A History of the Mennonites' Russian *Privilegium*: 1800-1919[1]

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The Mennonites who settled in Russia from 1789 onwards were eager to secure their own *Privilegium* (Charter of Privilege)[2] from Russia's ruler. The award of special rights and privileges in the form of *Privilegia* by those in authority to groups and individuals was a common practice in pre-modern Europe. For minority groups, especially those of a different religious affiliation from the ruler's confessional community, such Privilegia also afforded protection, often essential to survival. So it was that Mennonites, living in various areas of Europe, obtained such documents and when necessary ensured that they were renewed as different rulers succeeded to office or took control of territories in which Mennonites were located.[3] As the Mennonites who settled in Russia mainly came from Prussia where the importance of securing Privilegia was well established, it is not surprising that they desired their own Privilegium as a matter of priority. The Privilegium they eventually secured, however, had different uses and meaning to different generations of Russian Mennonites. This article explores the Privilegium's complex history in Russian Mennonite history including that of the physical copy of the document possessed by the Mennonites and the interpretation, politics and competing claims of the rights and privileges granted in the Privilegium.

Securing the *Privilegium*

Mennonites immigrated to Russia under the general provisions of a 1763 Manifesto of Catherine the Great of Russia that promised general privileges to any foreign settlers who agreed to move to her Empire. This included the right for settlers and their descendants to follow their own religious beliefs and practices, and freedom from military service.[4] But the Manifesto also allowed prospective immigrants to negotiate special agreements with officials if they so wished. Mennonites settled under such specific provisions negotiated with Prince Potemkin by Johann Bartsch and Jacob Hoeppner, the two Mennonite delegates sent to Russia in 1785.[5] After long and complex negotiations the delegates obtained agreements outlining rights and privileges that were confirmed by the Russian Consul in Danzig in 1787.[6] The first immigrants to Russia apparently viewed these as a Privilegium-like agreement. Many, however, considered the agreement with Potemkin and his agent as not constituting a proper Privilegium. The 1787 agreement, however, promised a proper Privilegium approved and signed by Russia's ruler sometime in the future.

The agreements that Hoeppner and Bartsch negotiated involved settlement conditions and associated rights in the short term but did not focus specifically on Mennonite rights in the long term. The delegates were more concerned with seeking sites suitable for settlement rather than negotiating a separate Mennonite Privilegium incorporating special religious rights. This may be because neither Hoeppner nor Bartsch were religious leaders but rather secular delegates skilled in the selection of sites to establish an economically sustainable settlement. On the other hand, their selection as delegates may have been precisely because they were not religious leaders and therefore could not be singled out by Prussian and Danzig officials as clergy encouraging emigration on behalf of their congregations.

As a reward for their efforts in negotiating immigration the delegates received special, personal privileges and gratuities from the Russian authorities. This, however, caused resentment among some Mennonites especially when the settlement site promised them was changed.[7] It would appear the delegates retained control of the documents containing the original promises but in 1793 they were forced to surrender these to the newly established Khortitsa religious leaders after a revolt against them by the immigrants.[8] This clearly marked a power-shift in the colony with a re-establishment of congregational leaders as the central authority in social and cultural life as well as religious affairs. The surrender of

the original documents revived efforts to secure the promised Mennonite-specific Privilegium, but this time under the auspices of the religious leaders of the Khortitsa Colony. Potemkin had died in 1791 leaving his promises unfulfilled, and Catherine the Great died in 1797 so after her passing and the accession of a new Tsar, her son Paul, the need to obtain an Imperial Privilegium became more pressing. Undoubtedly these changes were behind the decision to send two delegates to St Petersburg in 1797 or 1798 to secure a specific Mennonite Privilegium. In 1800, after living for two years in the house of a Mennonite merchant in St Petersburg and petitioning the Imperial Russian government, the newly appointed Khortitsa elder David Epp and a minister, Gerhard Willms managed to secure the desired Privilegium, signed by Tsar Paul, and to bring a copy of the document back to the Colony.[9]

The Privilegium Document's Appearance

There is a description of the return of Elder Epp and Minister Willms with the Mennonites' copy of the Privilegium in an account written by Dietrich H. Epp, a descendant of Elder Epp who immigrated to Canada in the 1920s and became editor of the immigrant newspaper *Der Bote*. Apparently unpublished during Dietrich Epp's lifetime the description was included in a booklet with limited circulation.[10] The account is semi-fictional rather than strictly historical but does give some hint of what the actual document given to the Mennonites looked like. The document was apparently written in both German and Russian and allegedly signed by the Tsar himself. It was written on parchment and, for protection was placed "between thin leaves of blue silk" with a "massive imperial seal …[and] a metal capsule fastened with a cord that held the individual leaves of the book."[11]

There are few other descriptions of the document itself. An English newspaper report stated that the original, "certified copy" of the document was in "in the archives at St. Petersburg … written on parchment, in gilded letters."[12] According to P. M. Friesen the Khortitsa copy had gold lettering.[13] Martin B. Fast, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren editor of the North American newspaper the *Mennonitische Rundschau* who viewed the document on a visit to Khortitsa in 1908, described it as "carefully wrapped and enclosed and encased with ribbons, seals and brocade."[14]

Re-confirming the Privilegium and Mennonite Politics

A document is an object, an artefact that can be held, examined and stored, physically altered, lost or even destroyed. But the text itself is another matter. Once given authority it is open to interpretation, it can be argued over, and disagreed about. In other words, it can be the basis for internal political discord. This occurred soon after the Molochna colony was settled but was particularly intense during the 1830s and 1840s when major discord erupted in Molochna. The major focus of conflict was between conservative religious leaders and secular leaders supported by more progressive religious leaders. Both sides often drew on alternative interpretations of the Privilegium.

Tsar Paul died in 1801, less than year after presenting Mennonites with their Privilegium. In 1814, two ministers, Gerhard Willms of Khortitsa who with David Epp had obtained the original Privilegium, and Jacob Enns, the first Elder of the recently founded Molochna Colony, requested passports to travel to St. Petersburg apparently to have the Privilegium reconfirmed by Paul's successor, Alexander I.[15] Requesting new rulers to reaffirm existing privileges reflected Mennonite practice in Prussia and in other areas where Mennonites received Privilegiums. It is unclear whether or not Alexander reconfirmed the Privilegium in 1814 as Mennonites later made repeated requests over the same issue during his reign (see below).

But why did the ministers wait until 1814 before requesting the Tsar to reconfirm the Privilegium? The delay may reflect Russia's long conflict with Napoleon which dominated Alexander's early years as Tsar. But there might be another reason. The religious leaders' request is dated August 1814 but followed an earlier petition by the Molochna District Mayor, Klaas Wiens addressed to the Guardianship Office, the body responsible for the overall management of foreign colonists, for six copies of the Privilegium. His petition is dated April 1814.[16] The date is significant. Since the earliest days of its foundation the religious congregation in Molochna under Elder Jakob Enns and the newly formed civil authorities represented by Mayor Wiens had been in conflict.[17] The reasons were complex and may have dated back to before their immigration to Russia as well as conflicting personalities. But the system of civil governance with village mayors and a central colony office had been imposed on the immigrants by the Russian government and challenged the authority of the congregation under the leadership of its Elder and Ministers.

