey. Small plots of kaffir corn, wheat, and barley were planted the first year.⁵

Many settlers had difficulty in locating alkali-free water sources. One pioneer in the Watonga area dug as many as seven wells, all over fifty feet in depth, before securing good water.⁶

Severe drought conditions and low prices combined to make early farming efforts a failure. Financial aid received from Mennonite groups in Kansas helped to alleviate the dis-

³Fred Ringleman, "A Brief History of the Mennonite Church of Geary, Oklahoma", The Mennonite, March, 1929, 20.

⁴Personal interview with P. C. Grunau, July 23, 1952.

⁵Ringleman, The Mennonite, March, 1929, 20.

⁶Personal interview with P. C. Grunau, July 23, 1952.

tress, but many forsook the territory feeling that "nothing good could come out of such an arid wasteland".⁷

The Geary settlement grew slowly at first. The town itself, until 1897, consisted of a store and post office. In that year, however, the Rock Island Railroad was built through the region resulting in a rapid development of the town.⁸

The Mennonites' first religious services in the Geary community were held in a barn loft owned by Rev. Krehbiel. Krehbiel was actively engaged in missionary activity among the Cheyenne Indians located in camps along the nearby South Canadian River. In 1894 the Mennonite Conference constructed a church building which was used in connection with the mission. Services were conducted every other Sunday afternoon for the Indians. A noontime lunch was served, and then Krehbiel preached to them through interpreters. The Mennonites held their services in the evenings. The mission work, as such, was discontinued by the General Conference in 1896.⁹

On August 15, 1897, the settlers organized a formal church body. The twenty-two Mennonite and three Indian charter members selected Krehbiel as their pastor. Shortly thereafter, Krehbiel, with the help of his congregation, organized

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ringleman, The Mennonite, March, 1929, 21.

⁹Krehbiel, History of the General Conference, II, 15.

a union Sunday School in, as yet, churchless Geary. Services were held each Sunday in partially completed store buildings; planks placed on nail kegs or beer barrels served as pews. When the building was completed the group had to find another unfinished structure in which to meet. Tiring of the numerous moves this entailed, the Mennonites, in July, 1898, loaded their country church upon four wagons and transferred it to a lot granted to them in Geary by the Townsite Company. This eighteen by thirty feet structure was the first church established in Geary. So many people attended the church that it soon had to be enlarged. Other denominations, as they moved in, gradually absorbed some of the membership so the name of the church was later changed from the Geary Union Sunday School to the First Mennonite Church of Geary.¹⁰

The Cooper Mennonite Brethren Church was organized in 1893 with approximately twenty members. Early-day religious activities, including a convention of all the Mennonite Brethren churches in Oklahoma Territory, were held in a large barn on the Cornelius Grunau farm.¹¹ The church had more than doubled its membership by 1896, but thereafter it began to decline, as many left the region because of crop failures.¹² The population had dwindled to such an extent by 1902 that

¹⁰Ringleman, The Mennonite, March, 1929, 21.

¹¹Personal interview with P. C. Grunau, July 23, 1952.

¹²Konferencebeschlüsse der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde, 180.

the church was disbanded. The few remaining families, thereupon, disposed of their farms and treked northward to join their brethren living under more prosperous conditions at Okeene and Fairview.¹³

The Okeene settlement struggled through the early period of hardship to become well established by the time of statehood. A church organizational meeting held April 20, 1902, enrolled sixty members into the Mennonite Brethren Church. Adam Fischer and Fredrick Schafer provided the congregation with religious leadership during this period.¹⁴

The lands in the western part of the Cheyenne-Arapaho Territory were generally considered to be little suited for farming. But J. J. Kliewer, who had founded the Mennonite Washita Mission near the present site of Corn in 1889, held a different opinion of the region. He carried reports to Mennonite communities in Kansas of rich river-bottom lands and of other fertile virgin acreages capable of being transformed into productivity equal to any lands in Kansas. This optimistic appraisal of the area, to a large extent, initiated the extensive Mennonite movement into what are now Washita and Custer counties.¹⁵

¹³Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 187.

¹⁴Personal letter from Henry Heinrichs, November 13, 1951.

¹⁵Personal interview with Henry H. Flaming, July 15, 1952.

Most of the Mennonite homesteaders in the western part of the territory came from Reno, Harvey, Marion, Woodson, and Butler counties, Kansas. They generally traveled to the region in groups of several families. The first part of their journey led the wagon caravans southward to Caldwell, Kansas. From this border town the route followed the Rock Island Railroad through the Cherokee Outlet to the vicinity of El Reno. The last section of the route took them west across the South Canadian River and on to the Mennonite mission on the Washita River. It was around this mission site that the early homesteaders settled. Treacherous river beds, steep cliffs, wide canyons, and the presence of many Indians posed real or imaginary threats to safety along the way.¹⁶ The largest influx of settlers came in 1894 but well over a score of Mennonite families were established in the two counties a year after the opening of 1892.

Numerous unique problems taxed the ingenuity of the early settler. The building of some type of house was an immediate concern. The first homesteaders generally built sod houses and dugouts, either because they were too poor to erect a frame structure or because lumber was not available within convenient hauling distance. Since the sod in this region was not sufficiently matted, the sod houses constructed leaked badly during periods of rain. Dugouts, six or

¹⁶Ibid.

eight feet deep excavations covered with a few boards and prairie sod, proved to be more "water-proof" and consequently more popular. But these also had their discomforts. One family awoke one rainy night to find their dwelling flooded with water entering by way of a prairie-dog hole.¹⁷ Another settler, knowing little about sod building, at one time related that his house leaked to much that it was necessary for one member of the family to hold an umbrella over the food while the others ate the meal.¹⁸

Many homesteaders found the water and fuel problem quite serious. Wells, even though dug to depths of over sixty feet, often produced only alkali water and could not be utilized for household purposes. Cisterns or water stored in barrels often had to suffice. Where firewood was scarce, the settler burned cow "chips" (excrement) and grass.

A wide variety of crops---kaffir corn, milo-maize, wheat, and cotton---were planted the first years. In most instances the original seed for the grain crops had been brought along from Kansas. Cotton seed was purchased at El Reno. Henry H. Flaming, who came to what is now Washita County in the fall of 1892, tells of a unique method utilized by his father for the sowing of grain. A tin can, with a small hole fixed in it, was filled with grain and tied behind

¹⁷ Personal interview with Mrs. J. P. Kroeker, December 27, 1952.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the breaking plow. As the share cut through the sod, the kernels of grain were shaken out of the can trailing in the furrow. The next time around the plow would cover the grain.¹⁹

During the first few years, crops, due to droughts and hot winds, were very scanty. Many remained optimistic and waited for better years; a few returned to Kansas or moved elsewhere. Those in the latter group often gave up their lands for very little remuneration. One man traded his farm for a grass mower. Another exchanged his 160 acres for a cow. Those that remained and those that secured land later found that harvests of good years were bountiful. In 1894 some wheat in the area yielded fifteen bushels to the acre; and in 1897 a bumper crop was harvested, with yields averaging as high as thirty bushels to the acre.²⁰ Oats and maize produced from twenty to thirty bushels per acre in 1898. Cotton, kaffir corn, and sugar cane were also successfully raised.²¹

The nearest market facilities were at El Reno, some fifty miles to the east. A round trip over the rough prairie roads took five days. Quicksand and occasional heavy rains caused the wide South Canadian River, unspanned by bridges,

¹⁹Personal interview with Henry H. Flaming, July 16, 1952.

