

Wealth and Power in the Vistula River Mennonite Community, 1772-1914

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In September 1772 as part of the first Partition of Poland twelve thousand Mennonites living along the Vistula River became subjects of Frederick II, King of Prussia. As part of the official ceremonies transferring control from Poland to Prussia, representatives of the various estates in the annexed territory, including a Mennonite delegation, gathered in Marienburg castle to pay homage to the envoys of the king. Mennonites as a religious minority under Polish rule had lived under a special set of laws, an arrangement that was used for a wide variety of social groups in most parts of Europe at that time. Their Charter of Privileges outlined the limits of both state interference in Mennonite religious life and Mennonite access to political and civil rights. Because the viability of their religious community depended on this Charter signed by the King of Poland, an arrangement now null and void since they were no longer his subjects, the main focus of the Mennonite delegation in Marienburg was to start the formal process of applying for the same type of Charter from Frederick II. To help facilitate this process, the Mennonites, according to Elder Heinrich Donner's chronicle, supplied the official reception buffet with "two

fatten steers, 400 pounds of butter, 20 cheeses, 50 pairs of chickens and 50 pairs of ducks.”¹

This vignette of Polish/Prussian Mennonite life on the cusp of change raises many questions about wealth and its connections to power within and outside the community, that is both to external political power and to the leadership’s ability to mobilize the community’s wealth internally. Which of the twelve thousand affected Mennonites in roughly a dozen different congregations had to donate chickens and which ducks? Did wealthy Mennonites give more than poor ones? Who had the power to decide on the amounts or that a gift should be offered at all? What if someone assigned to bring a pound of butter forgot or refused to contribute as ordered?

Unfortunately we lack the records to track down each sacrificial steer or cheese from the feast at the castle. We can, however, answer the questions on the larger scale of how Mennonites along the Vistula River pooled their finances in order to meet governmental requirements that they pay communal taxes for a variety of reasons, mostly associated with avoiding military service. Power within the Mennonite community was connected to external political power because the collection and payment of large sums of money to the government forced Mennonites to develop a highly organized and efficient method of taxing the community’s resources in an equitable way in order to lobby politicians and meet payments imposed, sometimes even on short notice, by the government. Finally individual wealth among Mennonites was linked to power within the community because it helped to determine who assumed leadership.

Initially external political power and authority within the community complimented each other, as the Prussian government put police powers at the disposal of the Mennonite leadership in order to force recalcitrant Mennonites to contribute to the Cadet tax and other payments to the state. Once the state revoked the Mennonites’ military exemption in the 1860s, however, dissident Mennonites took advantage of new opportunities to counter traditional patterns of authority within the congregation. By the 1880s, after a period of sorting out the new options, the older pattern of leadership dominated by wealthier Mennonites reemerged, but not with the power leaders had held in the first half of the century.

The Rise and Fall of a Mennonite Tax Collection System

Arrangements made in the summer of 1772 by Frederick II and his appointed governor of the newly acquired territory, Joachim Friedrich von Domhardt, included plans to grant Mennonites’ request

for a Charter as long as the community agreed to an annual payment of 5,000 *talers* for exemption from military service.² Money from this Mennonite tax, as the government referred to it, was earmarked first to build and then to run the Military Academy in Culm/Chełmno. Domhardt founded this school to serve as a feeder to the Cadet Academy in Berlin. The school was open only to the sons of Polish noblemen and was intended to integrate the *szlachta* into the new state.³

The need to raise the equivalent of approximately fifty annual salaries for workers each year forced Mennonites to develop an internal tax code for the entire community. Mennonites already had a long tradition of mutual aid and regular contributions to the needs of the church, especially for the poor in the church. These contributions often came from special voluntary collections that were placed in a fund administered by the deacons. This system of offerings continued to be used in parallel to the more organized tax collection system that was now implemented. Perhaps this preexisting understanding of the need to contribute to the church made the creation of a new tax system more palatable. Nevertheless this external requirement resulted in major internal changes concerning how money was raised and crucially made more abundant resources available to leadership to use on the community's behalf. Once this new system was implemented it became possible for leadership to calculate quickly how much additional money they could raise simply by asking for an additional round of tax collection, be it a fraction of the regular Mennonite tax for small amounts or increasing the regular amount by multiples of two, three, or more to meet extraordinary state demands during times of war.

