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Article Summary: Just after the Burlington Railroad settled the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites on its lands in Jefferson County, it tried to conclude an agreement with a much larger group of Mennonites temporarily being housed in Lincoln, Nebraska. A E Touzalin was able to secure some Mennonite settlers through a carefully planned and executed advertising campaign, willingness to change state laws if necessary and the extremely liberal financial terms offered to the immigrants.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Jacob Buller, Dietrich Gaeddert, Peter Balzer, Peter Ratzlaff, David Goerz, Wilhelm Ewert, Cornelius Jansen, C B Schmidt, A E Touzalin; Bernhard Warkentin, H Richert, Peter Wall, Jacob J Friesen, J J Rochussen, John N Dennison, Isaak Peters, Cornelius Jansen, George Tyson, Father Lechlestner, Gerhard Petker, David Henderson, Jacob A Wiebe, C B Schmidt, James D Butler

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Photographs / Images: Drawing, Burlington and M R R Emigrant House, Lincoln, Nebraska; Map of the Settlement of the first Mennonites in 1874 in Nebraska; Model of Henderson Immigrant House; Jacob J Friesen at Immigrant House marker near Henderson; Mennonite Pioneers of 1874: Joham W Friesen, Mrs Peter P Regier, Jacob J Friesen; Peter Jansen on his favorite horse

THE BURLINGTON AND MISSOURI RIVER RAILROAD BRINGS THE MENNONITES TO NEBRASKA, 1873-1878

BY JOHN D. UNRUH, JR.

PART II

JUST after the Burlington Railroad settled the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites on its lands in Jefferson County, it endeavored to conclude an agreement with a much larger group of Mennonites it was temporarily housing in Lincoln, Nebraska. Those Mennonites represented the Alexanderwohl congregation from the Molotschna colony in Russia. When they settled there in 1821, Tsar Alexander I had wished the Mennonites well in their undertaking and from thenceforth they were known as the "Alexanderwohl Mennonites." The passage of the Russian conscription law was the stimulus which led nearly the entire congregation to migrate en masse to America, the only instance in the Mennonite migration where an entire village left as a unit.¹ From the first the Alexanderwohl congregation

¹ Cornelius Krahn, "Alexanderwohl," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, (4 vols., Newton, Kansas, 1955-1959), I, 48-49.

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had been one of the centers of the emigration movement. Their elder, Jacob Buller, had been a member of the committee of twelve and the congregation had already held meetings in 1872 and 1873 to discuss the situation. Only seven families from the entire congregation remained in Russia, and the departing members were joined by additional individuals from other congregations so that the total number of Alexanderwohl Mennonites that left for America in 1874 was over one thousand.²

The Alexanderwohl Mennonites left Hamburg, Germany, in two groups. The first group, under the leadership of elder Jacob Buller, departed on August 10, 1874, on the *S. S. Cimbria*.³ The vessel docked in New York on August 27, 1874,⁴ and the prospective Mennonite settlers, approximately 85 families numbering nearly 800 persons, immediately departed by train for Elkhart, Indiana, where they arrived on August 31, 1874.⁵ Funk and the other Elkhart Mennonites fed and housed the group. During the brief stopover in Elkhart, representatives of four different railroads approached Buller and his companions and unsuccessfully attempted to convince them to purchase their lands. The following afternoon the Mennonites boarded the same train on which they had come and continued on to Lincoln, Nebraska,⁶ arriving on September 3, 1874.⁷ Buller, while a member of the committee of twelve, had harbored inclinations of settling in Dakota Territory but according to Christian Krehbiel he was now determined to

² C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (4th ed., revised by Cornelius Krahn, Newton, Kansas, 1957), 454.

³ John F. Funk, "The Emigration Movement," *Herald of Truth*, (Elkhart, Indiana), September, 1874.

⁴ *Selected Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York and Philadelphia, 1873-1879*, (Microfilm selections of the records of the Bureau of Customs, filmed in Washington at the National Archives and located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.)

⁵ John F. Funk, "Progress of the Russian Emigration," *Herald of Truth*, October, 1874.

⁶ Kempes Schnell, "John F. Funk and the Mennonite Migrations of 1873-1885," Cornelius Krahn, ed., *From the Steppes to the Prairies* (Newton, Kansas, 1949), 83.