²⁰Jacob J. Kroeker in a letter to Zionsbote (McPherson, Kansas), January 9, 1897.

²¹Ibid., August 24, 1898.

to be an ever present problem. Emil Hinz as a lad often crossed the river with his parents. On one occasion one of the wagons in their train became mired in the quicksand. In order to rescue its occupants they placed wooden planks across the quicksand area. This gave a firm enough footing to permit the people to walk to safety. The team and wagon, however, could not be saved from the mire.²²

The Canadian was crossed either at a point near the site of Geary or approximately one mile south of the present U.S. Highway 66 bridge. Favorite overnight camping sites along the way were Devil's Canyon and Dead Woman Creek, terms generally carrying connotations not conducive to peaceful repose.²³

The extension of the Rock Island Railroad into Custer County in 1898 brought about the establishment of market centers in that area.²⁴ The long burdensome trips to El Reno, therefore, became unnecessary after that date.

Shelly, located five miles west and two south of present-day Corn, for eight years was the center of the Mennonite settlement in Washita County. The town boasted a post office, general merchandise store, cream station, and cheese factory. John Ratzlaff, H. A. Flaming, George Bushman,

²²Personal interview with Emil Hinz, December 30, 1952.

²³Personal interview with Henry H. Flaming, April 16, 1952.

²⁴The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.

Henry Wiens, Frank Janzen, Peter Flaming, and J. J. Kliever were pioneer businessmen in the town. Shelly began to decline when the Frisco Railroad reached into Washita County in 1900. The townsite of Stout was laid out along the tracks, and soon it replaced Shelly as the leading town of the area. In 1903 Stout was moved to the present location of Bessie.²⁵

Corn became the center of the Mennonite populace shortly after the abandonment of Shelly. The town itself grew up around the Mennonite Brethren Church built in 1894. The original post office site was two miles north of the present location. A small general merchandise store was operated in connection with the post office. It is generally agreed that the post office received its name because of the large amount of corn grown in the immediate vicinity. In signing the official papers, however, the postal department spelled the name K-o-r-n; consequently the town carried the German name "Korn" until 1918 when it was changed to its present spelling.²⁶

Soon after its establishment, the post office was moved to Kendall's Store three miles north of the original location. Later an application was granted to have it moved to the present site. G. A. and H. A. Flaming were the first

²⁵Charles E. Engleman, "Two Towns Started, Died before Bessie Founding," Ibid.

²⁶Washita County Enterprize (Corn, Oklahoma), November 9, 1950.

merchants to start stores in Corn.²⁷ The town was not incorporated and did not organize any form of government. All activities functioned through the church.

Being traditionally religious, the Mennonite frontiersmen, soon after they had planted homes, organized and built churches. The Mennonite Brethren Church of Corn was founded on November 9, 1893. Sixteen families, led by Abraham Richert, made up the church body. Jacob Funk, Benjamin Wedel, and Henry Dyck assisted Richert in the ministry. Services during the first months were held in private homes,

In the spring of 1894 the first church building, a dugout, forty feet long and twenty wide, with sides built up a few feet with sod was built. The site was donated by Peter Bergman. Benches were made from cottonwood lumber which came from a sawmill located near Cloud Chief.²⁸

Conference reports reveal that the church membership numbered 175 by 1896.²⁹ This remarkable population growth coupled with the bumper crops the following year, stimulated the settlers to begin construction on a frame church building. The new edifice, sixty feet long and thirty-two wide, was proudly dedicated on April 10, 1898.³⁰ In 1905 the

²⁷Engleman, "Corn Built on Church," The Clinton Daily News, April 13, 1949.

²⁸Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 177.

²⁹Konferenzbeschlüsse der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde, 180.

³⁰Zionsbote, April 14, 1898.

building was enlarged with the addition of two wings.³¹

During February, 1895, the church members elected Peter Neufeld as their pastor. Isaak Harms was chosen as a minister, and Benjamin Wedel and Jacob Funk were selected as deacons. On March 15, 1897, Abraham Richert and Isaak Harms were officially ordained as ministers by Abraham Schellenberg of Ebenfeld, Kansas. In May of the same year Richert resumed the leadership of the church. Four years later Harms was ordained as elder and pastor, and Funk and Wedel as deacons. Jacob Richert, Peter Wiebe, and Henry Bergthold, prominent lay members, assisted in the preaching ministry. The first board of trustees, elected on January 5, 1901, was composed of the following members: H. H. Kliewer, D. D. Wiens, J. J. Kroeker, A. J. Kroeker, and Isaak Harms.

After the death of Elder Harms in September, 1903, Richert, for the third time in less than a decade, was called upon to shoulder the responsibilities of the church leadership. Henry H. Flaming and Jacob Reimer, at the same time, were elected ministers. Other members active in religious activities were Peter R. Wohlgenuth, John F. Duerksen, and Ferdinand Engle, later arrivals in the community.³²

A memorable event in the history of the community occurred in 1902 when the General Conference of the Mennonite

³¹Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 177.

³²Ibid., 177-179.

Brethren churches of the United States and Canada convened at Corn. The event was reported by a contemporary newspaper as follows:

The national conference of the Mennonites has been in session the past week at Korn . . . with over 3,000 members in attendance. . . . The sessions are held in a large tent and the greatest interest is manifested. Wednesday the Sangerfest [song festival] took place, participated in by trained choirs from all portions of the United States. The remainder of the meetings were devoted to conference affairs It was one of the most important meetings in the history of the Mennonite movement.³³

Since Corn was an inland town, delegates to the convention could only travel by rail as far as Bessie, twelve miles distant. It was necessary, therefore, for the settlers to establish a temporary horse-and-buggy transportation system between Bessie and Corn for the benefit of the many out-of-state delegates. From Corn the guests were taken into private homes and cared for by the people of the community.³⁴

In 1907 the Bessie Mennonite Brethren Church was established for the benefit of the members living on the western fringe of the settlement. It started with a membership of thirty-five persons. The new congregation, located eight and one-half miles west and one south of Corn, obtained B. P. Schmidt as their first leader.³⁵

³³Stillwater Advance, November 27, 1902.

³⁴Washita County Enterprize, November 9, 1950.

³⁵Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 188-189.

On August 24, 1894, fifteen families originating from the Alexanderwohl and Hoffnungsaw communities in central Kansas organized the first General Conference Mennonite church in the Corn area. The group held its early religious services in the Sichar and Greenfield schoolhouses. Sichar was located seven miles west and four south of Corn and Greenfield school was two miles west and one and one-half north of the town. Later the congregation met in the Shelly mission church two Sundays of the month and in homes or schools the remaining Sundays.