The government had set the fee at 5,000 *talers* by rounding down heavily from a rule of thumb based on 1 *taler* per male. On August 22, 1774, the church leadership met in Heubuden at the house of Preacher Hans Classen to create a centralized internal tax collection system that was more complex than the government's simple rule. The specifics of this tax code are recorded for Elder Heinrich Donner's Orloffferfelde congregation. Each male older than fifteen was required to pay one-third *taler* while females over fifteen paid one-sixth *taler*. Landowners were charged one and one-third *taler* for each *hufe* they owned (approximately 41 acres or 17 hectares). Those who had money invested for interest were charged a three percent fee. Applying these rates uniformly in all congregations meant that roughly sixty percent of the 5,000 *talers* needed would have been raised from property owners, given that Mennonites owned almost 2,200 *hufen*. Most of the rest would have come from the poll tax and "capitalists" who had money out on interest would have paid only a small percentage of the total bill.⁴

From this original formulation Mennonites created a standardized tax system to collect the communal fee charged for military exemption

until 1868 when the draft was imposed on Mennonites. Because this amount was separate from that charged to areas that fell to Prussia in the Polish partition of 1793, this tax collection system was only coordinated among congregations in the lands under Prussian rule in the east in 1772 thus excluding the Mennonites from the city and territories of Danzig.⁵ The tax rates and the money it generated from each congregation were recorded on documents that look like modern-day spreadsheets. The first known extant copy from 1828 lists the results of a general meeting of Mennonite congregations held on September 14 that year.

General meeting

Der Selbsten-geliebtesten Mennoniten-Gemeinde in Ost-Preussens, die den 14. Sept. 1828 im Saale der Wittve Wall in Marienburg.

Es ist beschlossen, alle auf den vorgedachten Saale am 14. Sept. 1828 in Marienburg gehaltenen Verhandlungen zu bekräftigen, und die dabei beschlossenen Artikel zu genehmigen.

Kirchen Gemeinden	Männl. Mitglieder		Weibl. Mitglieder		Gesamt	Kathol.	Luther.	Evangel.	Andere	Summe	Kathol.	Luther.	Evangel.	Andere	Summe
	alte 15 J.	unter 15 J.	alte 15 J.	unter 15 J.											
1. Rheinberg	66.	70.	26.	24.	186.	28.	76.	123.	26.	330.					
2. Elbingen	44.	32.	35.	36.	147.	46.	70.	102.	28.	265.					
3. Ellnau	104.	128.	70.	61.	363.	78.	140.	112.	17.	617.					
4. Lissa	180.	150.	173.	160.	663.	52.	79.	197.	18.	910.					
5. Trossen	437.	351.	190.	212.	1190.	201.	16.	302.		1509.					
6. Marienburg	101.	162.	75.	54.	392.	125.	224.	157.	16.	522.					
7. Rastenburg	304.	304.	177.	169.	954.	180.	120.	265.	4.	1363.					
8. Neuhagen	290.	258.	107.	112.	767.	172.	57.	259.	24.	1157.					
9. Orlow	160.	172.	97.	105.	534.	117.	24.	176.	21.	751.					
10. Gnesen	159.	136.	51.	74.	420.	110.	10.	165.	23.	508.					
11. Seelowitz	258.	270.	131.	132.	893.	213.	25.	470.	27.	1215.					
12. Neubrandenburg	383.	367.	203.	176.	1129.	307.		505.	15.	1951.					
13. Anklam	149.	153.	130.	136.	574.	77.	27.	116.	26.	734.					
14. Graudenz	250.	241.	156.	140.	787.	101.	29.	152.	28.	1068.					
15. Kallinow	173.	161.	141.	145.	660.	31.	7.	46.	26.	743.					
16. Bartenstein	20.	10.	4.	7.	41.	3.	10.	5.	9.	26.					
Summe	3118.	3021.	1796.	1788.	8703.	2002.	24.	4300.	6.	15137.					

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Artifact 1 - "The Cadet Money of all Mennonite Congregations in East and West Prussia and Lithuania by acreage and membership over fifteen years of age. Assembled on August 6, 1840, at the widow Mrs. Wall in Marienburg."

Rates were now set at thirteen *groschen* for males older than fifteen and eight for females in a system where a *taler* was worth thirty *groschen*. Thus the rate increased three *groschen* for both males and females from the amount that Donner cited some fifty years earlier. The spreadsheet lists males and females both older and younger than

fifteen, giving comprehensive data on the size of congregations as well. Land was assessed at a rate of one *taler* thirteen *groschen* per *hufe*, also an increase of three *groschen*.⁶ Given the different starting places of these rates, females were now paying proportionally more, have faced an sixty percent rate increase while property owners' rate only went up seven percent. By 1828 capitalists were apparently not charged anything at all. About 2,900 of the total 5,113 *taler* raised were still from property taxes or about fifty-seven percent, so the overall percent raised from property had not shifted significantly in fifty years.