⁷ *The Daily State Journal*, (Lincoln, Nebraska), September 5, 1874.

settle in either Minnesota or Nebraska, and accordingly led his followers directly to Nebraska.⁸

The second group of the Alexanderwohl Mennonites, under the leadership of Dietrich Gaedert, Peter Balzer, and Peter Ratzlaff, departed from Hamburg on the *S. S. Teutonia* on August 16, 1874, arriving in New York on September 3, 1874.⁹ Midway across the Atlantic Ocean the *Teutonia* caught fire but it was quickly brought under control. It was the last successful voyage for the vessel, for on its next trip across the Atlantic it sank.¹⁰

All immigrants landing in New York were required to pass through Castle Garden, the landing depot for immigrants from 1855 until 1890 when the station was moved to Ellis Island. Immigrants were registered at Castle Garden and usually remained there until they secured tickets and provisions necessary to continue their journey in America.¹¹ It was at Castle Garden that representatives of the various railroads and state immigration agencies besieged the immigrants with offers and claims of all types. The routine procedures at Castle Garden included a medical examination. For the passengers of the *Teutonia* this consisted of passing single file over a small stepladder while a doctor glanced at them. The Mennonites all passed the examination, spent the night in Castle Garden, and left on September 4 for Elkhart, Indiana.¹² The *Teutonia*

⁸ Christian Krehbiel, *Prairie Pioneer, The Christian Krehbiel Story* (Newton, Kansas, 1961), 90.

⁹ *Selected Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York and Philadelphia, 1873-1879*. J. J. Friesen, only a very young child when he crossed the ocean on the *Teutonia*, recalls that they arrived in New York on September 2, 1874, instead of September 3, as the official records indicate. Likely the vessel arrived in New York on the prior date, but the passengers did not officially disembark until the following day. J. J. Friesen, "The Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874," 6, *J. J. Friesen Collection*, located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.

¹⁰ A. J. Dyck, "Hoffnungsaue in Kansas," *Mennonite Life*, IV (October, 1949), 18-19.

¹¹ Christian Krehbiel, "Second Report of the Mennonite Board of Guardians," *Herald of Truth*, November, 1874.

¹² Friesen, "Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874," 6, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

passengers had been met in New York by David Goerz, Wilhelm Ewert, Cornelius Jansen, and C. B. Schmidt.¹³ Dietrich Gaeddert and Wilhelm Ewert led a number of Alexanderwohl Mennonites directly to Kansas, but sixty-seven families continued on to Lincoln, Nebraska, on a special Burlington immigrant train, to join the advance party led by Jacob Buller.¹⁴ In Chicago the Burlington Railroad assumed jurisdiction over the special immigrant train. Captivated by Schmidt's "interest" and "kind treatment" on the journey up to that point, the Mennonites requested that he accompany them to Nebraska. Burlington officials quite naturally refused, so Schmidt was obliged to travel by a regular passenger train. When the Burlington train arrived in Lincoln, Schmidt was waiting at the depot.¹⁵ The second group of Alexanderwohl Mennonite immigrants arrived in Lincoln on September 8, 1874,¹⁶ and Lincoln was then practically inundated with prospective Mennonite settlers—over one thousand were in the city.¹⁷ Attempting to provide suitable lodging for over one thousand persons was a gigantic task and Touzalin

¹³ H. Banman, "Geschichte der Alexanderwohl Mennoniten Gemeinde bei Goessel, Kansas," *Bundesbote-Kalendar*, (Berne, Indiana), 1926, 32.

¹⁴ Funk, "Progress of the Russian Emigration," *Herald of Truth*, October, 1874. In a September 19, 1874, letter to David Goerz, Bernhard Warkentin indicated that he had been travelling with the Alexanderwohl group for fourteen days and that it was being led by Touzalin and Peter Jansen, which would tend to suggest that it was Peter Jansen, not Cornelius Jansen as Banman stated, who met the Alexanderwohl Mennonites in New York. Warkentin also noted that Gaeddert was in Kansas looking at land. *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*, located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas. Thus, contrary to J. J. Friesen's suggestion that Gaeddert had personally led the Teutonia Mennonite passengers to Nebraska ("Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874,"), it is evident that Gaeddert led some of the Alexanderwohl Mennonites directly to Kansas.

¹⁵ H. R. Voth, Narrative of Alexanderwohl Mennonites in Lincoln, Nebraska, quoted in C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Indiana, 1927), 116; John B. Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," *The York Republican*, (York, Nebraska), August 12, 1937.

¹⁶ Friesen, "Land Journey & the Sea Voyage to America in 1874," 6, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

¹⁷ Anonymous, "The B. & M. R. R. in Europe," *The Daily State Journal*, September 12, 1874.

labored mightily to house one and all.¹⁸ The regular Burlington immigrant home in Lincoln was far too small to accommodate all the Mennonites and the Burlington quickly erected another large frame structure at the fairgrounds. Built in the form of a cross, the interior was 18 feet wide and each limb of the cross was 258 feet long.¹⁹ The building was not yet completed when the second group of Alexanderwohl Mennonites arrived in Lincoln and carpenters were still adding the finishing touches to the roof and the floor.²⁰ In addition to the regular immigrant home and the one nearing completion, the Mennonite families were housed in other buildings at the fairgrounds and in railroad passenger cars on side tracks.²¹

A committee of five Mennonites was appointed to tour the Burlington lands and Touzalin and Peter Jansen led them first to Burlington lands in Franklin and Webster Counties, Nebraska.²² Some of the Mennonite young men accompanied the party to that area to help dig wells, but because of the deep water level they were unable to produce satisfactory wells. Then, apparently on the recommendation of a grain buyer from Sutton, Nebraska, who had settled in that area after emigrating from Odessa, Russia, some years before, the Burlington agents also showed the Mennonites land north of Sutton and the Little Blue River.²³

Schmidt had secured the committee's promise that they would not decide on a final location until they had

¹⁸ *The Daily State Journal*, September 13, 1874.