Because the members were scattered widely, the church agreed, in February, 1896, to separate into two bodies. Thereafter the settlers living west of the Washita River met as a congregation in the Sichar schoolhouse while those living east of the river congregated at the Shelly mission or in private homes.³⁶

The western, or Sichar, congregation, by the spring of 1900, had prospered to the extent that they were able to build and dedicate a new church building. The white frame structure was located four miles east and one and one-half north of Cordell.³⁷ Peter Pankratz and Michial Klaasen were early leaders of this group. Shortly after 1900 a faction from the congregation withdrew to organize the Herald

³⁶Personal interview with Emil Hinz, December 30, 1952.

³⁷The El Reno News, March 15, 1900.

Mennonite Church. This latter group, located three miles to the north, was more centrally situated; consequently it soon surpassed the mother church in membership.

In 1901 the Bergthal congregation constructed a church two miles west and three north of Corn on a plot of ground donated by Benjamin Ratzlaff. Because most of the labor was donated, the entire cost of construction was only \$947.00. John Peters was chairman of the building committee and Henry Krause was the chief carpenter. The first church trustees were John Heidebrecht, F. J. Adrain, and Emil Hinz. J. J. Kliever and John Flaming were early pastors.³⁸

The Amish Mennonites were among the first to organize church congregations in what is now Custer County. The Amish trace their history back to seventeenth-century Switzerland. The founder of the sect, Jacob Ammon, an extremely conservative-minded Mennonite, concluded that the church of his day was too lax, especially in the failure to apply the practice of avoidance. His movement, as a whole, tended toward the preservation of old customs and traditions and the shunning of new innovations, which he considered "of the world".³⁹

The Amish people in the Thomas community, being part of the main trunk of the conservative sect, were known as the Old Order Amish. They practiced the religious and social

³⁸Personal interview with Emil Hinz, December 30, 1952.

³⁹Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 139-141.

customs prevailing during the time of Ammon, thus making them almost exact replicas of the seventeenth-century Swiss. Characteristics distinguishing the group were beards, long hair, hooks and eyes, uniform homemade clothing, broad-brimmed hats, aprons, and the use of springless top-buggies. Things tabooed by the Order included buttons, store clothes, hats for women, brightly painted machinery or houses, writing desks, wall pictures, sofas, carpets, power farm machinery, any buggy accessories, telephones, and church buildings. Religious services were conducted in private homes in the German language. English preaching, Sunday schools, and evening services were not permitted.⁴⁰

The first Amish families settling in the Thomas community arrived in 1893; but by 1898 the group still numbered only six families. However, the arrival of a minister in 1898 and the subsequent formation of a pioneer church stimulated the growth of the settlement greatly.⁴¹

The settlement soon came to cover such a large area that it became expedient to divide the church into two congregations. Thus the South and North congregations of the Old Order Amish Church came to be formed. Each group had an enrollment of over fifty members by 1907. In the South

⁴⁰Ibid., 633-634.

⁴¹Personal letter from Malinda Yoder, December 27, 1951.

Congregation, Jacob Yoder, J. A. Miller, and A. D. Nissley served as ministers; in the North, John Slabough, A. B. Miller, and Tobias Yoder functioned as leaders.⁴²

Several families near the present Hydro community formed an Amish Mennonite Church. The Amish Mennonites composed a more liberal wing of the Amish sect. Their way of life followed a more moderate course, hence they were often referred to as the "progressive" Amish.⁴³ Two religious leaders, John J. Johns and Lewis Eichorn, were among the early pioneers. This settlement, however, did not experience a substantial growth before statehood.⁴⁴

Another small band of settlers planted a church community a few miles southwest of the present city of Weatherford. The members of this group belonged to the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. This Mennonite branch originated in Russia in 1861. In 1874 the entire church membership migrated to Kansas. The group held religious practices very similar to the Mennonite Brethren;⁴⁵ consequently there was considerable intermingling between the two conferences. The main point of distinction between the two branches was in their mode of baptism. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren immers-

⁴²Mennonite Yearbook and Directory, 1908 (Scottsdale, 1908), 34.

⁴³Personal letter from Malinda Yoder, December 27, 1951.

⁴⁴Mennonite Yearbook and Directory, 1907 (Scottsdale 1907), 25.

⁴⁵See pages 29-30.

ed forward into the water while the Mennonite Brethren immersed backward.⁴⁶

Jacob M. Friesen and David E. Harder were instrumental in the organization and development of the early church activities of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren in Oklahoma. The group had no permanent place of worship before 1904 but religious meetings were regularly conducted in the homes. In 1904 a church building was erected on a site three miles south and two and one-half west of Weatherford.⁴⁷

The table below shows the number of pioneer church congregations established by the different branches in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Territory.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF MENNONITE CONGREGATIONS BY
BRANCHES IN THE CHEYENNE-ARAPAHO
COUNTRY BY 1907

Mennonite Branch	Number of Local Congregations
General Conference	4
Mennonite Brethren	4*
Old Order Amish	2
Amish-Mennonite.....	1
Krimmer Mennonite Brethren	1
Total	12

*Includes Cooper, disbanded in 1902

⁴⁶Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 664.

⁴⁷Mennonite Yearbook and Directory, 1907, 25.

CHAPTER IV

MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS AND THE CHURCH IN THE CHEROKEE OUTLET (1893-1907)

The land known as the Cherokee Outlet was opened to settlement at noon on September 16, 1893. Federal officials sought to avert "Sooner" problems by requiring prospective homesteaders to obtain registration certificates at the boundary before entering the Outlet. The huge crowds that crowded each registration booth, however, made this plan impracticable.¹ It has been estimated that more than 100,000 people joined in the race to claim the rich prairies of northwestern Oklahoma Territory. A participant in the run has described the event as follows:

Among the crowds assembled there [at the Kansas border] were conveyances of almost every conceivable kind. There were many covered wagons; buggies; buckboards; carts; and even surreys At five minutes to twelve all was tense and ready. The last details had been attended to and all were on the line All eyes were on the man on horseback, stationed well within the Strip, who was to fire the signal shot which was to start the . . . race A puff of blue smoke and the race is on. Everything helter skelter, pell mell, every fellow apparently for himself and the devil for the hindmost Rigs were broken down and horses stum-

¹Gittinger, The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 199-201.

bled and fell, but the rolling mass moved on and within two hours the tides from the north and south had met near the middle of the Strip.²

Mennonites were in the front ranks of the homesteaders that surged into the newly opened territory. Forsaking Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri, they scattered into all areas of the Outlet. They had a definite part in the founding and early development of the communities of Meno, Deer Creek, Orienta, Fairview, Lahoma, Jet, Lucien, Manchester, Kremlin, Medford, North Enid, and Enid.

Nearly all of the Mennonites that participated in the run apparently were successful in filing claims to quarter sections. Several, however, lost choice lands because they were not willing to "fight it out" with challengers who falsely asserted prior claims to their staked locations.³

It was mainly the poor, the landless, and the unemployed that ventured into the "Strip" country. This original poverty, intensified annually by dismal drouth conditions, threatened to wreck the Mennonite settlements for many years. The crops of 1894 were complete failures, except for watermelons and turnips and these overflowed the market. Harvests of 1895 and 1896 were poor at the best with most farmers again experiencing complete failures.⁴

²George Rainey, The Cherokee Strip (Guthrie, 1933), 277-279.