By 1840 and 1846, the next years from which summary documents of this Mennonite tax code survive, Mennonite leadership was meeting and adjusting congregational quotas on a six-year cycle. Rates on land had increased two *groschen* per *hufe* up to one *taler* fifteen *groschen*. Rates and ages for the poll tax remained unchanged. A loss of 34 *hufen* in total Mennonite-owned property perhaps explains the rise in property rates. That loss of land in the tax base lowered tax revenues by approximately 49 *talers*. Adding two *groschen* additional tax to each of the 2,000 remaining *hufen* would have brought in an additional 133 *talers*, more than enough to cover the difference.⁷

The number of taxpayers liable for the poll tax remained remarkably constant over these years. The total of males older than fifteen ranged from 3,102 in 1846 to 3,193 in 1828 while females ranged from 3,021 in 1840 to 3,072 in 1846, with figures from 1828 roughly in the middle at 3,051. Given the rapid rise of European populations in the nineteenth century when the general population of the German states, for example, rose 30 percent from 1800 to 1850, this oddity of no growth among Mennonites requires some explanation.⁸ In addition to placing a new tax on Mennonites, Prussia had began already in the 1770s to restrict Mennonites' ability to purchase property. By 1803 the government had worked out a system of allowing Mennonites to buy property only from other Mennonites, making it generally impossible to set up more than one son in farming. Given the alternatives of emigrating to Russia or remaining in Prussia without property, hundreds of Mennonites chose the former. Clearly the restriction of land ownership to a static amount also fixed the number of adult Mennonites in the area to a constant number. Research done by Wilhelm Mannhardt documented that this stagnation remained the case at least up until 1858.⁹

One important change in the Mennonite population was apparent from the tax rolls. In 1828 those under fifteen constituted 42 percent of the total Mennonite population while in both 1840 and 1846 the figure had slipped to only 37 percent. Mennonites were having smaller families in the 1840s than in the 1820s.

While the spreadsheet format records the overall population and property holdings of the Mennonite community, detailed records

kept by Jacob v. Riesen, apparently a deacon of the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation, in the years 1808 to 1816 specified how collections were carried out in local congregations.¹⁰ These were times of extreme financial and political stress for Prussia due to the Napoleonic wars and Mennonites were squeezed to contribute even more than usual since they refused to serve in the military, thus a number of extraordinary collections are chronicled here.¹¹

In order to assure equity and completeness in tax collection, the amount assessed to the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation in the regional records was broken down at the congregational level into local collection districts. Every household in the congregation was entered in a large ledger book with columns for the amount of land owned, males and females older than fifteen, and the amount of capital out on interest. In 1810, for example, this congregation divided its 175 households into thirteen districts, each supervised by an official called *der Einforderer* or collector. Jacob v. Riesen himself was in charge of the largest collection district, the city of Elbing and its forty-two households, which included 38 *hufen* land, 48 males and 57 females over fifteen, 18,000 *taler* of “male” capital and 7,500 of “female” capital. In addition he collected from four households scattered in outlying villages.¹² The smallest district was that of collector Heinrich Rempel Jr. of Rosengarterfelde who collected his own taxes and that of only three other households.¹³

The office of collector was apparently an informal one, the qualifications for which are not clear. In four of the districts, including Heinrich Rempel Jr.’s, the collector was the largest landowner, but these districts were all quite small. All of the collectors owned enough property to be independent farmers, but in the larger districts they were collecting money from Mennonites who owned quite a bit more property than they did. How these men were chosen for their tasks is a topic requiring more research.

The collection in 1810 was a bit unusual. Two rounds were taken, one in April and one May. The Prussian kingdom, which had been defeated by Napoleon in the 1806 and reduced to the status of a French satellite state, was not able to raise the contributions owed the French. Extraordinary loans had to be raised and all landowners were ordered to “loan” money to the state at the rate of 3 *florin* per *hufe*. At a general meeting held in Koczeltitzky near Marienburg, the leadership decided to raise in addition a double Cadet tax to offer as a gift to the state. Thus these two rounds of collection were taken. Other congregations apparently had more trouble raising the money, so the total amount was not finally collected and paid in until 1811.¹⁴

This system of tax collection continued until 1868 when the Prussia Parliament (*Landtag*) voted to drop the Mennonite tax from the

budget. This action was precipitated by the imposition of the draft on Mennonites in 1867 and was confirmed by Interior Minister Count Friedrich zu Eulenburg in May 1868. Since Mennonites were no longer exempted from the draft, they no longer needed to pay a communal exemption fee.¹⁵