¹⁹ Anonymous, "The B. & M. R. R. in Europe," *The Daily State Journal*, September 12, 1874.

²⁰ J. J. Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 6, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

²¹ J. J. Friesen, "Recollections on our Journey in 1874 and of Pioneer Life," 3, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

²² Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, *Bernard Warkentin Collection*.

²³ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 6-7; Friesen, "The Landseeking Expedition in 1872 and Incidents on Their Way to America & in Pioneer Life," 4; Friesen, "Our Fathers Settled Here in 1874," *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

also seen the Santa Fe lands in Kansas.²⁴ Peter Jansen accompanied the Mennonite delegates to Kansas, "to see that the land sharks of Kansas don't come any little game over them, and, if they are not suited down there, to bring them back to this State."²⁵ While the committee inspected the lands the Burlington and Missouri and the Santa Fe Railroads offered for sale, the Burlington continued to care for the Mennonites in Lincoln. The chill night air necessitated fire wood which the Burlington provided for the immigrants in abundance. Most of the food and other essential items were purchased in Lincoln.²⁶ Many of the young Mennonite boys helped to keep the family larder supplied by assisting the butcher at the slaughter house. For their help they received the livers of the butchered animals which they divided among themselves and gave to their mothers who fried the liver for part of their family meals.²⁷ On Sundays the Mennonites conducted their own religious services, occasionally meeting under a large circus tent at the fairgrounds.²⁸ Apparently the sermons were geared to their emigration experiences and problems—one of the Mennonites, speaking in German, strongly urged the group to settle permanently in Nebraska, and not in Dakota Territory, where the winters were of greater severity and of longer duration.²⁹

After the railroad lands had been investigated the committee presented to the entire congregation the conditions they had discovered in Nebraska and Kansas.³⁰ A huge open meeting was arranged with the committee seated in front of the Mennonite lodgings, Touzalin and Peter Jansen

²⁴ Anonymous, "Henderson, Nebraska feiert goldenes Jubiläum," *Christlicher Bundesbote*, (Newton, Kansas), August 31, 1937.

²⁵ Anonymous, "The Mennonites," *The Beatrice Express*, September 10, 1874.

²⁶ Voth, *Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites*, 116.

²⁷ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 8, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

²⁸ *The Daily State Journal*, September 15, 1874.

²⁹ *The Daily State Journal*, September 18, 1874.

³⁰ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

(serving as Touzalin's interpreter) standing in an open buggy in front of the committee, and the prospective Mennonite settlers eagerly crowding around. The Santa Fe agent, Schmidt, stood in the midst of the Mennonite immigrants, from which vantage point he responded to Touzalin's offers and statements.³¹

Touzalin began the meeting by offering to the Mennonites the lands he had earlier shown them in Franklin and Webster Counties. The delegation objected to those lands because wells needed to be dug from 75 to 150 feet before water could be secured, because the prairie had only sparse grass cover which would provide insufficient hay for feeding cattle, and because the road from the railroad to the land led for over five miles through sandy hills.³² Touzalin was prepared to meet the objections and promised that the Burlington would either drill a well and put in a pump on every quarter section of land or drill a well and put up a windmill on every section of land; that the Burlington would furnish free of charge all the hay the Mennonites might need for the winter; and that the railroad would also build a temporary plank road between the Mennonite settlement and the nearby towns.³³ Also traveling with the Alexanderwohl group was Bernhard Warkentin. Many railroad agents had already tried to tempt Warkentin with the best offers their companies could give to the Mennonites, yet Warkentin thought Touzalin's offers to be "fabulous."³⁴ In behalf of the Burlington, Touzalin offered to provide every family with a security bond of \$20,000 whether they settled on railroad or government land; to build an immigrant house with a capacity of 150 to 200 families and give it to the congregation; and to transport 250,000 feet of lumber to the settlement at the Chicago price. For cash purchases, the Burlington would sell its land for an average price of \$2.00 to

³¹ Voth, *Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites*, 117-118.

³² Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

³³ Voth, *Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites*, 117.