³Personal interview with Ben Decker, July 17, 1952.

⁴Personal letter from Peter Neufeld, July 29, 1952.

Men obtained whatever outside employment was available, leaving wives and children to do the farm work. Those living in the "blackjack" region tried to eke out an existence by selling wood at sixty cents a wagon load.⁵ One Mennonite in the Medford community, as a last resort, secured employment on the railroad at twenty-five cents a day in a desperate attempt to support his wife and family of fourteen children.⁶

Quite a number went to work in the harvest fields of Kansas. This entailed leaving their families to manage without them for several months. Many were forced to beg food, seed, and money from fellow-Mennonites in neighboring states.⁷ One settler was known to have walked from his homestead near Hennessey to Marion County, Kansas, a distance of over one hundred and fifty miles, to borrow money to provide for his family through the winter of 1894.

The general diet during the early trying years consisted of a small variety of foods. "We lived on beans," stated one pioneer. "Beans were cheap and they were good."⁸ Cakes made from the meal of kaffir corn ground in a coffee mill were also commonly served. Gravy and corn bread was

⁵Rainey, The Cherokee Strip, 359.

⁶Personal interview with Mrs. C.N. Hiebert, July 19, 1952.

⁷Personal letter from Peter Neufeld, July 29, 1952.

⁸Personal interview with Ben Decker, July 17, 1952.

a cheap steady diet, as was watermelon, and cow peas. "Prips," a concoction brewed from ground roasted wheat or barley, was the Mennonite substitute for coffee.⁹

Sod houses and dugouts were typical abodes for the Cherokee Strip pioneers. As soon as building supplies were available and finances permitted, such residences were replaced with wooden structures. Frame buildings came into use early in the North Enid-Kremlin area; but it was after 1900 before most of the Mennonite settlers in the other areas were able to improve their housing status to that extent.¹⁰

The obtaining of good water, a major problem in the Cheyenne-Arapaho Territory, also caused some concern in parts of the Outlet. At Fairview, Orienta, and some sections east of Enid the well water contained alkali. Good water was generally found at depths of twenty-five to forty feet in the other settlements. Several wells dug near Medford and Deer Creek shortly after the run are still in use today.¹¹

The pioneer Mennonite settler in the Cherokee Outlet did not have much farming equipment. The average farmer owned a team of horses, mules, or oxen, a wagon, plow, possibly a mower or reaper, and a few garden tools. A reversion to some of the earliest frontier methods of farming was, there-

⁹Personal interview with Mrs. P. P. Regier, July 16, 1952.

¹⁰Ibid; Personal interview with Mrs. C. N. Hiebert, July 19, 1952.

¹¹Ibid.

fore, often necessary. Such feed crops as corn, maize, and sugar cane were planted by hand with the aid of a hoe. Sugar cane was raised not so much for cattle fodder but primarily for its sugar. Sugar was "made" by forcing the cane stalks through a hand wringer. The juice extracted by this process was led through a trough into a huge iron kettle. When the kettle had been filled with juice the contents were boiled down to a thick sugary sirup. This sirup, used extensively in cooking and baking, apparently served as a good substitute for refined sugar.¹²

Wheat was cut with a mower or a reaper and, for many years, bound into bundles by hand with straw. A unique method of thrashing the grain, employed for some time in the Medford community was to have a horse pull a heavy notched stone back and forth across the wheat straw, thereby beating the grain from the heads.¹³ Such special "thrashing stones", brought to America by the Russian Mennonites, had earlier been used in Kansas.¹⁴ Mennonites in present-day Grant County seem to have been the only ones ever to have utilized "thrashing stones" in Oklahoma.

¹²Personal interview with C. N. Hiebert, July 19, 1952.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Bliss Isely and W. M. Richards, Four Centuries in Kansas (Wichita, 1944), 245.

A few thrashing machines, sometimes cooperatively owned, were usually found in the Mennonite communities. Neighboring farmers went together to help each other harvest the crops. Thrashing "rigs", with a crew of fifteen to thirty workers, were available for hire after crop conditions improved in the territory.¹⁵

The distinctive "Nebraska" and "Jack Rabbit" plows were used extensively in the Cherokee Outlet. Instead of having moldboards, these plows had curved rods set some four inches apart. An upright knife-like cutter was attached near the point of the plow even with the land side. Sometimes the cutter was fastened to the short steel beam, but generally it was attached to the inner edge of the share. The cutter, set at an angle, sliced off a layer of soil at the proper width and thickness. The share cut it loose, and the rods turned it bottom-side-up. The plow made a characteristic humming sound as it cut through the sod.¹⁶

The general economic outlook of the Mennonite frontiersmen brightened considerably after 1897. Good crops, the passage of the Free Homes Bill in 1900, which revoked the plan that settlers should pay for their homesteads, and continual thrifty living made rapid changes in farming methods

¹⁵Personal interview with Mrs. P. P. Regier, July 16, 1952.

¹⁶Rainey, The Cherokee Strip, 332.

and equipment possible. Debts were paid, homesteads improved, and many persons secured additional land.¹⁷

As conditions improved the Mennonite settlements were enlarged with newcomers who were drawn to the region by the optimistic, and frequently exaggerated, reports of the original settlers. Perhaps a typical example of the type of information received in the older sections is contained in the following letter written by a former resident of Nebraska:

The land here northeast of Enid is as good as any in Nebraska The climate is very good, much better than in Nebraska. It isn't nearly as cold in winter and only five degrees warmer in summer. The summer nights are always cool with refreshing breezes. . . . This is good grass country, and we have been able to sell milk at the creamery all summer for sixty-five to ninety-nine cents per hundred pound Settlers are moving in every day. . . .¹⁸

Later arrivals were able to purchase land from discouraged or bankrupt farmers without much difficulty. Prices varied with the type of land, the location, and the economic outlook at the time of purchase. During the drought a quarter section of land in the Fairview-Oriente area could be obtained for one hundred and fifty dollars.¹⁹ Some land in the vicinity of Ringwood and Lahoma could be had for a span of

¹⁷Personal letter from Peter Neufeld, July 19, 1952.

¹⁸Peter Regier, in a letter to Zionsbote (McPherson, Kansas), December 27, 1897.

¹⁹Personal interview with P. C. Grunau, July 15, 1952.

mules or a good set of harness.²⁰ In 1897 and 1898 Mennonites in present-day Garfield County paid from five hundred to two thousand dollars per quarter section.²¹

Religion, in the true Mennonite tradition, was of primary importance in the settlements founded by members of the denomination. Religious services, often without the aid of ministers, were conducted from the very outset in private homes. An official church was organized as soon as possible even though the membership was usually small. Land, labor, money, and time were willingly donated to provide a church building.

The first Mennonite church in the Cherokee Outlet was founded in the fall of 1894. It was located in the Fairview community and became affiliated with the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Jacob Kliwer was the first pastor and H. D. Bartel and Peter Martens were the first deacons.²² Before the building of a church the favorite place of assembly was in a grove of trees located on a farm a half mile north of present-day Fairview. Parents came to the grove with

²⁰Personal interview with Ben Decker, July 17, 1952.

²¹Peter Regier, in a letter to Zionsbote, December 27, 1897.