Mennonite traditionalists fought to maintain their exemption and thus to keep paying this tax. In February of 1868 a deputation of five Mennonite elders visited the capital, Berlin, and met with King William I, Crown Prince Frederick, most of the Cabinet and several legislators. Especially telling was the fact that the Prime Minister, Otto von Bismarck, refused to meet with them. One of his friends, Hermann Wagener, however, did agree to meet with them. He suggested they continue to pay the tax for now so that they could consider a court challenge if necessary to enforce their exemption on the basis of having already made the payment for it. Thus the Mennonites petitioned the Parliament for the right to continue paying the tax. The idea of farmers demanding the right to pay taxes provoked gales of laughter in the House of Lords. Mennonites were allowed to pay the tax for an additional year but the only concession the government eventually made was unrelated to this tax payment. Mennonites were permitted to serve as non-combatants beginning in 1868.¹⁶

In the absence of external pressure, centralized attempts to raise money for the common good faltered. The Danzig congregation had suggested retaining the system in order to use the funds for other needs, but given the high tensions over the transition to accepting military service, rural congregations rejected that call. The creation of the Alliance of Mennonite Congregations in the German Empire (*Vereinigung*) in 1886 presented entirely new projects for joint financing. The main goals of this new group, which initially consisted of the urban congregations in northern Germany, were to support small, struggling congregations and to reestablish Mennonite identity via scholarly publications and a more sophisticated pastorate to be educated at a new Mennonite seminary. The founding churches of the Alliance expected it to become the main avenue of joint Mennonite fund-raising efforts but the rejection of a professional pastorate by many rural congregations made this goal unattainable. Eventually in West Prussia two common funds were developed separately from the Alliance. The Danzig congregation served as treasurer for a general fund while the Heubuden congregation administered a home missions fund. These funds were controlled by an elected committee of six Elders. Joint financial projects thus became possible for Mennonites along the Vistula River, but now on a donation basis without the centrally organized amounts and strong obligations.¹⁷

Tax Collection and the Power of Leaders

The creation of a Mennonite tax code shifted power within the community. Initially the Prussian state offered to back this system with its own police authority. Although only rarely used, this offer gave Mennonite Elders unprecedented clout. More important were the indirect implications. Mennonite Elders, by certifying members as being of good standing, or not, could keep young men out of the army or deliver them up to the recruiters. The tax system also made it possible for leaders to speak authoritatively on the community's behalf and to raise large sums of money on relatively short notice. Thus the end of the tax collection system marked an important realignment of internal power structures for the Mennonite community.

The first manifestation of increasing centralization was the introduction of government-mandated church books to replace the hit-and-miss recordkeeping that characterized Prussian congregations before 1772. For example, in 1772 the Ladekopp branch of the Vistula Delta Flemish Congregation began keeping records of births, weddings, deaths, and communion attendance on the direct order of the Marienwerder Cabinet. The same development took place in the Frisian congregation up the river in Schönsee near Graudenz.¹⁸ Other congregations, such as the Danzig Flemish congregation and Donner's Orloffelfelde congregation, had kept such records earlier. The government, however, now required all congregations to keep the same kinds of records, giving them for the first time a common administrative structure as a bond in addition to the cohesion lent by family ties and a shared theology and history.

As the Mennonite tax system was being set up, recordkeeping and cooperation with the Prussian state lent impressive new power to the Elders who could now call on Prussian officials to aid them with the collection of the Cadet tax. In 1779, for example, Jacob Penner, who had been a Preacher in the Orloffelfelde congregation before resigning his position and leaving the church, was ordered by the county government either to pay four years of back Cadet taxes to the congregation or enroll himself and his sons for liability for military service. He paid up. Soon after that Elder Heinrich Donner at the request of officials wrote a warning note that his deacons took around to members at their homes that they needed to pay the Cadet tax assessments or face military service.¹⁹

Parallel to authority over tax collection, Elders also had the power to keep their members out of the military. In 1788 recruiters took in two Mennonites who had married Lutheran women. Since most congregations did not allow so-called mixed marriages, the government now claimed that these two, Hans Penner and Lenert Hamm, were

no longer Mennonites and thus liable for military service. Eventually a simple note from the respective Elders secured their release from the military.²⁰ The power Elders had over tax collection was part of a larger project of the Prussian state to use local religious leaders to keep subjects within the boundaries drawn by the state.