³⁴ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

\$2.50 per acre—a reduction of forty-five per cent from the appraised price. A thirty-five per cent reduction was offered for a down payment of one-tenth of the total cost and a twenty-five per cent reduction for payment made on the ten year credit plan with six per cent interest.³⁵ No matter how appealing the conditions were, however, the Mennonites just were not interested in the Burlington lands in Franklin and Webster counties.³⁶ Indeed, it became increasingly evident to Touzalin that the committee had been so favorably impressed by the Santa Fe lands that they were inclined to accept Schmidt's offer.³⁷

Touzalin consequently abandoned his effort to sell the Franklin and Webster County lands and offered instead the lands north of Sutton in York and Hamilton counties which he had also shown the Mennonites.³⁸ If the Mennonites would settle there, Touzalin said, the Burlington would transport to Nebraska free of charge the train load of freight the Mennonites had waiting in Philadelphia; it would charge no freight for all the lumber, coal, grain, and other supplies the Mennonites might need; and would give free railroad passes to certain designated Mennonites. From his location in the midst of the congregation, Schmidt promised that the Santa Fe would match each of Touzalin's offers. The discussion soon centered on the prices the Burlington would charge for the lands. Touzalin's every offer was more inviting than the preceding one, but Schmidt matched every offer. Finally, Touzalin promised that if all the Mennonites remained in Nebraska the Burlington Railroad would "give them the necessary land for nothing." Schmidt did not match the offer of free land, probably because he could sense that the committee was on the verge of choosing Kansas and, as he later explained to one of the Mennonites, he wanted to salvage some financial returns for the Santa Fe. His instructions,

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," *The York Republican*, August 12, 1937.

³⁷ Voth, *Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites*, 117.

³⁸ Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," *The York Republican*, August 12, 1937.

however, had been to bring the Mennonites to Kansas "at any cost."³⁹ In response to a query from the Reverend H. Richert, the committee's principal spokesman, Touzalin magnanimously indicated that the Burlington would not charge the Mennonites anything for the expenses they had incurred in Lincoln, but that if they went to Kansas the Santa Fe would have to furnish the necessary transportation.⁴⁰

The Alexanderwohl Mennonites did not decide where they would settle immediately following the conclusion of the meeting.⁴¹ Though they had been offered a fifty per cent reduction on the prices of the Kansas lands as well as a section of land for the poor, the poorer immigrants seemed desirous of remaining in Nebraska, while most of the other immigrants wished to go to Kansas.⁴² The decision was soon made, and, as Touzalin had feared, the great majority of Mennonites elected to leave Nebraska, most going to Kansas, but some also to Minnesota,⁴³ Manitoba and the Dakota Territory.⁴⁴ On Tuesday evening, September 22, a large portion of the Mennonites then in Lincoln left on the Atchison and Nebraska Railroad for Kansas,⁴⁵ arriving in Topeka the following night. The approximately 102 families that departed on that train numbered 557 persons and filled eleven passenger coaches and upon arrival in Kansas immediately set about touring the Santa Fe's lands prior to making individual selections.⁴⁶

³⁹ Voth, *Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites*, 117-118; Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," *The York Republican*, August 12, 1937; Anonymous, "Henderson, Nebraska feiert goldenes Jubiläum," *Christlicher Bundesbote*, August 31, 1937.

⁴⁰ Voth, *Narratives of Alexanderwohl Mennonites*, 117-118.

⁴¹ The meeting likely took place on or prior to Saturday, September 19, and Warkentin indicated that the final decision would probably be made by Monday, September 21. Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," *The York Republican*, August 12, 1937.

⁴⁴ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, October 12, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

⁴⁵ *The Daily State Journal*, September 23, 1874.

⁴⁶ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 24, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad had housed over one thousand Mennonites in Lincoln for three weeks, and those who chose to settle in Nebraska remained in Lincoln for three additional weeks. Touzalin had been confident that the entire group would settle in Nebraska on the Burlington's lands and was "furious" when the great majority departed for other states, apparently blaming Warkentin in part for their departure.⁴⁷ Touzalin had been outmaneuvered in the contest between the Burlington and the Santa Fe for the Alexanderwohl Mennonites by the man he had originally hired to help bring the Mennonites to Kansas for the Santa Fe. Touzalin had trained Schmidt too well.

Of the total group, thirty-five families numbering between 205 and 207 persons had decided to remain in Nebraska and they settled on lands in York and Hamilton Counties which they purchased from the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company.⁴⁸ Other than for the alternate sections of land belonging to the Burlington Railroad, the area had already been almost completely settled by homesteaders. The homesteaders were largely of American stock, descendants of settlers in the Atlantic seaboard states, although there were some Germans, Swedes, and Irish. The homesteaders each had approximately thirty to forty acres of land under cultivation, the rest of the prairie was a "great sea of unbroken grass" marked only by their log cabin's and dugouts.⁴⁹ Though all signs

⁴⁷ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, September 19, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

⁴⁸ Eva Abrahams (Mrs. Peter J. Friesen), *Family Diary*, now in possession of A. W. Friesen, Henderson, Nebraska; J. J. Friesen, "List, The Mennonite families who first settled in the western part of York and the eastern part of Hamilton Counties in Nebraska, Oct. 14, 1874," *J. J. Friesen Collection*. Friesen lists the names of the original thirty-five settlers and a consultation of the official passenger lists of the *S. S. Cimbria* and the *S. S. Teutonia* reveals that, with one possible exception, all the families who chose to remain in Nebraska had been passengers on the *S. S. Teutonia* — contrary to Cornelius J. Dyck's assertion in "Kansas Promotional activities with Particular Reference to Mennonites," (unpublished M. A. thesis, The Municipal University of Wichita, 1955), 40-41.