²²J. C. Grunau, "History of the South Fairview Mennonite Brethren Church" (A paper read at the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the South Fairview Mennonite Brethren Church, Fairview, Oklahoma, April 22, 1945).

their wagons filled with children, packed dinners, and feed for the horses. A typical Sunday scene at the location has been described as follows:

It was a picturesque sight to behold the wagons come along the newly broken trails from various points of the . . . prairie, spotted here and there by small, fertile, and productive fields. Having arrived at the place of meeting, the horses were unhitched and tied to the wagons. Men and women gathered in groups to visit while the younger generation ran about until the preaching service began. Then all congregated, sitting in the shade of the trees on wagon seats, boards, blocks. . . . The song leader then led the singing, getting his pitch with the aid of a tuning fork. . . . A prayer service followed, and one and often two sermons At noon the mothers and older girls would unpack the lunches The food, though simple, was wholesome and thoroughly enjoyed. The Sunday School was conducted in the afternoon.²³

In the spring of 1895 two Mennonite Brethren churches were constructed to accommodate the widely scattered membership. One, a crude frame structure, was erected in the northern part of the settlement and named Nord Hoffnungsfeld (North Hopefield). The Süd Hoffnungsfeld (South Hopefield) Church, built of sod, served the people living in the southern section of the settlement. Jacob Kliewer became the pastor of the northern group and William Hergert of the southern congregation. The total membership of the two churches in 1895 was 171.

The small North Hopefield church, located three and a half miles north and one mile west of present-day Fairview,

²³A. Elmer Jantz, "A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Fairview, Oklahoma" (A paper read at the dedication ceremonies of the Fairview Mennonite Brethren Church, Fairview, Oklahoma, May 7, 1950).

was replaced in 1902. The new structure erected was fifty feet long and thirty wide, and had a seating capacity of approximately two hundred. Some prominent lay men who served as deacons and assistant ministers during the early years were: J. B. Unruh, D. C. Eitzen, Peter Martens, Henry D. Bartel, George Knaak, J. L. Hodel, and C. A. Wichert.²⁴

From 1900 to 1905 the Süd Hoffnungsfeld Church, located four miles southeast of present-day Fairview, was under the joint pastorship of M. M. Just and Fred Just. On May 18, 1902, the congregation moved from the original "soddie" into a new frame church. In 1905 J. M. Just assumed the sole leadership of the church. Some active church officers and assistant ministers during this period were: Fred Fruechting, Cornelius Grunau, Abraham Becker, H. G. Fast, and A. P. Epp.²⁵

Mennonite families originally from McPherson and Marion counties, Kansas, organized a church in the present Meno community on June 13, 1895. The group affiliated with the General Conference and elected John Ratzlaff as their first pastor. The widespread nature of the settlement here also necessitated two places of worship. The larger group held services in a log school house near the site on which Meno later was founded. The other church group, consisting

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵J. C. Grunau, "History of the South Fairview Mennonite Brethren Church".

of settlers living north of present-day Ringwood, congregated in local homes or school houses until after statehood.²⁶

The town of Meno was founded in 1902. Peter Kane, its founder, originally intended to name the town "Memo", after the historic Menno Simons. Not knowing how to spell the word, however, he left out one "n".²⁷ A Mennonite church was built in Meno shortly after the founding of the town. The log school house was then abandoned as a place of worship. Pioneers associated with the early development of the Meno church were: Adam Becker, Henry Koehn, Cornelious Unruh, David Wedel, Jacob A. Wedel, Benjamin Eck, William R. Jantz, Benjamin P. Jantz, Andrew Koehn, and Benjamin Koehn.²⁸

The first Mennonite church in the Medford community was organized on February 4, 1897. The thirteen charter members elected H. J. Gaede as their pastor. The group met in a school house for many years but eventually erected a church two miles north and two east of Medford. The General Conference congregation had grown to approximately sixty members by 1907.²⁹

Settlers from central Kansas and York County, Nebraska, united to form a church organization in the North Enid settle-

²⁶H. U. Schmidt, "From Homestead Days to the Present", The Mennonite, LXI (January, 1946), 28-31.

²⁷Personal letter from August Schmidt, June 18, 1953.

²⁸H. U. Schmidt, The Mennonite, LXI (January, 1946), 28-31.

²⁹Personal letter from Peter Neufeld, July 19, 1952.

ment on April 5, 1897. Peter Regier, a former leader of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Henderson, Nebraska, was elected pastor by the thirty initial members. Construction of a church on a site three miles north and a half mile east of the present city of Enid was begun immediately. The building committee supervising the work was composed of Peter Regier, Isaak Regier, and D. G. Gaede. The thirty-two by twenty-four feet wooden structure was erected on a three acre tract of land donated by Absalom Martens. With the help of financial aid received from the Mennonite Brethren Church of Henderson, Nebraska, the building was completed on March 26, 1898.³⁰

Regier, one of the most active leaders in the Mennonite Brethren Conference, served as pastor of the North Enid church until his death in 1904. A committee of eight men directed the church affairs until January 16, 1905, when J. D. Hiebert was secured as pastor. B. M. Regier, the founder of the Mennonite settlement, Claas Penner, Peter P. Regier, and John Bese were other settlers active in the early development of the church.³¹

³⁰P. C. Grunau, "Fiftieth Anninversary of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Enid, Oklahoma, 1897-1947" (Bulletin of the North Enid Mennonite Brethren Church, 1947). (Mimeographed).

³¹Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 190-191.

Daniel S. Krehbiel of Moundridge, Kansas, was the first Mennonite homesteader in the community now called Deer Creek. Other Mennonites, chiefly from McPherson County, Kansas, gradually moved into the area after 1893. By August 27, 1899, there was a group large enough to warrant the establishment of a church.³²

In 1898 the town of Deer Creek was founded adjacent to Mennonite farm holdings. In 1902 the Mennonites built their church on the edge of town. Christian Goebel was the leader of the General Conference congregation from 1899 to 1901. Manassas Moyer of Excelsior, Missouri, served from 1901 to 1903. In 1903 J. G. Peters was elected pastor and H. R. Voth was chosen as elder. The original church membership of twenty-one had increased to sixty-five by the end of the territorial period.³³

The Mennonite Brethren Church of Medford was established through the efforts of J. F. Harms on November 12, 1899. Harms, a prominent leader among the Mennonite Brethren, settled on a farm two and a half miles northeast of present-day Medford in the summer of 1899. He was the first minister in the community and through his zealous leadership the congregation, starting with approximately thirty members, developed an active church program. In addition to his preach-

³²Mennonite Year Book and Almanac for 1903 (Quaker-town, 1904), 35.