Having community money at their disposal enhanced leaders' authority by making it possible for them to lobby government more effectively. Heinrich Donner and Peter Regier, for example, were able to spend a month in Berlin in 1775 pushing the community's Charter of Privileges project and with Johann Busenitz replacing Regier, the two leaders spent over two months on the same errand in 1777. Occasionally decisions to fund these trips out of the common fund proved controversial, as with Heinrich Donner and Cornelius Warkentin's ten-week stay in Berlin in 1787 to secure a renewal of the Charter from the new king, Frederick William II. In the context of a larger conflict within the Mennonite community over mixed marriages, one group of churches only wanted to activate the tax system to the tune of fifteen *groschen* per *hufe* instead of covering all the costs that amounted to thirty-six *groschen* per *hufe* or roughly half of an annual Cadet tax.²¹ Clearly the ability to raise money for long, expensive stays in the capital enhanced the Mennonite ability to get a better deal out of the state than individual petitioners could have. At the same time, it made congregants even more dependent on the leadership as the intermediary between the community and the state.

The most dramatic example of the connection between leadership's authority and the ability to raise large sums of money was the crisis over the imposition of the draft for the first time in Prussia in 1813. The initial version of the law required Mennonites to serve but subsequent negotiations restored their exemption for a fee that was five times the annual Cadet tax plus the delivery of much-needed horses for the cavalry. Although the fee was difficult to raise, Mennonite and state leaders could come to quick agreement in a time of crisis because both sides knew the community would be able to deliver on its promise of cash.²²

State support for Elder authority faded throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, then crumbled dramatically in connection with the revolutions of 1848. Early in 1848 a liberal Prussian State Ministry reigned in Berlin. This ministry began efforts to draft a constitution for Prussia. Several anticipated clauses of the Prussian constitution were promulgated as law on April 6 in an attempt to placate the revolutionary movement. Mennonites were particularly affected by §5, which stated that, "the exercise of civil rights is henceforth independent of religious affiliation."²³

Numerous Mennonites tested this new law by circumventing the restrictions on property acquisition. Although this particular constitu-

tion was never implemented, the phrase cited above did become part of the constitution granted by a restored monarchy at the end of 1848 and revised in 1850. In this new legal setting the district government in Danzig ordered local courts to allow Mennonites to register deeds without the special permit since civil rights, including property rights, were no longer tied to religion. By their own admission Mennonites bought 5,600 acres of land without permits from 1849 to 1856.²⁴ Although not a significant percentage of the total Mennonite acreage owned, this amount did constitute some erosion of the Protestant tax base. The sheer novelty of the idea, as well as the resulting increased competition for land, would certainly have raised some neighbors' hackles because Mennonites were still exempted from the draft.

Some of this resentment spilled over into anti-Mennonite political activity. Responding to petitions, in 1850 the finance committee of the House of Representatives, a body that was itself first created by the constitution of 1848, recommended striking the Mennonite tax and requiring them to serve in the army.²⁵ Church leadership worked assiduously over the next several years to persuade Mennonites who had acquired extra property to resell it or to emigrate to Russia in order to ease these tensions. This time the government did not aid Elders by applying direct pressure on individual Mennonites to acquiesce to Elders' requests but rather pressured Mennonites as a whole to accept military service.

In 1867 as part of political changes related to the unification of Germany, Mennonites were required to serve in the army and the Mennonite tax was dropped the next year. The resulting tension engendered a schism in the Mennonite community that created competing petition drives as the progressive portion of the laity confronted a more traditionalist leadership. With the lifting of collective exemption, each individual Mennonite had to decide how to respond to the pressure of military service.

This level of individual responsibility led to a lay-led petition drive in the fall of 1869. A petition signed by almost 1,300 heads of household explicitly accepted military service, at least as non-combatants, but demanded full civil rights, especially in regard to taxation and property ownership. The records show that this petition was organized by village affiliation and not by congregational affiliation, corroborating anecdotal evidence that it was conduct against the wishes and authority of the Elders.²⁶

One congregation that did not join this petition effort was Heubuden, the largest congregation in the Vistula Delta. Its leadership was united in opposition and Elder Gerhard Penner was the staunchest opponent of military service. He led a petition effort that called for the Prussian parliament to strip Mennonites of the right to vote in

exchange for reinstating their military exemption. This petition gathered roughly 1,800 signatures. As time passed, however, with no improvement in the Mennonites' draft status, members of his own congregation eventually turned against Penner. One member even assisted the county attorney in bringing charges against Penner shortly before his emigration to Nebraska in 1876. A law passed in 1874 largely resolved the Mennonites' legal status by granting them most civil rights.²⁷ Beyond the issue of civil rights, equally significant was the fact that the laity now had government backing for defying church leadership, a sharp reversal of the earlier policy. Some congregations also relaxed church discipline at this time, further eroding the reach of church authority into individuals' lives.