⁴⁹ A. E. Sheldon, "The Mennonite 'Einwanderung' to Nebraska," *The Mennonite*, LII (September 21, 1937), 8.

pointed to a bountiful harvest in 1874,⁵⁰ the homesteaders' hopes were dashed by the Rocky Mountain grasshoppers. The area where the Mennonites settled in the fall of the year was invaded by the grasshoppers on July 26, 1874. Coming in hordes so thick that they obscured the sun, they quickly settled on the cultivated areas and began their feasting.⁵¹ By nightfall the corn had all been devoured and mere stumps remained. The grasshoppers also stripped the garden patches, gnawed holes in carpets which had been placed over plants in vain attempts to salvage them, and finally attacked the prairie grasses. After they had eaten they bored holes in the ground, filled them with eggs, and then died. In places their dead bodies covered the earth in depths ranging up to six inches. The disastrous grasshopper invasion, the corresponding fear that the grasshoppers would hatch the following spring and devour anything they might plant, and the effects of the financial crisis of 1873 led many homesteaders to offer to sell their lands at prices which were far less than the Burlington was asking for its lands. For some reason, however, the Mennonites believed that the homesteads were reserved for soldiers or those who had served in the army and were unavailable to those who did not believe in military service. Thus, thinking that the homestead land was "Soldaten Land," the Mennonites purchased their lands from the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company.⁵²

⁵⁰ Everett Newton Dick, *The Sod House Frontier, 1854-1890* (New York, 1937), 203.

⁵¹ Sheldon, "Mennonite 'Einwanderung' to Nebraska," 8.

⁵² J. J. Friesen, "Early Nebraska Settlers Faced Grasshopper Plague," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, (Newton Kansas), April 22, 1948; J. J. Friesen, "Our Fathers Settled Here in 1874," 6-8, J. J. Friesen Collection.

Touzalin concluded the purchase agreement with the remaining Mennonites in early October, 1874.⁵³ According to the provisions of the contract, the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad agreed to construct a dwelling for those families who were not in a position to erect their own houses immediately and indicated that the immigrant house would remain the property of the Mennonites. Though the contract did not specify the number, the Burlington agreed to dig "wells sufficient to meet all their needs," and if several families living together would prefer it, to erect wells with windmills and tanks attached, all without charge. The Burlington Railroad agreed to supply a guide who could speak both English and German and who would locate lands and provide other services. All the hay the Mennonites needed for the first winter would be supplied at the Sutton railroad station for \$2.50 per ton, and if the Mennonites should need additional hay the following year, that would also be provided at the same rate. The Burlington also agreed to set aside \$1000 to construct and improve bridges and roads; to transport 250,000 feet of lumber from Chicago to their location free

⁵³ Apparently Touzalin first extended an offer for at least fourteen sections of land in Clay County, Nebraska, directly south of Hamilton County. The *Burlington Collection* includes a tentative Memorandum of Agreement dated October 3 which provided that the Burlington would erect an immigrant house for the Mennonites, would bore a well for each purchaser, would supply a guide to help locate lands and render other services free of charge, would grant \$300 to poor families and for the first two years of the ten years provided for land payments would not collect any interest from ten poorest families providing they had not purchased more than 160 acres of land, would transport 45,000 feet of lumber free from Chicago to Sutton, Nebraska, would bring the belongings of the group from Philadelphia free of charge, would provide free transportation to the Mennonites from Lincoln to the station nearest their final location, and would provide two of the Mennonite leaders with free passes on the Burlington from Chicago to their location for one and one-half years. The Burlington was prepared to grant forty per cent reductions on the appraised land prices for cash purchases and thirty per cent reductions for lands purchased on the ten year credit plan at six per cent interest. As a guarantee that it would carry out the agreement the Burlington indicated its willingness to place \$5000 with Cornelius Jansen. Memorandum of Agreement between Touzalin and the Mennonites of South Russia then at Lincoln, Nebraska, October 3, 1874, *Burlington Collection*.