The conflict between Wiens and Enns became so severe that it led to Wiens being placed under a ban by Enns.[18] Khortitsa religious leaders were likely drawn into the dispute in Molochna because as the more established colony they had greater experience of dealing with relations between congregations and the Russian imposed system of civil government.[19] Of the Privilegium's ten points only two could be read as directly relating to Mennonite religious principles: the one that guaranteed freedom of religion, worship and the right to affirm rather than to swear oaths, and the second granting freedom from military service and related issues such as the quartering of troops.[20] The remaining eight points were concerned with what might be subsumed under the category of economic and social rights and privileges. Some of these, such as tax exemptions, were of limited duration.[21]

Out of this discord a new congregation emerged which became known as the *Kleine Gemeinde*, led by a minister, Klaas Reimer. It was formed between 1812 and 1816 and involved matters of faith arising from an official request to contribute money to the Tsar's military struggle against Napoleon as well as disagreements between Elder Enns and Reimer and the way Enns had handled the matter.[22] It is unclear whether or not the Privilegium was involved at this time but the request for financial support for a military cause contravened Mennonite principles of non-resistance. It is perhaps significant that later Kleine Gemeinde ministers appealed to the Privilegium whenever they thought Mennonite religious principles had been brought into question.

In 1818, Mennonites again requested that their Privilegium be renewed. The request came from the district mayors of both colonies and the Molochna Elder, Jakob Fast.[23] The Minister of Internal Affairs rejected the request as he argued there had been no changes in government policy since the Privilegium had been granted that might require any re-negotiation. But the Mennonites were persistent, explaining that their experience in other countries was that when requested to do so, new rulers confirmed the promises of their predecessors. They also argued that as further Mennonite immigrants had come to Russia after1800 they would like to see the Privilegium reconfirmed. The matter was referred to officials and ministers but was rejected in 1820. In 1821 the head of the Guardianship Office reported that the Mennonites were again seeking to have the Privilegium reconfirmed. Once more the Ministry suggested it was unnecessary to grant their request, noting that Alexander had shown Mennonites great favour and this illustrated that the privileges had not been undermined,

but had even been enhanced. Again the Mennonotites were told the Tsar would not be bothered with their request.

In 1825 Tsar Alexander I died. During his lifetime he had twice visited the Mennonites in Molochna. But following his death the Khortitsa and Molochna elders and ministers petitioned the new Tsar, Nicholas I, to reconfirm the Privilegium as, although they knew no changes had been made to the original, they would feel more secure if it was renewed. Nicholas had come to the throne in confused circumstances about who was to succeed Alexander. His accession was followed by an attempted coup, known as the Decembrist Revolt, whose leaders atttempted to establish a constitutional form of government. Following the Revolt's failure, those involved were arrested, some were executed and others banished. The Mennonite petition therefore constituted not just an attempt to ensure a renewal of their Privilegium by a new ruler, but was also an expression of their continued loyalty to autocratic rule. This was reflected in the language of the 1826 petition. It is rife with religious phraseology and humility in face of "the unfathomable providence of the all-ruling God [and] the precious life of his blessed anointed [i.e. the Tsar]."[24] Apparently the Council of Ministers discussed the petition, and decided, as in 1819/1820, that the Emperor did not need to be bothered with the request. Nothing, they stated, had changed in the status or force of the original Privilegium.

Rights and Privileges/ Duties and Obligations

Mennonites seemed aware that the principal religious protections granted by the Privilegium remained unchanged as they frequently appealed to it in defence of their rights. For instance, one of the Kleine Gemeinde's later leaders, Abraham Friesen, referred to the Privilegium's provision "guaranteeing the highest measure of religious freedom" in the1820s when faced with difficulties over inheritance problems.[25] And the Privilegium was referred to in more secular cases, as in 1812 and 1815 when Mennonites were faced with tax demands or requirements excluded by the Privilegium, such as compulsory labour.[26] In most cases they were successful or able to delay payments as some exemptions were granted for only limited periods. These actions and appeals indicate that most Mennonites viewed the Privilegium as the protector of their particular rights and privileges. But some Mennonites had alternative views.

The 1826 petition to the Emperor is dated September 1826 so it may be more than just a coincidence that two months later, in November 1826, the Molochna Mennonite reformer Johann Cornies raised the issue of the Privilegium in a letter to David Epp a minister and friend in Heubuden, Prussia.[27] The letter was concerned with plans for further Mennonite immigration, but Cornies informed Epp that the government no longer wanted just new settlers, irrespective of their abilities. Instead Cornies argued the authorities wanted "good, upright economic managers, useful to the state." He then told Epp that, on speaking with St. Petersburg officials concerned with the affairs of foreign colonists, he had been told that if Mennonites did not "work industriously" as they "had promised," and for which purpose they "were granted the *Privilegium*," they would be "in danger" of losing their special privileges. He told Epp that he also had been told that any "law may change over time" and had then been pointedly asked what he had "accomplished."[28] Obviously Cornies thought the Privilegium might be at risk unless Mennonites fulfilled their side of the bargain; rights and privileges necessarily involved an acceptance of duties and responsibilities.

Cornies was referring to the 1800 Privilegium's opening preamble that declared it was granted because of the Mennonites' "excellent industry and morality [which] may, according to testimony of the authorities, be held up as a model to the [other] foreigners settled" in the region in which they were located. The granting of the Privilegium was expected to further "stimulate" Mennonite "industry and concern in agriculture" to provide such a model of progress for non-Mennonites.[29] Basically, this assertion of Mennonite duties and obligations provided Cornies with justification for his radical economic and social reforms. In contrast, leaders of conservative congregations focused on the clauses that granted Mennonites religious freedom and ensured the continuity of their faith and spiritual practices. Policies that threatened the maintenance of tradition and authority of religious leaders, such as the radical plans championed by an un-ordained, secular reformer like Johann Cornies and his supporters, were in breach of the religious rights guaranteed under the Privilegium.

There was, however, another factor behind Cornies comments to David Epp regarding the Privilegium. This involved the question whether or not any later confirmation of the Privilegium by Paul's successor had included new obligations. In 1804 Alexander I had issued a directive concerning the reception of foreign colonists wishing to settle in New Russia. It stated that any new settlements had "to be composed only of such people as may be most useful for

that region." The rules then listed in detail the skills and trades required for the development of agriculture, industry and commerce.[30] Such favoured immigrants fitted the type of people central to Cornies' plans for reform and were also consistent with the views of progressive religious leaders a number of whom represented newer congregations of recent immigrants. In terms of the arguments over interpretation of the Privilegium the events coincided with Cornies' efforts to establish a new settlement of skilled craftsman near Halbstadt. These plans were first formulated in 1836 and a new settlement, Neu Halbstadt, was incorporated by government decree in 1841.[31]

The most vocal critic of Cornies, his supporters and reforms was the leader of the largest and most conservative Flemish congregation in Molochna, Elder Jacob Warkentin. In April 1837 Warkentin travelled from Molochna to Khortitsa to "view the *Privilegium*."[32] As the Khortitsa leaders held the copy of the original document Warkentin no doubt wished to check its exact wording.[33] But it is clear that something else was afoot. Warkentin held discussions with the Khortitsa Flemish Elder, Jacob Dyck and some of his conservative ministers. What was discussed is unknown but Warkentin at the time was in dispute with Cornies over control of the District Office and who was to proposed for election as District Mayor.[34]