This break in leaders' authority and the imposition of the draft occasioned the last large-scale Mennonite emigration from the Vistula River region in the nineteenth century. Once the conservative opponents of a rapprochement with military service and the Prussian state departed, leadership's authority returned to patterns similar to what apparently existed before the Partitions of Poland. Elders and Preachers were still respected and deferred to, but they no longer reigned directly over members' pocketbooks.

Wealth and Leadership

Just as control over the community's wealth lent extra authority to Elders, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, their own personal wealth apparently played a roll in selecting leaders for positions of authority in the first place. Mennonite leaders along the Vistula River were not simply the wealthiest members of the community but neither were they the poorest. A certain level of prosperity seemed to be a prerequisite to winning election into leadership positions.

One of the best places to test this thesis is in the comprehensive records compiled by the Prussian kingdom in 1772 after the first Partition of Poland. Detailed records of residents' wealth and property were compiled for the population at large and specifically for Mennonites as well, in their case in conjunction with their request for a new Charter of Privileges. As part of preparing the Charter, officials gathered information on each Mennonite household that included the number of sons and daughters, the numbers of male and female hired hands, if they owned or rented property, and their general economic condition.²⁸ Comparing these lists with the names of leaders provides an initial read on the correlation of wealth and power in the 1770s.

Property ownership was clearly linked to prosperity. Out of the 2,755 Mennonite families listed for West and East Prussia, 2,113 or

77 percent owned substantial property. Cottagers with owned their own plots were clearly listed as a separate category comprising only 2 percent of the total. An additional 17 percent or 461 families rented substantial property, while only 1 percent or 24 family units lived in the congregational poorhouses. Thus 94 percent of the Mennonite families were financially independent, owning or renting substantial property.

More revealing is the data provided of the Mennonites' economic status. Mennonites were ranked in four economic categories: good, medium, bad, and indigent. Only 1 percent was classified as "good," mostly from the suburbs of Danzig where they engaged in distilling, lace-making, and shop-keeping outside the jurisdiction of the guilds. An additional 22 percent, or 616 families, were categorized "medium," while the largest portion, 73 percent, were labeled "bad." The lone percent living in the poor houses were the only group to earn the label of poor, while for about 3 percent no information was available.

The estimates of leaders' economic condition demonstrate that clergy fared better than average. One third of Elders were in the medium condition compared to 22 percent of Mennonites over all. Adding the preachers who are known to us makes a group of 27 households of which 30 percent were in the medium category. So Elders were statistically better off than Preachers who in turn were better off than other Mennonites. Yet these slight differences suggest there was no sharp division between leadership and others in economic terms.

The most significant indicator of economic difference between leaders and followers in the Mennonite community turned out to be the presence or absence of hired help. Only 22 percent of households listed hired help overall. Almost half of the Preachers, however, listed such. Among the small group of Elders 83 percent lived in a household where they managed outside help. This status did not directly correlate to wealth, as smaller landowners had such help and occasionally larger ones did not. Certainly in some cases a widow or elderly farmer might hire such help without necessarily being able to afford it easily. Nonetheless it is striking that the Preachers of Mennonite congregations in Prussia in the 1770s were twice as likely to have hired help and Elders almost four times as likely to do so as the average Mennonite. Leaders were clearly more likely to be managing larger, more complex households. One final observation, all of the leaders belonged to the 77 percent who owned property and did not rent it. The proclivity of Mennonites to select property owners of above average wealth for leadership suggests that as a rule they were comfortable with having such men making decisions for the community as a whole well before migration to Russia began.

Comprehensive data similar to that generated by the 1776 census does not exist for subsequent time periods, but significant anecdotal

evidence suggests the trends did not change. Consider, for example, the well-documented history of leadership in the Danzig Mennonite Church. In H. G. Mannhardt's 1919 congregational history he is careful to recount the selection and careers of the congregations Elders, Preachers and Deacons and later church council members, giving us more information about these men as individuals than for other members. Clearly this group remained the locus of decision-making and authority more so than the congregation as a whole. The only group photo in the volume shows the deacons and church council from 1904 and carefully lists the professions and titles of each man. Of the ten, six were successful independent businessmen, three played important roles in city government and administration and the tenth was the lead teacher at the only college-prep high school in town. Wealth, success and prestige in secular life clearly still were prerequisites for congregational leadership.²⁹

Conclusion

The linkage between modest wealth and access to positions of leadership in the Mennonite community remained constant over 150 years in the Vistula River Valley. One criterion for Mennonite voters in congregational elections was the material success of the candidates in secular life. In part this preference was linked to a realization that leaders needed to have the leisure prosperity affords in order to spend time on church business. It was certainly not the only issue congregants considered, church offices tended to run in families in many congregations and the role of family and clan ties in voting is a lacuna that future research will need to consider.