of charge; to provide \$1000 worth of food and clothing for poor people during the first winter or to loan them limited sums of money at five per cent interest; and to give six of the Mennonite leaders free passes on the Burlington to Chicago for one year or longer. The Burlington Railroad further promised to grant the Mennonites a fifty per cent reduction on the transportation of farming implements, cattle, household goods, and other articles; and to attempt to secure the lowest freight rates for their luggage in Philadelphia, even sending an agent to help expedite the process. In the hope of still attracting those Alexanderwohl Mennonites who had already departed for Kansas, the Burlington promised to provide free passage to "the whole of the Mennonite people now in this country . . . from Lincoln, from Topeka or wherever they may be located with their baggage and household goods." Also, the Burlington agreed to transport coal for the Mennonites at cost, to reserve for them free of charge a body of four townships wherever they desired, and to assist the poorer Mennonite families in securing the government lands in those four townships. The lands themselves were to be sold for a reduction of forty-five percent for purchases paid in cash, for thirty-five per cent for those who paid a portion in cash, and a reduction of twenty-five per cent was given to those who purchased land on ten years credit paying six per cent interest. Finally, as assurance that the contract would be faithfully executed, the Burlington agreed to provide a sum of \$10,000 to be placed with any impartial person the Mennonites designated.⁵⁴ The contract was similar to the one the Burlington had previously extended to the Mennonites offering them lands in Clay County, except that it was more generous. Additional moneys were granted to poor persons, a far greater amount of lumber was shipped free of charge for the

⁵⁴ Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company contract with the Mennonites at Lincoln, Nebraska, 1874, taken from the Burlington files and quoted in full in John Delbert Erb, "The Influence of the Western Railroads Upon Mennonite Settlements in the United States," 1951, (unpublished manuscript located in the Goshen College Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Indiana), 31-32.

settlers, more free passes were granted to Mennonite leaders, and the Burlington also granted reductions to persons making their entire land payments in cash or even partially in cash. The Burlington even offered to double the guarantee that it would fulfill the contract terms.

It was evident that Touzalin was according the Mennonites preferences which the Burlington was not, according to policy, granting to other purchasers of its lands. On January 1, 1873, the Burlington liberalized its policies in Nebraska, especially those relating to payments for land purchases. Under the new conditions the settler making his land payment in cash received a twenty per cent reduction on the appraised price of the land. The settler who had chosen the long credit plan and then paid in full after one year received an eighteen per cent reduction on the appraised price; if he paid in full at the end of two years fifteen per cent was deducted; and if he paid in full after three years, ten per cent was deducted.⁵⁵ On the ten year credit plan the Mennonites were promised a reduction of twenty-five per cent without being required to pay in full after any specified number of years; if they paid a portion in cash they received a thirty-five per cent reduction; and a full payment in cash meant a forty-five per cent reduction. The contract Touzalin concluded with the Mennonites provided rates which were more than twice as generous as those provided by the stated Burlington policies, an indication of Touzalin's efforts to secure Mennonites as settlers on the Burlington lands.

Of the thirty-five original families, thirty-four purchased land from the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad during the first year. Twelve families purchased land in Hamilton County and twenty-two families pur-

⁵⁵ Richard C. Overton, *Burlington West, A Colonization History of the Burlington Railroad* (Cambridge, 1941), 340.

chased land in York County.⁶⁶ Most of the purchases were for 160 acres of land, some were for less, and one family purchased 320 acres.⁶⁷ The thirty-five families purchased approximately 6000 acres of land and reserved nearly another 1000 acres for friends and relatives they expected to arrive later. Prices ranged from \$3.50 per acre for cash

⁶⁶ Somewhat puzzling are several references to a Mennonite settlement in Clay County begun at that time. The previously cited *Familien Kalender* of 1878 noted that the large Mennonite colony north of Sutton lay in Hamilton and Clay Counties and had grown so fast that it extended into York County. Peter Jansen recalls that in 1875 "large settlements were started by our people in Clay and Hamilton Counties," (Peter Jansen, *Memoirs of Peter Jansen* (Beatrice, Nebraska, 1921), 42); the October, 1875, *Zur Heimath* refers to the "neuen Mennoniten-ansiedlungen in Clay County" which did not fare too well in the 1875 harvests whereas Hamilton County did; and the *Daily State Journal* of December 1, 1874, mentioned that the Burlington was drilling wells for the Mennonites north of Sutton in Clay County. Those references notwithstanding, it appears that no Mennonites settled in Clay County at that time. J. J. Friesen, in his voluminous writings regarding the origins of the Henderson, Nebraska Mennonite community, never makes reference to any settlement in Clay County. The Reverend A. W. Friesen indicated to the author both in a personal interview and in a letter dated June 16, 1962, that "none of these early settlers bought land in Clay County. As stated they settled north of the Blue River with a few on the south side. The Blue river seems to be the line of demarkation [sic] up to this day between the German settlers of Clay county and the Mennonites. The Germans in Clay county also came from Russia, Odessa it seems to me, but came a year or so earlier than 1874." Friesen indicated that even today there are no more than several Mennonite families residing in Clay County. The confusion may be partly explained by the fact that other German settlers in Nebraska were frequently mistaken by the press for Mennonites. Funk noted in the February, 1874, issue of the *Herald of Truth*, that a Lutheran colony from Odessa, Russia, which settled in southern Nebraska was erroneously referred to by the press as a Mennonite colony. The Russian colony in Clay County wrote to their friends in Russia via a Burlington circular, indicating that their lands lay from one to seven miles from Sutton and that they were of the Reformed Church ("An unsere Verwandte und Freunde in Russland!" February, 1874, Burlington promotional leaflet in *Burlington Collection*). One of the original land contracts between the Burlington Railroad and the Mennonite settlers noted Sutton, Clay County, as the settler's address, although the purchased land was located in Hamilton County. The Burlington operated a railroad station in Sutton, Clay County, which was the mailing address for the Mennonite settlement and likely led many to assume it was also the location of their settlement.