Perhaps in response to Warkentin's interest in the Privilegium, in October 1837 the progressive forces in Molochna petitioned the Tsar regarding the Privilegium. The petitioners were the elders of the four progressive congregations in Molochna: the Ohrloff Flemish congregation, the Frisian and the two Groningen Old Flemish. But not included were the two leaders of the Molochna conservative congregations: Warkentin's large Flemish congregation, the Kleine Gemeinde and the leader of the Khortitsa Flemish congregation, Jacob Dyck.[35] The timing was chosen because Tsar Nicholas was travelling through New Russia and was in the Crimea.[36] As David Epp reported, the group succeeded in delivering the petition while a letter from Cornies reported that he had met the Tsar and leading government officials and that Nicholas had "kindly accepted our community's written expression of gratitude and its request that its privileges be confirmed" and had thanked Cornies for his work, saying that Cornies particularly had "become useful to the state."[37] While the exact contents of the petition are unknown, the papers documenting official discussions in St. Petersburg and the final response of December 1838 provide an indication of the matters raised.[38] The first request was for the Privilegium to be reaffirmed.[39] The second matter raised questions

about whether Alexander I had indeed ever reconfirmed the Privilegium and indicating that they were "disquieted by the fact that perhaps the rights they were given might have lost their force somewhat through the passage of time."[40]

Warkentin and the Khortitsa Elder Dyck were "alarmed" by the actions of the other elders and by their failure to consult.[41] In the case of an important issue such as the Privilegium all the congregational leaders should have been involved. The official reply of December 1838 was in the form of a directive sent from the Ministry to the Guardianship Office who were instructed to to tell the Molochna District Mayor to inform the Elders of the Emperor's and Minister's decision. The wording was clear and unequivocal:

> The Emperor and his Lordship [the Minister] wish it most urgently to be announced to the Mennonite Elders … that their concerns over the soundness of the Privilegium - granted them by the exalted Emperor Paul the First - are unfounded and that they can now, and in the future, as before, use the Privilegium unhindered in any way.[42]

This appeared to indicate that the 1800 Privilegium remained the principal document that defined Mennonite rights. At the same time the directive suggested that Alexander I had not altered Paul's Privilegium. But doubts appear to have remained. In February 1839 Elder Epp, minister Heinrich Penner and the Khortitsa Frisian Elder Jacob Hildebrand travelled to Molochna to discuss the Privilegium with Warkentin.[43] What was discussed is unknown. Warkentin's apparent victory, if it was such, was to be short lived. He continued to object to Cornies and his economic and social reforms, but Cornies now had the full backing of the Russian government. Further conflicts over the election of a District Mayor occurred in the early 1840s with Cornies favouring his own candidate and the conservative elders objecting to his choice. The new head of the office responsible for foreign colonists, Evgenii von Hahn, appointed the candidate Cornies favoured not the person the colonists had elected. Warkentin objected to this apparent breach in Mennonite rights to self-government but von Hahn had him removed as elder, an unprecedented act that caused ongoing problems. But Warkentin's successor, Heinrich Wiens soon became involved in ongoing disputes with the civil administration in the colony and government officials. When the head of the Russian administration for foreign colonists became involved he ordered Wiens' large congregation to be divided. After further confrontations with Wiens, who in his defence appealed to the freedoms provided by the Privilegium, von Hahn threatened to lobby the

central government to terminate the Privilegium.[44] Eventually Wiens too was removed from office and banished to Prussia.

One problem the conservative elders faced when appealing to the details contained in the Privilegium was that the original document presented to the Mennonites in 1800 was located in Khortitsa, not Molochna. Although copies of the text were undoubtedly available and circulated in Molochna and they and their descendants were covered by its provisions, the Colony had been established after the Privilegium had been granted.[45] Each party read the Privilegium in their own way. For Cornies the Privilegium was as much about Mennonite responsibilities for economic and social development as for the recognition and maintenance of established Mennonite religious principles. For Cornies it was a secular document concerned with Mennonite responsiblities to the state rather than a sacred document for the protection of the Mennonites' faith, acknowledged, granted and personally re-confirmed by Russia's holy rulers.

Control and Location of the Privilegium Document

As the conflicts over the interpretation of the meaning of the Privilegium shifted over time the Mennonites' copy of the actual Privilegium continued to be held in Khortitsa. But the location and control of the document in Khortitsa also reflected a change in its significance from a religious to a more secular document. Dietrich Epp suggested that once the two ministers, Epp and Willms, returned with the document from St. Petersburg, there was discussion about where to keep "this precious gem." He suggests that it was decided, "to build a special little house in which this treasure could be kept" and there it lay "untouched" for many years. But then, for reasons that remain unclear, it was transferred to the District Office and placed on a "top shelf with a book of regulations." Later, when a new District Office was constructed it was transferred to the Mayor's office.[46]

Epp's account of shifting locations for the document is confirmed in other accounts, as is its final location in the District Office under the secular control of the Mayor. But who controlled the early locations, whether the Elders or the Mayor is also unclear. Daniel Schlatter, the Swiss missionary to the Nogai Tatars who had extensive contacts with Molochna Mennonites in the 1820s, mentions a separate building in Khortitsa, which he said contained not only the Privilegium, but also other official documents from the time of Catherine the Great.[47] The earlier

documents were probably those connected with Hoeppner and Bartsch that had been surrendered to the congregational leaders in 1793. In the early 1830s a Lutheran minister also reported the building contained documents given by Tsarina Catherine as well as Tsar Paul.[48] A Dutch account of 1862 noted the Privilegium and other important documents were kept in a special, small fireproof building in the village of Khortitsa.[49] This still existed in 1867 when Jacob Epp noted in his diary that his brother Johann, assistant secretary in the District Office, was living in the building.[50]

The latter reference suggests a District Office connection but earlier accounts are unclear about who controlled access to the documents apart from the fact that those involving Mennonite agreements with Russia's rulers were kept together. In Prussia such documents were usually part of a congregational archive under the control of religious leaders. What was different in the Russian situation was the existence of a Mennonite secular system of authority parallel to the religious structures, backed by the state through its agencies and ministries, with its own records. What is more significant is that the extent and power of the secular authorities grew as the state extended its control over Russian society during the nineteenth century.

When M. B. Fast searched for the building in 1908, where "the famous Privilege of the Mennonites" had "earlier [been] stored like a gem," he was informed that the Privilegium had been relocated to the District Office in Khortitsa.[51] In the District Office officials revealed how a "niche had been constructed in the wide wall … now accommodates this document."[52] They "opened the little door in the wall and produced the old document and I was allowed to peruse it in a room all by myself. Considering the time it was compiled, or drafted, it is really a magnificent creation."[53]

Shifting Mennonite Identities and the Privilegium

The immigrants to Russia during the first half of the nineteenth century brought with them older religious congregational differences from Prussia and re-established these in their new home. Although there were subsequent schisms and the emergence of one new, conservative group, the Kleine Gemeinde, it was not until the period between the 1850s and 1870s that new religious movements emerged that coalesced into congregations often connected with non-Mennonite religious ideas and organizations. Initially they were met with opposition from sections of the established Mennonite community. One argument was their actions might exclude

their members from the provisions of the Mennonite Privilegium. In Molochna in January 1860, Johann Claassen, the leader of one of these new movements identified later as Mennonite Brethren, and his followers, declared they were separating from other Mennonites. In March 1860, the District Office and its Mayor, David Friesen, suggested to the Guardianship Office that those involved in the new movement should be "deprived of their colonist status."[54] The Kleine Gemeinde, although not totally sympathetic to Claassen, his followers or their beliefs, viewed their own congregation as the guardians of the religious freedoms granted in the Privilegium. They had earlier suffered similar difficulties when they had formed their own, new congregation. So they objected to the measures taken against the separatists by the older congregational leaders and the District Office.[55] This undoubtedly is the reason why in February 1860, Kleine Gemeinde member Kornelius Toews copied out the Privilegium and the December 1838 official directive from the Guardianship Office informing the then District mayor that the Privilegium applied to all Mennonites. In their eyes, the identity of any Mennonite did not change just because they wished to form new congregations.