While the qualifications for Mennonite leadership seem to have remained constant over this time period, the amount of authority with which they were vested changed dramatically over time. For the first half of this time period the authority of the leadership was enhanced by external reinforcement from the state that aided the leadership in collecting and channeling the community's wealth to pay state fees. In the later half Mennonites entered into a more direct and individual relationship with the state, decreasing the power of the leadership.

Notes

¹ Max Bär, *Westpreussen unter Friedrich dem Grossen* (Leipzig: Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1909), 1:38-44; Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreußischen Mennoniten* (Marienburg: Selbstverlag der altpreußischen Mennonitengemein-

- den, 1863), 123; Heinrich Donner and Johann Donner, *Chronik von Heinrich Donner*, transcribed by Werner Janzen (Allmersbach, n.p., 1996), 24. Heinrich Donner was the leader or Elder of the Orloffferfelde Mennonite Church near Tiegenhof and an important Mennonite leader of his generation, his son Johann was elected Elder after his death in 1804 and continued his *Chronik*.
- ² Geheimer Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (GStA), Berlin, Hauptabteilung (HA) II (Generaldirektorium), Westpreußen (WP), Materien (M), Titel (Tit.) 109 (Mennonitensachen), no. 1 (Wegen der von den Mennonisten-Gemeinde in Ost-, Westpreußen u Litauen nachgesuchten Privilegii zu ungestörte Fortsetzung ihres Gottesdienstes, Nahrung und Gewerbes, auch Befreiung von der natürlichen Werbung und Enrollierung, incl. gebetener Erlassung derer sowohl an die katholische als lutherische Geistlichkeit zu entrichten jurium stolae u[nd] sonstigen Abgabe und Calenden, etc.), vol. 1 (1775-1787), fols. 9, 10, 15. See also Mannhardt, *Wehrfreiheit*, 123-8, Erich Joachim, *Johann Friedrich von Domhardt. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte von Ost- und Westpreußen unter Friedrich dem Großen* (Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1899), 115-116, Bär, *Westpreussen*, 2:45-6.
 - ³ Joachim, *Domhardt*, 139. See also Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg, *Zwischen Polnischer Ständegesellschaft und Preussischem Obrigkeitsstaat. Vom Königlichen Preußen zu Westpreußen (1756-1806)* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1995), 370-6 and Bär, *Westpreussen*, 2:178.
 - ⁴ W. Mannhardt, *Wehrfreiheit*, 128. *Chronik von Heinrich Donner*, 25. Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku (AP Gdańsk), Gdańsk, Poland, Syg. 836 (Jeziernik/Schönsee), no. 1 (Heinrich Donner, *Pamiętnik*), 4-6. Note that Donner recorded amounts in *florin* where three *florin* equaled one *taler*.
 - ⁵ H. G. Mannhardt, *The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569-1919*, trans. Victor G. Doerksen, eds. Mark Jantzen and John Thiesen (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2007), 148.
 - ⁶ Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, (MFs), Weierhof-Bolanden, Germany, OK 51, [Peter Wiebe], *Amtstagebuch der Mennoniten-gemeinde Elbing-Ellerwald, 1825-1835*, 127 loose-leaf.
 - ⁷ Mennonite Church USA Archives - North Newton, V-18, Folder 30 (Archives of the Mennonite Church at Orloffferfelde - Miscellaneous documents 1775-1907). Also available online at http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/V_18/folder_30/.
 - ⁸ John Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe*, 2 vols, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), II:557.
 - ⁹ Mannhardt, *Wehrfreiheit*, xc.
 - ¹⁰ MFs, OK53, *Schutz und Gemeinten Gelder Berechnungs-Buch der Elbing-Ellerwaldeschen Mennoniten Gemeinde*. Also available at http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_301/ok53/.
 - ¹¹ On this time period see Horst Penner, *Die Ost- und Westpreußischen Mennoniten*, 2 vols. (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1978 and Kirchheimbolanden: Selbstverlag, 1987), II:37-42, Mannhardt, *Wehrfreiheit*, 155-88 and Mark Jantzen, "Vistula Delta Mennonites Encounter Modern German Nationalism, 1813-1820," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 78, no 2 (April 2004): 185-212.
 - ¹² MFs, OK53, *Schutz Gelder Elbing-Ellerwald*, 15-6, 24. Also available at http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_301/ok53/DSCN0916.jpg, [DSCN0917.jpg](http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_301/ok53/DSCN0917.jpg), and [DSCN0925.jpg](http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_301/ok53/DSCN0925.jpg). For a few years in this book "male" capital was assessed at 1 percent and "female" capital at half a percent. The latter was money that had been invested for a female heir.
 - ¹³ *Ibid.*, 24. Also available at http://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_301/ok53/DSCN0925.jpg.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-36; Mannhardt, *Wehrfreiheit*, 156-7.
 - ¹⁵ GStA, HA XIV (Provinz Westpreußen), Rep. 181 (Regierung zu Marienwerder), no. 31520, (Marienwerder Abtheilung des Innern des Mennoniten-wesen betr. Generalia), fol. 174.