⁶⁷ J. J. Friesen, "The Number of Acres of land our fathers bought in 1874," *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

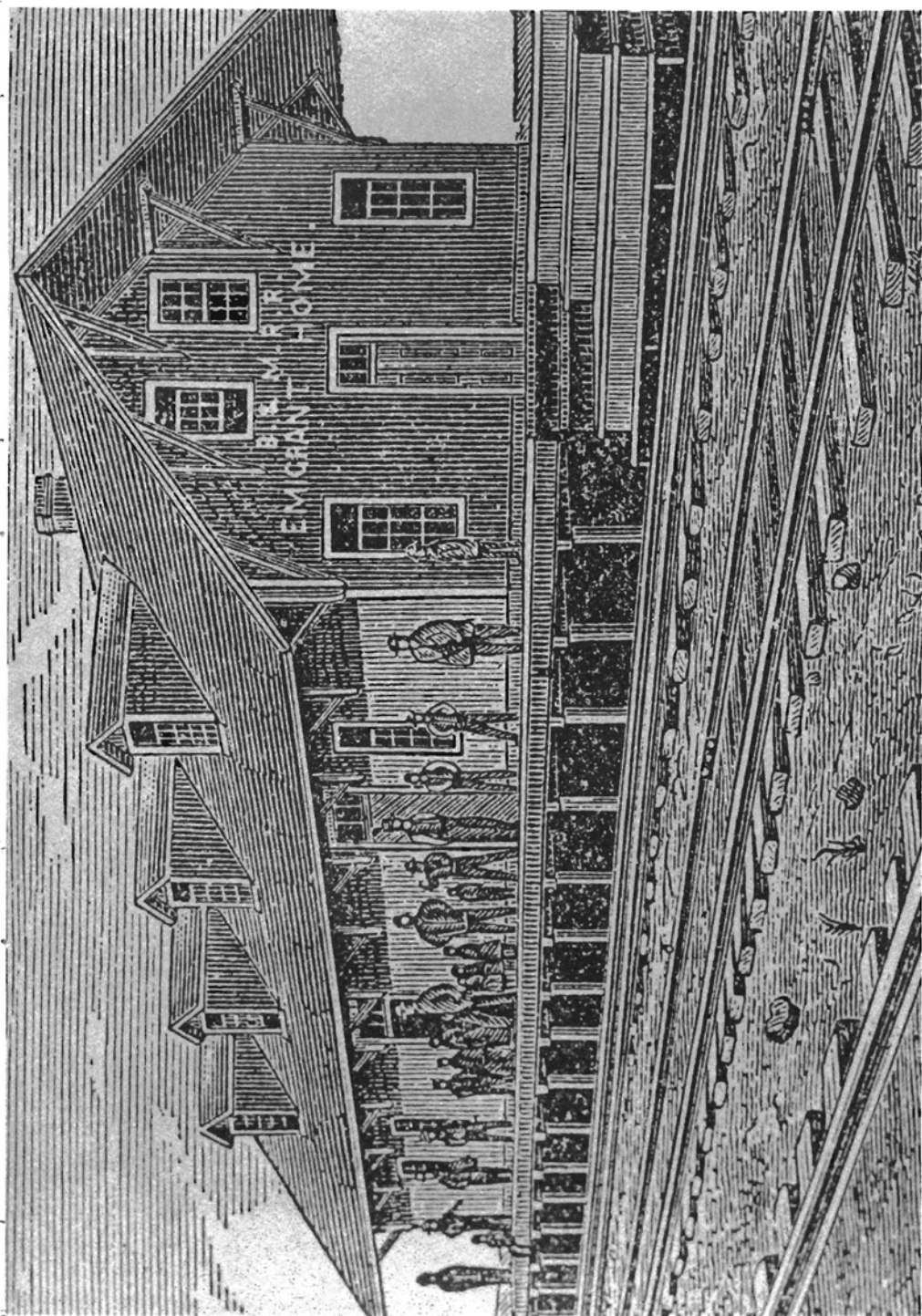
purchases to \$6.00 per acre on the credit plan.⁵⁸ Within the settlement the Mennonite families crowded as close together as the alternating homestead lands permitted. In only two places did the Mennonite owned land not connect at the corners with lands owned by other Mennonites. Relatives endeavored to select lands close to each other—four family heads purchased one section of land, cast lots to determine which quarter section each would buy, and then built their homes close together near the center of the section.⁵⁹ The contracts themselves specified the conditions the Burlington Railroad imposed on the Mennonite purchasers. For example, Peter Wall purchased forty acres in Hamilton County for \$4.20 per acre at six per cent interest on the ten year credit plan. Wall made his last payment in 1884 and the forty acre purchase eventually cost him \$228.48—\$168.00 for the principal and \$60.48 for interest. According to the contract, Wall agreed to improve and bring under cultivation one-tenth of the acreage each year for the first three years; not to cut any wood except for fuel or construction of buildings and fences. If Wall abided by the regulations and made his payments, he would then be given a deed to the land, although the railroad would reserve a strip of land 200 feet wide to be used for right of way or other railroad purposes. Touzalin signed the contract.⁶⁰