³³personal letter from Carl J. Landes, August 8, 1952.

ing and farming, Harms also published the Zionsbote, the official German newspaper of the Mennonite Brethren Conference. This weekly publication carried religious articles together with news about Mennonite life in the United States and Canada. It was printed on Harms' farm at first, but later the press was moved to Medford.³⁴

Religious services were held in a school building which the church had purchased and moved onto a site three miles northeast of Medford. For several years after 1900 it appeared that Medford would grow into an extensive Mennonite Brethren settlement. In the fall of 1906, however, Harms, because of ill health, moved to Canada. The Conference thereupon decided to move the publication headquarters of the Zionsbote to McPherson, Kansas. This was to mark the beginning of a gradual decline of the settlement. It did not become apparent, however, until after 1907.³⁵

A branch of the Mennonites known as the Old Mennonites were also represented in the Cherokee Strip. The Old Mennonite church was the original body of American Mennonites from which all the other branches stemmed. Almost exclusively of Pennsylvania origin, it was the largest of all the Mennonite groups.³⁶ The Old Mennonites maintained very con-

³⁴personal interview with C. N. Hiebert, July 19, 1952.

³⁵J. F. Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 173-175.

³⁶Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 614.

servative religious and social customs. Church discipline forbade members to attend fairs, picnics, surprise parties, moving pictures, political meetings, exhibitions, baby shows, and the like. Membership or participation in secret societies, labor unions, farm unions, and life insurance plans were also forbidden. Ministers were chosen from the congregation by lot and served without pay. The bonnet and prayer-head covering was prescribed for women, and in some areas, the cape also. Regulations held that dresses should be of plain material, full to the neck, sleeves to the wrist, not transparent, and long enough to be modest in every way. Members were urged to pay all their just obligations and not to take advantage of exemptions and bankruptcy laws that might permit them to evade the payment of their honest debts. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the Old Mennonites began a rather progressive program of church activities in the fields of education, missions, evangelism, philanthropy, and publications.³⁷

The largest Old Mennonite concentration in the Cherokee Outlet was found in the vicinity of Jet, in Alfalfa County. The Milan Valley Church, located three miles southeast of the present townsite, was founded by the group. Simon Hershberger served as the minister of the church, numbering between forty and fifty members, for many years. Among the

³⁷Ibid., 618-624.

first deacons were P. Zimmerman, T. Hershberger, Aaron Landis, and J. Zimmerman.³⁸

The German Springs Old Mennonite Church was organized by a small number of settlers living near present Manchester in northwestern Grant County. G. C. Hinkel shouldered the ministerial duties for many years. Membership during the territorial period averaged slightly over thirty. Both the Milan Valley and German Springs churches were under the jurisdiction of Bishop T. M. Erb.³⁹

Another Mennonite branch with a congregation in the Cherokee Outlet country was the Church of God in Christ or "Holdeman" group. This faction had its origin as a small offshoot of an Old Mennonite congregation in Ohio. In 1870 the founder of the church, John Holdeman, together with his followers moved to Kansas. There the group succeeded in gaining additional members from among the Russian Mennonites. Although the "Holdemans" differed little from other Mennonites in their fundamental belief their social practices were extremely conservative. The men were distinguished by beards, collarless and tieless shirts; the women wore long skirts and small head coverings. They objected to the "taking of

³⁸ Mennonite Year Book and Directory, 1905 (Scottsdale, 1905), 11.

³⁹ Ibid.

usury", or interest.⁴⁰

The first "Holdemans" in Oklahoma settled in the Fairview community. The few families making up the group began the development of a church organization shortly prior to statehood. The settlement experienced very little growth during the territorial days.

Other small Mennonite churches established in the Cherokee Outlet by 1907 were located in the communities of Lahoma (Mennonite Brethren), Orienta, Coy, Lucien (General Conference), Newkirk (Old Mennonite), and Medford (Amish-Mennonite). By and large these latter congregations were composed of a mere handful of people that wished to maintain their Mennonite identity.

The table below shows the number of pioneer church congregations established by the different branches in the Cherokee Outlet.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF MENNONITE CONGREGATIONS BY
BRANCHES IN THE CHEROKEE
OUTLET BY 1907

Mennonite Branch	Number of Local Congregations
General Conference.....	6
Mennonite Brethren	5
Old Mennonite.....	3
Amish-Mennonite.....	1
Church of God in Christ ("Holdeman")..	1
Total	16

⁴⁰Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 607-608; 666-667.

These Mennonite church communities developed in present Kiowa County between the years 1901-1907. All were located in the Cotebo vicinity. The nucleus of this widespread settlement was made up of Mennonites who had originally homesteaded in other parts of Oklahoma Territory. One of the first to settle in the Cotebo area was J. S. Miller who in 1898 had founded the Mennonite community in Cotebo County. Two churches organized in the Cotebo community belonged to the Mennonite Church.

CHAPTER V
 MENNONITE SETTLEMENTS AND THE CHURCH IN
 CANADIAN, KIOWA, BEAVER, TEXAS
 AND CADDO COUNTIES

Almost two years after the opening of the Oklahoma District (1889), about twelve Mennonite families moved into Canadian County settling between El Reno and Okarche. A church was organized in the spring of 1891 with the help of Mennonite missionaries from nearby Darlington. Sixteen families, including several mission workers, were present at the founding. Various missionaries served the "Mennoville" church during its early history. Services were held in the home of Abraham Bergman until 1893. On June 21 of that year the group moved into a church building erected on a site seven miles north of El Reno.

Joel Sprunger, Isaak Penner, and J. H. Schmidt were the first deacons of the church. In 1893 Sprunger was elected and ordained minister. Although the group never substantially increased in size, it carried on a progressive church program throughout the years.¹

¹Year Book of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, 1945 (Newton, 1945), 9-10.

Three Mennonite church communities developed in present Kiowa County between the years 1901-1907. All were located in the Gotebo vicinity. The nucleus of this widespread settlement was made up of individuals who had originally homesteaded in other parts of Oklahoma Territory. One of the first to settle in the area was J. J. Kliever who in 1896 had founded the Washita Mission in present Washita County.

Two churches organized in the Gotebo community belonged to the General Conference branch. Together they had a membership of over a hundred people. The "Ebenezer" church was located four miles northeast of Gotebo, and "Friedenstal" was situated six miles southwest of the town.² The Gotebo Mennonite Brethren Church first met in a school house in Gotebo. In the fall of 1903 the congregation, with the help of the Gotebo citizens, constructed a church building. By 1907 the church had approximately sixty members. Peter Richert served as the pastor during the early years.³

By and large the Mennonites had not found success in the Gotebo area by the time of statehood. Drouths, dust, and hail storms made farming very difficult. Cattle raising also proved unsuccessful. Quite a number of settlers were beginning to leave the region for more prosperous areas.⁴

²H. P. Krehbiel, Mennonite Churches of North America, A Statistical Compilation (Newton, 1911), 15.

³Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 198-199.

⁴Ibid.

In 1903 Mennonites from the Buhler and Inman, Kansas, communities started a settlement near present-day Turpin in Beaver County.⁵ Before 1907 two additional groups of Mennonite settlers moved into the Oklahoma panhandle region. Balko, south of Turpin in Beaver County and Hooker in present Texas County, were chosen as settlement areas.⁶ Those unable to obtain free homesteads because of no land for filing were able to buy land at low prices, some for as little as \$1.90 per acre. Because of dry weather and the low market price of broom corn, the main crop of the region, settlers experienced much poverty during the first years. Due to this poverty many of the original pioneers were still living in small sod houses as late as 1907.⁷

The Home Mission Committee of the General Conference Western District directed the religious affairs of the Turpin settlers. In 1907 a church was organized with nineteen members. Jacob Dirks, one of the first homesteaders, was chosen as the minister.⁸

The Hooker and Balko Mennonite Brethren churches were organized in January and March of 1906 respectively. Settlers in the area of Hooker built a church that same year.