Another of the new groups that emerged at this time were the Templers or Friends of Jerusalem, a group that included Mennonite and non-Mennonite members.[56] In Russia its members were mainly people of Mennonite descent while others, both non-Mennonite and Mennonite established settlements in Germany and Palestine. It would appear that the matter of the latter's identity was resolved for those of Mennonite descent by their receiving the same rights as other Mennonites. This later extended to their right to alternative service like other Mennonites.[57] Many Templars, however, lived outside older, established Mennonite settlement areas. Mennonite Brethren not only had members within Mennonite areas of settlement, but also attempted to convert others from within the Mennonite world and, although illegal, from non-Mennonite communities (see below).

The Mennonite Brethren would only become an integrated organization after 1870 as Russia initiated a new round of major reforms (see below). During the 1860s its followers had often been divided, with some leaning towards the German Baptists and others toward establishing independent congregations within and outside the Mennonite world. However, faced with new challenges to their identity as Mennonites in the 1870s these groups were forced to acknowledge the Privilegium in order to secure any new privileges that might be negotiated between the government and other Mennonites over alternatives to military service.[58] Some pro-

visions granted in the original Privilegium, however, continued to worry some Mennonite Brethren. On reading the text of the Privilegium in Khortitsa in 1908, M. B. Fast was shocked to discover that one privilege involved the right of Mennonites to brew beer and vinegar, as well as to distill corn brandy for their own consumption and for sale.[59] This merely reflected the fact that Mennonites had been brewers and distillers in Prussia, and in Russia the right to produce alcohol for sale was an important privilege, as alcohol, especially vodka, was a major source of tax income for the Russian state.[60] The Privilegium also gave Mennonites the exclusive right to open taverns. To an American Krimmer Mennonite Brethren such as Fast viewing the document in the early twentieth century, particularly from the vantage point of American evangelical campaigns for temperance, this privilege was nothing short of scandalous.[61]

The Privilegium Challenged

Appeals to the privileges by the religious leaders declined once Cornies and his successor gained dominance over not only the affairs of Molochna, but also for a time Khortitsa. In 1830 the Mennonite Privilegium itself was incorporated into the Russian legal system when other Privilegia and government ordinances awarded by earlier Russian rulers were codified as part of Nicholas I's efforts to follow-up on the more substantial governmental reforms of his predecessor, Alexander I.[62] However, the principles of religious freedom which many Mennonites believed had been protected "for all time" received a serious setback in the 1870s as Russia's Great Reforms began to threaten key aspects of their beliefs. These reforms, begun by the government of Tsar Alexander II in the 1860s and continuing into the 1870s aimed to modernnize the country in key areas of social life following Russia's defeat in the Crimean War (1853-1856).[63] Ironically, ahead of the start of the Great Reforms the Mennonite elders and civil leaders of Molochna and Khortitsa sent a loyal address to Alexander II at the time of his coronation, acknowledging the continued importance of the Privilegium to their community.[64]

To some Mennonites the proposed reforms threatened their faith and the continuity of their way of life in a number of ways they thought were protected by their Privilegium. Proposed changes to administration and their identification as colonists appeared to alter their position as a privileged group in Russian society. Although education was not specifically mentioned in the

Privilegium, schools and schooling had developed into an important concern during the nineteenth century. So any reform of the educational system appeared to threaten the continuance of congregational life as most school instruction was to be in Russian not German, the language of faith. At the same time, Ministerial oversight of Mennonite schools would ultimately mean a loss of control over their young people, a threat to the continuity of faith in successive generations.

Much more serious, however, were reports that a universal system of compulsory military service was planned. In response to the news Mennonites frequently referred to their Privilegium in appeals to Russian government officials as delegations attempted to secure total exemption from any new law.[65] But the reforms involved changes to a wide number of privileges enjoyed by other interest groups in Russian society. In the proposed reforms everyone would be required to serve the Tsar and the state irrespective of established status, beliefs, or any privileges granted by previous Tsars or Tsarinas. Unable to secure exemption from the proposed conscription legislation, it seemed at first as if all Russia's Mennonites would emigrate to North America. The Russian government, however, was unwilling to lose such valuable subjects and after negotiations Mennonites were eventually granted special rights. These did not, however, involve the total exemption from conscription as had been inscribed in the Privilegium of 1800. Mennonites, like soldiers were still to be conscripted to serve the state but not for service in any military capacity. Instead, when young men reached the age when other Russians were required to present themselves for military service, they would draw lots and those selected would serve in non-combatant roles, mainly planting and managing trees.[66]

Following the agreement over alternative service a majority of Mennonites decided to remain in Russia. To other Mennonites, however, it appeared secular politics and economic considerations had triumphed over religious principles they believed had been protected by the Privilegium. So, Jacob Epp noted in his diary at the end of December 1871 that the "Privilegium, which guaranteed the community's religious liberties, seems to have lost its force."[67] As a consequence of the Great Reforms about 18,000 Mennonites emigrated to North America in the 1870s.

But while the significance of the Privilegium certainly declined after the compromise over state service was agreed to, the document itself retained a certain symbolic significance. As late as 1908 the American Mennonite M. B. Fast still felt a need to make a special effort, a kind of piligrimage, to visit Khortitsa from his former

home in the colony of Molochna, to view the document for himself. Like many others who had left Russia to resettle in North Amerca, Fast considered the promises made in the Privilegium to have been betrayed. He wrote that unfortunately the document "has lost its value since 1870 because the Tsar has rescinded the privileges granted for all time" Yet he added, the document itself "is so beautiful that one does well to look at it now and then and to remember those wonderful times."[68]

The Changing Mennonite World and the Privilegium

Given the Russian Mennonites' earlier marking of historical events with celebrations, the centenary of the granting of the Privilegium appears to have passed without any major celebration in Mennonite settlements.[69] The only mention of any such event appears is a short report in the German-language newspaper, *Odessaer Zeitung*, of a religious service in Molochna when greetings were forwarded to the reigning Tsar, Nicholas II, in recognition and thanks for the Privilegium; 5000 rubles for the Russian Red Cross was also included.[70]

One reason for this lack of celebration perhaps was that by 1900 Mennonites were living in a very different world than in 1800. Not only had they changed from a basically agrarian society into a more complex industrial society, but also the Russian state with which their ancestors had negotiated their original Privilegium was now a more complex, if somewhat compromised system of power, authority and governance. In the century between 1800 and 1900 various attempts at political reform had been formulated, bureaucracies created, and new laws introduced.[71] These changes either made many of provisions and privileges contained in the Mennonite Privilegium irrelevant or at least replaced them with other, more complex laws. As subjects of the Tsar in the vast Russian Empire, Mennonites did not stand aside from these changes because they possessed a Privilegium in their name. Instead they followed these changes and where necessary embraced the new order using it to their advantage.

Such changes included responding to legislation and regulations covering local and regional government, ownership and transfers of property - especially in terms of land transactions, trade and taxation, employment of labour, banking and investment - educational opportunities, not to speak of fulfilling obligations to the state in terms of the Mennonite alternative to military service. The institutional foundation of a Mennonite state-within-a state was

established, one that itself steadily grew in size and complexity into the early twentieth century and further added to these requirements.[72] Mennonites needed to consult non-Mennonites over many matters outside their previous experience while a new generation gained the skills to became competent participants in this new world, serving Mennonites and non-Mennonites.[73] The first area they developed was gaining higher educational qualifications, usually outside the Mennonite world while later generations became qualified in a number of professions such as doctors, engineers, businessmen and lawyers. Some returned to serve in Mennonite communities, others did not.