- ¹⁶ Peter Bartel, "Beschreibung der persönliche Bemühung der fünf Aeltesten bei den Hohen und Allerhöchsten Staatsmännern in Berlin um Wiederheraushebung aus dem Reichsgesetz, worin der Reichstag uns Mennoniten am 9. November 1867 versetzt hat," *Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender* 29 (1920), 70-9. *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Preußischen Herrenhauses, 1868*, 209. Mark Jantzen, "Creating Proper Citizens: Prussian Taxation Policies toward Mennonites, 1773-1927" in *Taxation, State, and Civil Society in Germany and the United States from the 18th to the 20th Century*, Christoph Strupp and Alexander Nützenadel, eds. (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2007), 108-10.
- ¹⁷ H. G. Mannhardt, *Danzig Mennonite Church*, 206-7, James Regier, "Where Two Kingdoms Merge: The Struggle for Balance Between National and Religious Identity Among Mennonites in Wilhelmine Germany," (MA Thesis, Wichita State University, 2006), 62-86, Driedger, A. and Harold S. Bender. "Konferenz der ost- und westpreussischen Mennonitengemeinden." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1953. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Retrieved 05 October 2008 <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/konferenz_der_ost_und_westpreussischen>
- ¹⁸ MFs, *Kirchen-Buch darinnen die im Ladekopschen Quartier Betrauten Geborenen Gestorbenen & Communicanten in jedem Jahre Angeschrieben*, fol. 5. MFs, *Schönsee Chronik*, n.p., see the entry for 1772.
- ¹⁹ *Chronik von Heinrich Donner*, 26. See also Donner, *Pamietnik*, 25-28.
- ²⁰ Donner, *Pamietnik*, 97-8. *Chronik von Heinrich Donner*, 41-2.
- ²¹ *Chronik von Heinrich Donner*, 25-6, 36.
- ²² Jantzen, "Mennonites Encounter Modern German Nationalism," 185-212.
- ²³ Ernst Rudolf Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte seit 1789* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960), 2:579-60. The law is printed in Ernst Rudolf Huber, ed., *Dokumente zur Deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1961), 1:367-8.
- ²⁴ GStA, HA I, Rep. 77 (Innenministerium), Tit. 31 (Mennonitensachen), no. 2 (Die in Ansehung der staatsbürgerlichen Verhältnisse der Mennoniten vorgenommen Anordnungen, desgl. wegen Behandlung der Mennoniten-Gemeinde in Danzig nach der Reoccupation dieser Stadt), vol. 6 (1851-8), fol. 240r. The statistics are from a report on the matter by General Governor Eichmann to Interior Minister Westphalen, Königsberg, 12 Jan. 1857.
- ²⁵ GStA, HA I, Rep. 77, Tit. 31, no. 2, vol. 5, fols. 146-7, are the relevant pages of *Stenographische Berichte der Haus der Abgeordneten*, Zweite Kammer, 19 Febr. 1850, 2909-12.
- ²⁶ *Sechster Bericht der Kommission für Petitionen*, 10. *Legislatur-Periode. III. Session 1869*, available in GStA, HA I, Repositur 76 (Kulturministerium), III (Evangelisch-Geistliche Angelegenheiten), Sektion 1 (Generalia), Abteilung XIIIa (Sekten- und Judensachen), no. 2 (Die Angelegenheiten der Mennoniten), vol. 10, fols. 39-100, 166-75.
- ²⁷ For additional details on this story of battling petitions, see Mark Jantzen, "'Whoever Will Not Defend His Homeland Should Leave It!' German Conscription and Prussian Mennonite Emigration to the Great Plains, 1860-1890," *Mennonite Life* 58, no. 3, <http://www.bethelks.edu/mennonitelife/2003Sept/jantzen.php>.
- ²⁸ GStA, HA II, WP, M, Tit. 109, no. 1, vol. 1, fols. 18-144. This list has been alphabetized by Gustav E. Reimer and is published in Penner, *Mennoniten*, 1: 414-468.
- ²⁹ Mannhardt, *Danzig Mennonite Church*, 232. Discussion of individual leaders is scattered throughout the book as well.