⁵Personal letter from Rudolph Kiehn, June 25, 1953.

⁶Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 185, 200.

⁷Personal interview with William Kliever, June 24, 1952.

⁸Year Book of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, 1941, 23.

The thirty charter members selected Abraham Schellenberg as their leader.⁹ At Balko services were held in a twelve by sixteen feet sod house owned by William Kliewer. The congregation, consisting of approximately twelve families, was led by S. L. Hodel.¹⁰

At the time of statehood Mennonite settlements, in the main offshoots from large nearby communities, were being established in present Caddo County. The most advanced settlement was located about eight miles east of Seger Colony and extended toward the present Eakly community. Small General Conference and Mennonite Brethren church groups had been formed by 1907. Another community, smaller in size, was in the process of formation a few miles southeast of Hydro. A General Conference congregation was organized here also.¹¹ In all there were probably less than a hundred and fifty Mennonites in Caddo County by 1907, however, additional settlers were still moving into the region.

The following table shows the number of pioneer church congregations established by the different branches in Canadian, Kiowa, Beaver, Texas, and Caddo counties.

⁹Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 200.

¹⁰Personal interview with William Kliewer, June 24, 1952.

¹¹Mennonite Year Book and Almanac for 1905, 26.

TABLE 3

NUMBER OF MENNONITE CONGREGATIONS BY
BRANCHES IN CANADIAN, KIOWA, BEAVER,
TEXAS, AND CADDO COUNTIES
BY 1907

Mennonite Branch	CHAPTER VI	Number of Local Congregations
General Conference.....		6
Mennonite Brethren.....		4
Total.....		10

By 1907 there were thirty-seven different Mennonite church congregations in Oklahoma. These were divided among seven separate branches as shown on the following table.

TABLE 4

NUMBER OF MENNONITE CONGREGATIONS
BY BRANCHES IN OKLAHOMA
TERRITORY BY 1907

Mennonite Branch	Number of Local Congregations
General Conference.....	16
Mennonite Brethren.....	12
Old Mennonite.....	3
Old Order Amish.....	2
Amish-Mennonite.....	4
Krismer Mennonite Brethren.....	1
Church of God in Christ Mennonite ("Holdeman").....	1
Total.....	37

General agreement existed among the various groups on such essential principles as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, the origin of sin, salvation through Christ, baptism upon confession of faith, non-resistance, and opposition to secret societies and the taking of

the sect. Minor differences here, as elsewhere, served to keep the different branches apart. This accounts for the seven branches of Mennonitism found in Oklahoma. In conservatism they ranged from the Old Order Amish and "Holdemans", who were the most strict, to the least proscribed group, the General Conference.

CHAPTER VI

MENNONITE CULTURE AND

CONTRIBUTIONS

By 1907 there were thirty-seven different Mennonite church congregations in Oklahoma. These were divided among seven separate branches as shown on the following table.

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NUMBER OF MENNONITE CONGREGATIONS BY BRANCHES IN OKLAHOMA TERRITORY BY 1907

Mennonite Branch	Number of Local Congregations
General Conference	16
Mennonite Brethren	12
Old Mennonite	3
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Total	37

General agreement existed among the various groups on such essential principles as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, the origin of sin, salvation through Christ, baptism upon confession of faith, nonresistance, and opposition to secret societies and the taking of

the oath.¹ Minor differences here, as elsewhere, served to keep the different branches apart. This accounts for the seven branches of Mennonitism found in Oklahoma. In conservatism they ranged from the Old Order Amish and "Holdemans", who were the most strict, to the least proscribed group, the General Conference. The Mennonite Brethren, Old Mennonites, Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, and Amish-Mennonites by and large occupied a middle ground between the other groups.²

The first, or most conservative group, changed very little in their way of life after coming to Oklahoma. They continued to adhere to rigid dress regulations. This included bonnets, prayer-head coverings, and aprons for the women, plain coats and simple clothes for the men. Broad-brimmed hats and hooks and eyes were synonymous with the male Amish. Both Amish and "Holdeman" men wore beards. They did not believe in formal education beyond the elementary grades, religious affiliation with any other church, holding of public office, and in some cases voting in elections. The Amish disapproved of church houses. Both branches used the church ban as a discipline. Foot washing was practiced in connection with the observance of the Lord's Supper. Preachers were unsalaried, untrained, and chosen by lot.

¹Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 748-749.

²Ibid., 749-750.

The four branches considered slightly less conservative than the Amish and "Holdemans" were more willing to modify their ways. New innovations in farming methods and equipment, and inventions such as the telephone were gradually accepted. Their opposition to the holding of public office was modified to the extent of permitting members to serve as county commissioners and on school boards. In essence, however, they still belonged to the company of "the plain people" who, by their simplicity of dress as well as rigidity of conduct, sought to show their "separation from the world". Various resolutions discouraged superfluous dress, excessive buying of land, attendance at shows and circuses, carrying guns, hail insurance, writing foolish articles and jokes for the newspapers, and participation in law suits. All practiced foot washing and the "holy kiss" in their communal version of the Lord's Supper. Strict rules were enforced against the "desecration of the Sabbath". The Mennonite Brethren Church near Medford, Oklahoma, expelled a member for playing ball at his home on a Sunday afternoon.³ All, except the Krimmer Mennonites, exercised the right of suffrage.⁴

The General Conference members were not distinguished by any severe dress or other personal restrictions. They

³Personal interview with C. N. Hiebert, July 19, 1952.

⁴Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 664.

⁵J. John Friesen, All Peoples of Mennonite History (Wheaton, 1944), 100-103.

were among the first in the community to use new inventions or farming methods. They had no objection to the holding of office except such as might compel them to enforce capital punishment. The church was opposed to dancing and drinking; also in many instances on the Oklahoma frontier, to smoking. A vital interest in education was manifested in the General Conference communities.

In their church government the Mennonite groups, with the exception of the Old Mennonites, were strictly congregational in type. Conferences had only advisory powers, with no disciplinary control over either members or congregations, except to exclude from conference membership. The Old Mennonite congregations were grouped into districts under the ecclesiastical authority of bishops.

Mennonite churches were built to provide a place of worship, and no thought of beauty was entertained. They were simple in design, architecture, and furnishings. There was a traditional air of humility and artlessness about the Mennonite worship service. There was no elaborate ritual, pomp, or pageantry. Congregational prayer and singing preceded the preaching. In some congregations it was not unusual to have two or three sermons during one service.⁵ Sunday evening meetings often consisted of a religious variety program given by the young people.

⁵J. John Friesen, An Outline of Mennonite History (Newton, 1944), 108-109.

Linguistically the Mennonites of Oklahoma were German. The household tongue of most of the groups was some form of Low German, or "Platt Deutch", brought from the lowlands of West Prussia by way of Russia. High German was the language of the pulpit. Many Mennonite children did not learn to speak English until after they entered the public school.