While for Mennonites the issue of privileges tied to the Privilegium diminished, some Russian writers in the latter half the nineteenth century questioned whether Mennonite economic success and advantageous position in society could be attributed to the favourable treatment and privileges they had received from earlier Russian governments. The issue of the Privilegium was occasionally included in these discussions but the accounts also examined other advantages Mennonites had received such as favourable tax concessions, official aid and advice as well as other matters. Some of the more radical criticisms of Mennonites were written in the context of increasing Russian nationalism but others were based on more careful historical and economic analyses which certainly exposed the favourable treatment Mennonites had received, some of which had stemmed from their Privilegium.[74]

The Privilegium's Significance Renewed

After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 the pace of reform to Russia's society was curtailed by his successors, Alexander III and Nicholas II. But the momentum of change was slowed rather than entirely stopped. Just as Alexander II's reforms had followed Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, so involvement and eventual defeat in another conflict, the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) saw the start of a new round of political and social reforms. These really began in 1906 and continued to outbreak of the First World War in 1914. In response to some proposed reforms, as well as increasing accusations of that Mennonites were German sympathizers, Mennonite leaders evoked the Privilegium to indicate how they had long been recognised as loyal subjects of the Tsar. A number of the proposed changes concerning "foreign" faiths, mainly non-Orthodox groups, including Mennonites came under scrutiny.[75] In their defence Mennonites highlighted earlier state-

ments going back to the rights granted in the Privilegium as well as freedoms of religion defined in subsequent legislation and noted in official documents. The most important of these was the right to practise their faith, openly and unhindered by officialdom and to assert their religious identity as a "denomination" and not as a "sect."[76] To be identified as a sect had the potential to restrict their religious freedoms and even open members to prosecution and persecution.[77]

Various meetings of religious leaders held after 1906 discussed these issues and produced statements to be forwarded to the government. Included were references to and quotations from the Privilegium. One, relating to the right to use school buildings for worship, included the complete Russian text of the Privilegium, taken not from the published *Collection of Laws* but instead from the Mennonites' original document safely preserved in Khortitsa and certified by the District mayor and secretary.[78] In 1912 a pamphlet produced by a General Conference of Mennonites in response to the denomination/sect issue and news of plans for further reforms to military conscription laws included the text of the Privilegium.[79] It was probably written by the minister, newspaper editor and historian David H. Epp and was followed by discussions as how to improve the teaching of Mennonite history in schools along with the collection, publication and study of historical documents.[80]

The efforts to respond to what was seen as a threat to all Mennonites quickly revealed major differences between Mennonite religious groups, mainly along the Mennonite Brethren/ General Conference (*Kirchliche*) divide. This built on established differences over a number of issues that included the evangelical activities of the Brethren both within and outside the Mennonite world. Evangelism among other Christian groups by the Brethren, especially among non-Mennonites, was illegal in Russia and many Mennonites in the General Conference believed such activities had contributed to official attempts to reclassify all Mennonites as a sect. While Christians could evangelize non-Christians, priority to convert such people was given to the Orthodox Church. To evangelize among and convert Orthodox believers was strictly forbidden. Such activity could result in severe penalties for the evangelist and the convert.[81]

In terms of the Privilegium, and the earlier rights negotiated by Hoeppner and Bartsch, the debate centred on what had, or had not been agreed to by Mennonites in order to secure the Privilegium and whether they had promised not to proselytize outside their communities. For some Mennonite Brethren such a promise was

scandalous as it breached fundamental Christian principles and Christ's command to spread the Word. But for General Conference Mennonites the Mennonite Brethren by proselytizing were in breach not just of Russian law, but also of promises their ancestors had made to Russia's rulers on entering the country. Essentially one view insisted Mennonites had denied their duty to God to spread the Word and convert the unfaithful; the opposing view accused the Mennonite Brethren of being disloyal to the Tsar and their country by breaking the law and the promises under the Privilegium. The problem was that nowhere in the earlier agreements or in the Privilegium was anything said about Mennonites having the right to evangelise or, in reverse, explicitly forbidding them from such activities. The noted Mennonite Brethren leader and collector of historical material, Peter M. Friesen, pointed this out in a pamphlet he published on the sect/denomination issue in 1914.[82] The issue is complex, however as Catherine the Great's Manifesto of 1763 did contain a passage forbidding immigrants to try to "persuade or mislead" other Christians. This could be read as a statement forbidding evangelical activities. But accusations on this issue, from both sides, continued for many years even extending to those Mennonites who emigrated from the Soviet Union mostly in the 1920s.[83]

Nationalism, War, and the Loss of the Privilegium Document

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards Mennonites in Russia faced accusations of disloyalty to the Tsar and the country in articles and books.[84] These stemmed from a number of sources, particularly pan-Slavism and associated Russian nationalism that opposed all subjects in the Russian Empire deemed to be "German". It found expression at the public level in critical articles attacking Mennonites and other Russian Germans published in journals sympathetic to nationalist views. As followers of a "foreign" religion, Mennonite attempts to convert loyal Orthodox believers revealed them to be essentially disloyal subjects of the Tsar and country. There were also a number of accusatory subtexts, which claimed Mennonites had been granted unfair privileges over Orthodox and other subjects when they initially had settled in Russia. Preferential treatment had continued long after settlement and this accounted for their wealth and influence. A number of more liberal Russians often with direct knowledge of Mennonites, however, defended them in articles, books and during political debates in the newly founded Russian Parliament (*Duma*).

In spite of increased political and social freedoms granted after 1906, anti-German sentiments increased, fuelled by greater freedom of the press and more open debates in the Duma. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 further accelerated anti-German rhetoric.[85] Bans on publishing in German saw the closing of Mennonite newspapers and journals and soon they faced other threats and restrictions. The latter included plans to confiscate Mennonite land and businesses under legislation that claimed Mennonites were a people of "enemy descent." In response to all this Mennonites and other non-Mennonite writers produced a pamphlets and larger studies published in Russian stating their own position. Russia's Germans it was argued had settled in the Russian Empire before the German Empire had existed, they had been explicitly invited to settle Russia by Catherine the Great and her successors and had always been loyal subjects of the Romanovs. Mennonites also promoted the view that they were not German by descent but instead were Dutch. Most, it was claimed, could trace their ancestors back to the territory of the Netherlands, conveniently a neutral state in the First World War.[86] To support their case they cited historical documents and official papers relating their connections with the Russian state. The latter included the text of the 1800 Privilegium.

Mention of the Privilegium drew the attention of local officials in southern Russia to its existence. In 1916 the Governor of the Province of Ekaterinoslav, Vladimir Arsenevich Kolobov, demanded that the Khortitsa Mennonites surrender this "most precious document," "apparently on the assumption" that its surrender "would invalidate its contents." When it was realised that the Privilegium had been codified into Russian law and thus had legal status, the Mennonites' copy of the document was returned to Khortitsa in 1917.[87] But while the fall of the Tsar removed the threat of expropriation of Mennonite land and other property and promised a new, elected parliament, the outbreak of civil war brought anarchy and renewed threats to the Mennonites. This included their copy of the original Privilegium document.

In 1919, in the midst of Russia's vicious civil war, the anarchist forces of Nestor Makhno occupied Khortitsa. They had met and killed some members of an armed self-defence unit formed by Mennonites and contrary to Mennonite non-resistant principles of faith. Makhno's men wanted to find out the names of any other members of the unit so they raided the District Office. The Secretary was Abraham Peter Regier, newly elected to the post after Khortitsa's previous, long-serving Secretary had been murdered. Much later in his life Regier recalled what happened after he per-

sonally met and spoke with Makhno in Khortitsa and realised that Makhno's forces were in control of the area. He hastened to the District office only to discover that Makhno's men had ransacked the place searching for documents relating to the self-defence unit. They had failed to discover anything and had left. Regier quickly located any incriminating material and burned it in the stove.

But later one of Makhno's men returned. Regier recalled:

> In the District Office, located in a small fire-proof safe installed in the wall of the Mayor's office, was kept the so-called Mennonite Privilegium of the Emperor Paul. One day Comrade B [?] Wdowidtschenko wanted to see what was in the safe and I had to open it up and show him the Privilegium. He gave me a receipt, and wrapped it in an old sack.

Regier then added, "So maybe I'll be the last Mennonite to hold it."[88]

"Wdowidtschenko" was undoubtedly Trofim Iakovlevich Vdovichenko (1889-1921), a former soldier in the Tsarist army and one of Makhno's "most talented" military commanders; he was captured later in the Crimea by units of Red Army and shot by the Bolshevik Cheka.[89] What interest he, or anyone else under Makhno's command had in the Privilegium is unknown. But the Mennonites' own copy of the Privilegium was lost, probably for ever.

Conclusion

For the Russian authorities the Privilegium was a secular, legal document, but given legitimacy by Russia's ruler, who had been ordained by God at his or her coronation.[90] For Mennonites the document gave their religious beliefs and practices protection but also provided them with earthly rights and privileges of a more worldly kind. It is not surprising therefore to find this contrast between religious and secular meaning and power to have characterised the history of the Privilegium during the time Mennonites lived in Russian under Imperial rule.

It is interesting to consider the Privilegium as a text, codified into law in official statutes, and the Mennonites' original copy as a physical artefact held in Khortitsa. Both the physical relocation of the original document over time in Khortitsa and reinterpretations of the Privilegium as text for both Mennonite and Russian reveal shifts in perceptions of its significance in Mennonite circles and Russian society over time. In the Mennonite world the physical

document moved from the control of religious leaders first to a separate building signalling perhaps a liminal phase in this process and finally into the District Office to be locked away in the fire-proof safe in the mayor's office. For Mennonites this reflected a shift in power from the dominance and authority of congregational leaders towards the growing importance of secular leaders backed by Russian officialdom. This in turn reflected changes in the form and attitude of Russian offialdom towards Mennonites. And in other ways to the Privilegium, mostly as text, relevant or irrelevant to governance of Mennonites.

The Privilegium was interpreted and appealed to in different ways over time. It first became the subject of internal Mennonite power struggles and only later the subject of differences between Mennonites and Russian officialdom. Increasingly Mennonites referred to the Privilegium in order to uphold their rights and as a defence against what they saw as an erosion of their privileges and place in Russian society. Finally the loss of their document in the Civil War marked the end of Mennonite control of their affairs and signalled, even if Mennonites at the time were unaware of what would follow, a threat to the freedom of religion and special rights and privileges detailed in the Privilegium. In this way the Privilegium reflected Mennonite history during the Tsarist period and its loss foreshadowed the difficult times to come.

Notes

I am grateful to Conrad Stoesz of the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg, John Thiesen of the Mennonite Library and Archives in Kansas, Arnold Neufeld-Fast of the Tyndale Seminary for supplying important sources on the Privilegium and Ernest N. Braun and two anonymous reviewers for comments and corrections on earlier drafts.

[1] An annotated bibliography of unpublished and published versions of the Mennonite *Privilegium* in German and Russian is published on the Plett Foundation website at https://www.plettfoundation.org/online-publications/.

[2] In some Mennonite accounts in German such documents are referred to as *Gnadenbriefe* (Letters of Grace) and in some modern translations into English as Charters of Privilege.

[3] James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood: Europe, Russia, Canada 1525-1980* (Winnipeg: Manitoba University Press, 2006), Chapter 2; see also Ernst Crous and Adolf Ens. "Privileges (Privilegia)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Ency-

clopedia Online. http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Privileges_ (Privilegia) &oldid=161249 (Retrieved January 6, 2019).

4 On the Manifesto see the discussion in Roger P. Bartlett, *Human Capital: the Settlement of Foreigners in Russia, 1762-1804* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) with an English text contemporary with the original Manifesto at 237-42.

5 See David H. Epp *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten: Versuch einer Darstellung des Entwicklungsganges derselben* (Odessa: A. Schulze, 1889), 14-36 and a more detail account based on Russian archival sources by David G. Rempel in his "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: a Sketch of its Foundation and Endurance, 1789-1919," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48 (1973), 282-286.

6 Peter Hildebrand, *From Danzig to Russia: the First Emigration of Mennonites from the Danzig Region to Southern Russia* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2000), 16-17; see also below. Hildebrand's account was first published in 1880; Epp, *Die Chortitzer Mennoniten*, 16-23.

7 Details in Rempel "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," 273, 289; Hildebrand, *From Danzig to Russia*, 26-27, 29.

8 On the revolt and surrender of the documents see Hildebrand, *From Danzig to Russia*, 31-32, 36-37.

9 There is extensive material regarding Paul's award and subsequent announcements to government agencies in the Central State Historical Archives in St. Petersburg (Fond 383, Opis 29, Dielo 171) that has been microfilmed and deposited in a number of Mennonite archives in North America; all other archival material from Russia and Ukraine cited below comes from similar microfilmed sources.

10 "Die Geschichte des Privilegiums 28. Oktober 1800 – 20. September 1918," in Abram Berg, *Dietrich Heinrich Epp. Aus seinem Leben, Wirken und selbstaufzeichneten Erinnerungen* (Saskatoon: Heese House of Printing, 1973), 78-80, as translated in the English version of N. J. Kroeker's *First Mennonite Villages in Russia, 1789-1943: Khortitsa*-Rosental (Vancouver: N.J. Kroeker, 1981), 20.

11 Epp, "Die Geschichte des Privilegiums," 80.

12 "The Mennonites," *London Standard*, Saturday, (31 March, 1877); as this report is from the time of the Mennonite emigration from Russia to North America, the description may be from a Mennonite who had seen the document in Khortitsa, not St. Petersburg.

13 Peter M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Russland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte* (Halbstadt: Raduga, 1911), 99; translated as *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno: General Conference Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 119.

14 M.B. Fast *Meine Reise nach Russland und zurück* (2nd Edition) (Scottdale: No Publisher, 1910), 193; translation by Jack Thiessen.

15 The delegates' request for passports to travel to the capital are in the papers of the Guardianship Office of Foreign Settlers in South Russia, Odessa Archives (Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 861).

16 The Guardianship Office of Foreign Settlers in South Russia, Odessa Archives: (Fond 6, File 833); the Office replied that it only had one copy of the Privilegium, probably the copy they had received in January 1801 from St.

Petersburg with supporting correspondence: The Guardianship Office of Foreign Settlers in South Russia, Odessa Archives: (Fond 6, File 39).

17 See Klaas Reimer's account in Delbert Plett, *The Golden Years: the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849)* (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1985), 163.