Socially Mennonites tended to be seclusive and confined within their own groups. This likely stemmed from their opposition to the commonly accepted forms of amusement, dress and other peculiar restrictions, and adherence to the German language. The absence of crime, immorality, and divorce among the Mennonites has been attributed, in part, to this sheltered type of life.

Courtship among the young people was carried on under the careful scrutiny of their elders. After a boy had dated a girl two or three times it was a foregone conclusion that they would soon wed. Following the announcement of their engagement a betrothed pair would make the rounds visiting relatives of both families.

The church provided the main social outlet for the pioneer Mennonite family. It furnished not only a place of worship but, also, the opportunity to visit and exchange views with other mortals. Sunday afternoons, when no services were scheduled, were used for visitation. During important

Christian holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, special family reunions were staged. These holidays were observed for two or three days in most places and provided a welcome break from the often lonely and drab frontier existence. As Mennonite families were traditionally large, ten or twelve children not being uncommon, gatherings of this type often assumed great proportions.

The highlight of any family celebration was the noon-day meal. Tables were laden with baked ham, roast, fowl, potatoes, roasting ears, bean soup, noodles, freshly baked bread, "Zweiback", preserves, "pluma moose", pies, and cakes. Food was one of the "first loves" of the Mennonites.

Social contacts with non-Mennonites were occasionally made at literary programs or community spelling bees. Other sources of community entertainment were not considered acceptable to the church.⁶ Relationships between Mennonites and non-Mennonites, as a whole, were congenial. Many considered the Mennonites "queer" and too strict. However, their close adherence to such virtues as honesty, truthfulness, generosity, kindness, and high morality, helped others to overlook some of their peculiarities. One newspaper editor evaluated them as "...sturdy, honest, hard working Germans ...a class of people who make most desirable citizens..."⁷

⁶Personal interview with Henry H. Flaming, July 15, 1952.

⁷The Herald-Sentinel (Cloud Chief, Oklahoma Territory), July 6, 1894.

A few looked upon Mennonites as "dangerous foreigners" and sold out their holdings rather than to live in their settlements.⁸

As already indicated, most Mennonite groups discouraged members from holding political offices. Generally, however, this did not include voting, or affiliation with political parties. From the beginning the Oklahoma Mennonites voted almost unanimously Republican. This was because most of them originally came from states where they or their forefathers had received special considerations from Republican administrations.

One of the main contributions of the Mennonites to the community was in the field of agriculture. The Mennonites had been strictly a farming folk for over three centuries. Their philosophy of the simple life had been developed upon this background.⁹ Mennonite pioneers had developed a keen sense of discrimination for good land. As a result they seldom settled on poor soil. If they made a poor choice they moved on to something more promising as soon as possible. Wherever they settled they earned the reputation of being good farmers. In time their settlements came to be the centers of some of the most progressive farming areas in the Territory. Their agricultural ability and success made them a vital economic asset to the town and community.

⁸Personal interview with P. C. Grunau, July 23, 1952.

⁹Friesen, An Outline of Mennonite History, 108.

Mennonites had a definite part in the establishment of educational foundations in Oklahoma. Schoolhouses were built as soon as communities and towns had been established. The Mennonite philosophy of education held that a school should teach a child how to read and write, provide a good knowledge of the Bible, and in every way help develop a sound Christian character. Wherever Mennonites lived in compact school districts they maintained such schools as met their aims, giving ample time to both religion and German. But where they constituted only a part of the school population, as most often was the case, the Mennonite youth attended regular public schools.

The lack of textbooks, maps, blackboards, and other equipment, short school terms, and poorly trained teachers were retarding influences on the frontier schools. A school term was seldom longer than four or five months; and the poverty of homesteaders even then made the average attendance poor. Often a schoolhouse was a dugout, a "soddy", or a crude frame structure, poorly lighted, ventilated, and heated.¹⁰

Religious education was considered as important as secular training among the Mennonites. Every year, usually following the close of the regular school term, the young people were given several months of religious instruction in a German school. Since their religion was so closely bound

¹⁰Personal interview with Henry H. Flaming, July 15, 1952.

with the German tongue, the idea of teaching religion in any other language was not even considered. Bible and church history, some grammar, and readings in the Old and New Testaments were the subjects generally taught in the schools.¹¹ The church pastors or other local religious leaders served as teachers, usually without salary. In some areas a small tuition fee was charged to help defray expenses.¹²

In a few communities more importance was attached to attending the German school than the public school. In one settlement the Mennonites took their children from the public school in the middle of a term and placed them in a special German school sponsored by the church. When the German school closed, two months later, the pupils were returned to the public school, much to the teacher's distress and the pupils' embarrassment.¹³

Secondary schools were not widely attended for many years. Though not generally opposed to them, the opinion prevailed among the Mennonites that only those preparing for preaching or teaching needed any higher education.¹⁴

A step toward the promotion of more advanced training among the Mennonites was taken in the Corn community in 1902.

¹¹Personal interview with P. C. Grunau, July 23, 1952.

¹²Personal letter from Carl Landes, August 8, 1952.

¹³Personal interview with C. N. Hiebert, July 19, 1952.

¹⁴Personal interview with Henry H. Flaming, July 15, 1952.

In that year the Corn Mennonite Brethren Church established a parochial Bible academy. The school was instituted to provide a thorough religious training together with the basic educational essentials. It was open to both grade and high school age groups. It was one of the earliest parochial schools established in Oklahoma.¹⁵

Mr. and Mrs. D. J. Classen served as the first teachers in the "Gemeinde Schule". They were followed by David L. Schellenberg in 1904, and Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Duerksen in 1905. Duerksen received a salary of \$1.25 a month plus an allowance of ten cents a month for coal during the winter. Twenty-seven pupils enrolled in the school in 1905. The term was five months and there was no prescribed course of study.

Beginning in 1907 a planned three-year course of study leading toward graduation with a Bible diploma was inaugurated. Only students of high school age or beyond were permitted to enroll. The length of term was kept at five months.¹⁶

By the close of the territorial period Mennonite settlements were firmly established in western Oklahoma. Vast acres of prairie land, where only tall grass and sagebrush was formerly grown, had been checker-boarded with fields of wheat and row crops. "Soddies" and dugouts had almost com-

¹⁵Personal letter from J. W. Vogt, July 10, 1953.

¹⁶Ibid; Harms, Geschichte der Brüdergemeinde, 177.

pletely been replaced by frame and brick structures. Prosperous farms, villages, missions, churches, and towns stood on what a short time previously had been the free range of the wild Indians. Indeed, remarkable changes had taken place since Mennonite missionaries, who led the way for Mennonite farmers, first entered the region in 1880.

Mennonite settlers had come to Oklahoma from various communities and sections of the country. Many had recently come from Russia and other parts of Europe. Life on the Oklahoma frontier was strangely different from what most of them had experienced previously. Adjustments in virtually every phase of life had been necessary. They had to contend with dangers, starvation, and bankruptcy. Hardships and inconveniences were met on every hand. But through it all a hardy Mennonite culture, nurtured by old-fashioned industry, resourcefulness, perseverance, and religious faith, had taken root. The Mennonite people were confident that their way of life, which had endured for over three centuries, could long be preserved on the plains of Oklahoma.

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