18 Reimer in Plett, *The Golden Years,* 167-168.

19 See James Urry, *None But Saints: the Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), 76, 78-79.

20 Both the major provisions on religious freedom and military service were already covered in Catherine the Great's original 1763 Manifesto and Alexander I's subsequent rules of 1804 concerning the reception of foreign colonists; for the text of the 1804 rules see Bartlett, *Human Capital*, 264-267.

21 The complete list in a translation of the Privilegium by David G. Rempel can be found in Urry, *None But Saints*, Appendix 1.

22 Plett, *The Golden Years*, 165, 167-168, 172-174.

23 This discussion is based on a summary of the files concerned with Mennonite requests on the Privilegium and official responses in the period 1818 and 1826 in the Central State Historical Archives in St. Petersburg (Fond 383, Opis 29, Dielo 439).

24 See the full text in John B. Toews, "Once Again - The Privilegium - A Letter from 1826," *Mennonite Historian* (13(4), 1997), 2, although Toews neither discusses the official response nor the connection with earlier requests for reconfirmation.

25 Delbert Plett, *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874* (Steinbach: Crossway Publication, 1993), 253.

26 Central State Historical Archives, St. Petersburg (Fond 383, Opis 29, Deilo 383).

27 On Johann Cornies as a reformer see Urry, *None But Saints*, Chapter 6; John R. Staples, *Cross Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe: Settling the Molochna Basin, 1783-1861* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2003), Chapter 5.

28 John Staples, "Religion, Politics, and the Mennonite *Privilegium* in Early Nineteenth Century Russia: Reconsidering the Warkentin Affair," *Journal of Mennonite Studies.* 21 (2003), 80; also in Harvey L. Dyck, Ingrid I. Epp, and John Staples, eds., *Transformation on the Southern Ukrainian Steppe: Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies Volume 1: 1812-1835,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 105-106; Cornies had told Epp a year earlier that any new settlers had to be "good, economically successful farmers", 41.

29 Urry, *None but Saints*, 282; on Mennonites as "models" including later self-identity, see also Dietmar Neutatz, "'Musterwirte.' Zum Selbstbild der Schwarzmeerdeutschen, insbesondere der Mennoniten," in El'vira Barbašina ed., *Die Russlanddeutschen in Russland und Deutschland: Selbstbilder, Fremdbilder, Aspekte der Wirklichkeit* (Essen: Klartext, 1999), 73-83 (Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur der Russlanddeutschen, 9).

30 Bartlett, *Human Capital*, 264; Bartlett (Chapter 6) also discusses the context of the formulation of these rules; see also James Long, "The Russian Imperial Manifestoes of 22 July 1763 and 20 February 1804," in Sidney

Heitman ed., *Germans from Russia in Colorado* (Fort Collins, Colo.: Western Social Science Association, 1978), 9-13.

31 Urry, *None But Saints*, 140-141; the settlement was established during the period of disagreements over the Privilegium discussed below.

32 David Epp, *The Diaries of David Epp 1837-1843,* John B. Toews, trans. and ed. (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 33; the date is incorrectly given as March instead of April by Toews. Staples ("Religion, Politics, and the Mennonite *Privilegium*, 80) mistakenly suggests that Warkentin travelled to Ekaterinoslav to view the Privilegium; Epp's diary entry shows he went to Khortitsa as this is where the document was located.

33 Lawrence Klippenstein has provided me with the missing diary entries and an alternative translation from that published by John B. Toews based on a close examination of the original manuscript of the diary. The meeting was held at the home of Heinrich Penner with the Khortitsa Elder and two ministers present; David Epp says he was not present although in his version Toews has him saying he was. I am grateful to Dr Klippenstein for providing me with the missing entries and an alternative translation.

34 Urry, *None But Saints*, 127-128.

35 Epp, *Diaries of David Epp*, 84; the Kleine Gemeinde probably wished to keep out of any dispute.

36 In 1837 Nicholas travelled to the Crimea on his way to visit the Caucasus region. He left St Petersburg in July travelling first to Odessa and then in early September he took a ship to the naval base at Sevastopol in the Crimea; see Michael Khodarkovsky, *Bitter Choices: Loyalty and Betrayal in the Russian Conquest of the North Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 120.

37 Johann Cornies to Andrei M. Fadeev, translated by Ingrid I. Epp, State Archive of the Odessa Region fond 89, opis 1, delo 434, page 6. 15 September 1837; this reference was kindly supplied by an anonymous reader of an earlier draft.

38 On the discussions in St. Petersburg see papers in the Central Russian State Archives, St. Petersburg (Reel 4, Fond 383, opis 29, Dielo 614). The December 1838 response as received by Mennonites in Molochna can also be found in Franz Isaac, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte derselben* (Halbstadt: H. J. Braun, 1908), 21-22. This official response was earlier copied by Kornelius Toews, a member of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1860 when issues relating to the Privilegium were again raised in another context (see below). Toews' copy is in the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg and I am grateful to Conrad Stoesz for drawing it to my attention.

39 David Epp also says the petition was a request for confirmation, *Diaries of David Epp*, 83.

40 Isaac, *Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, 22; given as 2 December; Directive No. 5281, Odessa, copied as 26 December 1838 by Toews in 1860.

41 Epp, *Diaries of David Epp*, 83.

42 Isaac, *Molotschnaer* Mennoniten, 22; given as 2 December; Directive No.5281, Odessa, copied as 26 December 1838 by Toews in 1860.

43 Epp, *Diaries of David Epp*, 83.

44 See von Hahn's response to Wiens's appeal to the Privilegium and Mennonite responsibilities as "citizens" in his order No. 5108, dated August 14, 1846

in Isaac, *Molotschnaer Mennoniten,* 115-116; Wiens's own account has been translated by Ben Hoeppner and published as "A Further Examination of the Molotschna Conflict," *Preservings*, 24 (December 2004), 23-28; see also Urry, *None But Saints*, Chapter 7 for a detailed account of the context and events of the Molochna conflicts of the 1830s and 1840s.

45 The issue of the status of Hutterites, settled on a nobleman's estate independent of the immigration of Mennonites who later faced the threat of enserfment by the nobleman's descendant, was apparently resolved in May 1801 during the reign of Alexander I when they were brought under the provisions of the Mennonite Privilegium and from then on Hutterites were referred to in official documents as "Radichev Mennonite Brethren." In 1842 these Hutterites were moved and settled close to Molochna. See Oksana Beznosova, "A Foreign Faith, but of What Sort? The Mennonite Church and the Russian Empire, 1789–1917," in Leonard G. Friesen ed., *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 112, 136, note 9.

46 "Die Geschichte des Privilegiums," 80.

47 Daniel Schlatter, *Bruchstuecke aus einigen Reisen nach dem suedlichen Russland, in den Jahren 1822 bis 1828* (St. Gallen: Huber, 1836), 25-26.

48 Johann Günther Friedrich Cannabich, *Neueste Gemälde des europäischen Rußlands und des Königreichs Polen: Mit einem Abriß des Freistaats Krakau* (Vienna: Doll, 1833), Volume 2, 52.

49 [P. Cool], "Een Blik op de Doopsgezinde en Rusland" *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 2 (1862), 121, footnote.

50 Jacob Epp, *A Mennonite in Russia: the Diaries of Jacob D. Epp 1851-1880*, Harvey L. Dyck, trans. and ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991), 229.

51 Fast *Meine Reise nach Russland*, 154; this suggests the change in location occurred after the 1870s when Fast immigrated to the United States of America.

52 David G. Rempel sent me a "rough sketch" of the layout of the Khortitsa District Office as he had known it before 1923 and the "walled in safe" for the Privilegium is situated clearly in the District Mayor's Office. He noted that the sketch was "Only for your eyes, James."

53 Fast *Meine Reise nach Russland*, 155; see also 193.

54 Letter in John B. Toews ed. *The story of the Early Mennonite Brethren (1860 -1869): Reflections of a Lutheran Churchman.* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 2002), 50.

55 See the letter dated 25 March 1860 to the Molochna District Office from the Kleine Gemeinde Elder Abraham Friesen in Delbert Plett, *Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, 1850*-1875 (Steinbach: D. F. P. Publications, 1986), 119.

56 On the Templers and Mennonites see Urry, *None But Saints*, 185-189; Heinrich Sawatzky, *Mennonite Templers,* Victor G. Doerksen, trans. and ed. (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1990).

57 Sawatzky, *Mennonite Templers*, 28; on the issue of alternative service see below.

[58] James Urry, "The Mennonite Brethren Church and Russia's Great Reforms in the 1870s," *Direction* 46 (2017), 10-25.

[59] Vinegar was a by-product of beer brewing.

[60] David Christian, *Living Water: Vodka and Russian Society on the Eve of Emancipation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Patricia Herlihy, *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Mark Lawrence Schrad, *Vodka Politics: Alcohol, Autocracy, and the Secret History of the Russian State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and on taxes, including the role of vodka and other taxes on alcohol, Yanni Kotsonis, *States of Obligation: Taxes and Citizenship in the Russian Empire and Early Soviet Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

[61] Fast, *Meine Reise nach Russland*, 156; on changing attitudes to alcohol among Mennonites see Bender, Harold S and Sam Steiner. "Alcohol (1958)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1958 http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Alcohol_(1958)&oldid=129059

[62] Richard S. Wortman, *The Development of Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[63] On the significance of the War and the Great Reforms see Urry, *None But Saints*, Chapter 11.

[64] Dated 31 May 1856 in "Abschrift der eingereichten Dankschrift des Mennoniten im suedlichen Russland an Sr. Majestaet den Kaiser Alexander II. vor den Kroenung im August 1856,"*Mennonitische Blaetter* 4 (January 1857), 5.

[65] See for instance the reference to the Privilegium by the minister Isaak Peters, after he had immigrated to North America,"Die Auswandering der Mennoniten aus Suedrussland," *Zur Heimath*, 1(4) (1875), 1.

[66] Lawrence Klippenstein, "Broken Promises or National Progress: Mennonites and the Russian State in the 1870's," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 18 (2000), 95-113.

[67] *A Mennonite in Russia*, 332; see also Epp's earlier comments in May 1871 (320-321) on discussions among Mennonites concerning the Privilegium and whether its provisions would be honored for all time.

[68] Fast *Meine Reise nach Russland*, 155.

[69] For instance, the centenary of the first Mennonite settlement in Russia was proudly marked in 1889; see Urry, *None But Saints*, Chapter 14.

[70] "Jubilaeumsfeier," *Odessaer Zeitung* 270 (1900), 1-2.

[71] For a discussion of these plans with texts see Marc Raeff, *Plans for Political Reform in Imperial Russia, 1730-1905* (Englewood Cliffs; Prentice Hall, 1966).

[72] James Urry, "The Cost of Community: the Funding and Economic Management of the Russian Mennonite Commonwealth before 1914," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 10 (1992), 22-55; Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood*, 103-106.

[73] James Urry, "Prolegomena to the Study of Russian Mennonite Society 1880-1914, "*Journal of Mennonite Studies* 8 (1990), 52-75.

[74] See the more extensive discussion of this issue by Nataliya Venger, "Mennonite Privileges and Russian Modernization: Communities on a Path Leading from Separateness to Legal and Social Integration," in Mark Jantzen, Mary S. Sprunger and John D. Thiesen eds, *European Mennonites*

and the Challenge of Modernity over Five Centuries: Contributors, Detractors, and Adapters (North Newton: Bethel College, 2016), 143-159.

[75] Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[76] See contextual discussion in Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, Part 2; Urry, *Mennonites, Politics and Peoplehood*, Chapter 5.

[77] During the period when Mennonites lived under Tsarist regimes the issue of tolerance had shifted but in spite of attempts to make the recognition of toleration part of the civil reforms after 1906, the legal situation created intolerance, see Peter Waldron, "Religious toleration in late Imperial Russia," in Olga Crisp and Linda Edmondson eds., *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[78] Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft*, 538-540, dated August 24, 1910; The English translation of Friesen provides a translation of the Privilegium with no indication that the submission provided the text in Russian, see Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 643-655.

[79] [David H. Epp], *Svedeniia o mennonitakh Rossii* (Berdiansk: H. A. Ediger, 1912) mentioned by Abraham Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Russian Mennonites and the State Before and During World War I*. (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2006), 48, 76; the only known copy is in the St Petersburg archives.

[80] The issue was discussed in the two leading Mennonite newspapers, the *Botschafter* and the *Friedensstimme*; see also Theodor Ediger, "Der Unterricht in mennonitischer Geschichte," *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* 10 (1913), 78-89. Ediger had a doctorate in history from a German university; for a discussion of David H. Epp's contributions to history at this time see David G. Rempel, "An Introduction to Russian Mennonite Historiography," *Mennonite Quarterly Review,* 48 (October, 1974), 427-435.

[81] This issue intensified in the later period of Tsarist rule, see J. Eugene Clay, "Orthodox Missionaries and 'Orthodox Heretics' in Russia, 1886-1917," in Robert Geraci and Michael Khordakovsky, *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[82] Peter M. Friesen, *Konfession oder Sekte?* (Halbstadt: Raduga, 1914), 10; translated in Abe J. Dueck, *Moving Beyond Succession: Defining Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity 1872-1922* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1997), 151.

[83] See Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, Chapter 8 and notes on 430-433.

[84] On some of the issues involved see James Urry, "The Russian Mennonites, Nationalism and the State 1789-1917," in Abe J. Dueck ed. *Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism*. (Winnipeg, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1994), 21-67; shorter version published as "Mennonites, Nationalism and the State in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 12, (1994), 65-88.

[85] Rustem Arkad'evich Tsiunchuk, "The German Question in the State Duma of the Russian Empire on the Eve of and During the First World War, or How 'Russian Germans Transformed from First-Class Citizens of Russia into a Subject of Hatred'," *Terra Sebus: Acta Musei Sabesiensis* Special Issue (2014), 411-428.

[86] Friesen, *In Defense of Privilege*, Chapter 13.

[87] David G. Rempel with Cornelia Rempel Carlson, *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, 1789-1923* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 163, 167; on Kobolov's dubious history as a Tsarist official, see Richard G. Robbins, "The Limits of Professionalization: Russian Governors at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," in Harley D. Balzer ed., *Russia's Missing Middle Class: The Professions in Russian History (*Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2006).

[88] I am grateful to Regier's son, Henry, for providing me in 2008 with a copy of the original letter his father sent to N. J. Klassen who published it as part as A. P. Regier, "Confiscation of Mennonite Privileges Document" in Klassen's *First Mennonite villages in Russia*, 123

[89] See entry in Jonathan D. Smele's *Historical Dictionary of the Russian Civil Wars, 1916-1926* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 1261 and Nick Heath, "Vdovichenko, Trofim Yakovlevich, 1889-1921" at https://libcom.org/files/ce169141.jpg

[90] Michael Cherniavsky, *Tsar and People: Studies in Russian Myths* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); the representation of Russia's rulers varied but Tsar Paul combined military-style with religious symbolism in a particular manner, see Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006), Chapter 5.