While still in Lincoln, most of the Mennonite families in the process of purchasing Burlington lands also bought horses, cows, oxen, harnesses, wagons, cook stoves and other household equipment. Those who had purchased teams and wagons loaded them with the accumulated merchandise, and drove across the prairies to the immigrant house which the Burlington Railroad was constructing for the Mennonites in accordance with the contract. Young

⁵⁸ J. J. Friesen, "Remaking a Community — Henderson, Nebraska," *Mennonite Life*, V (October, 1950), 10.

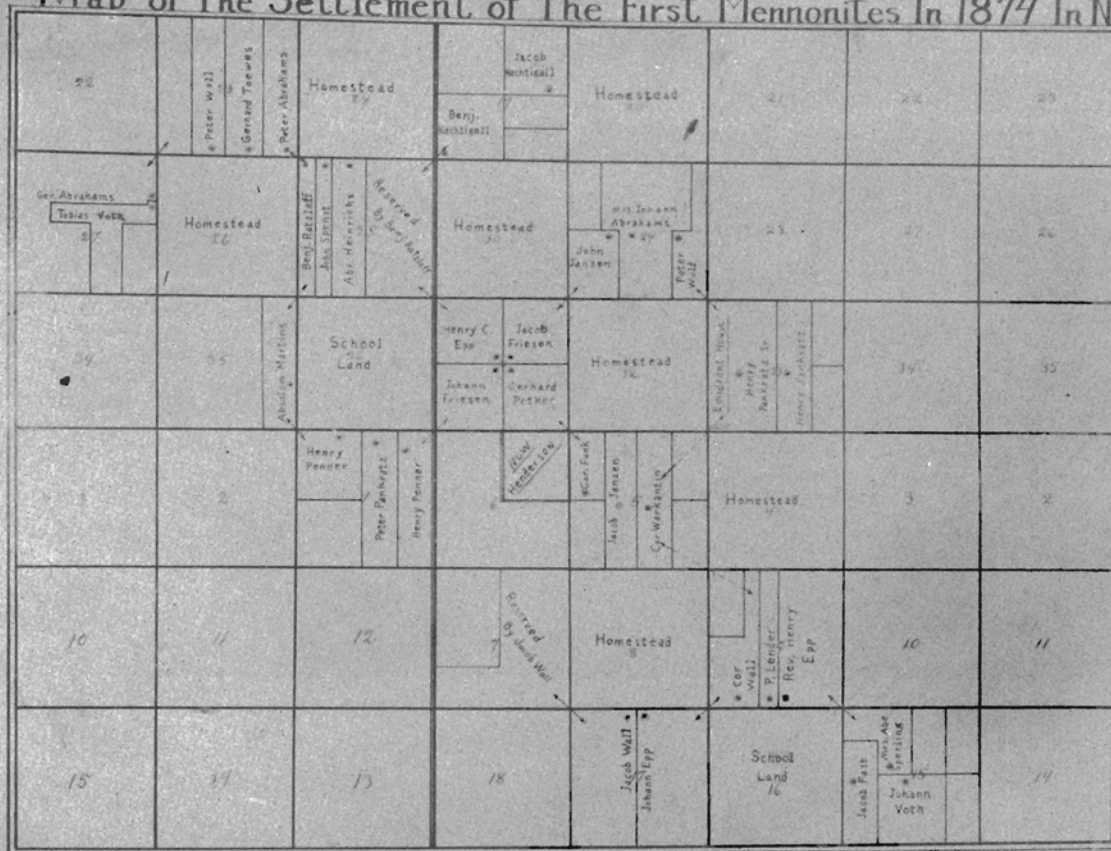
⁵⁹ J. J. Friesen, "The Map of the First Mennonite Settlement in 1874 in York and Hamilton County, Nebraska," 1, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

⁶⁰ Contract No. 8503 of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company in Nebraska with Peter Wall, October 20, 1874, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

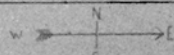


on and M. R. R. Emigrant House, Lincoln

Map of The Settlement of The First Mennonites In 1874 In Nebr.

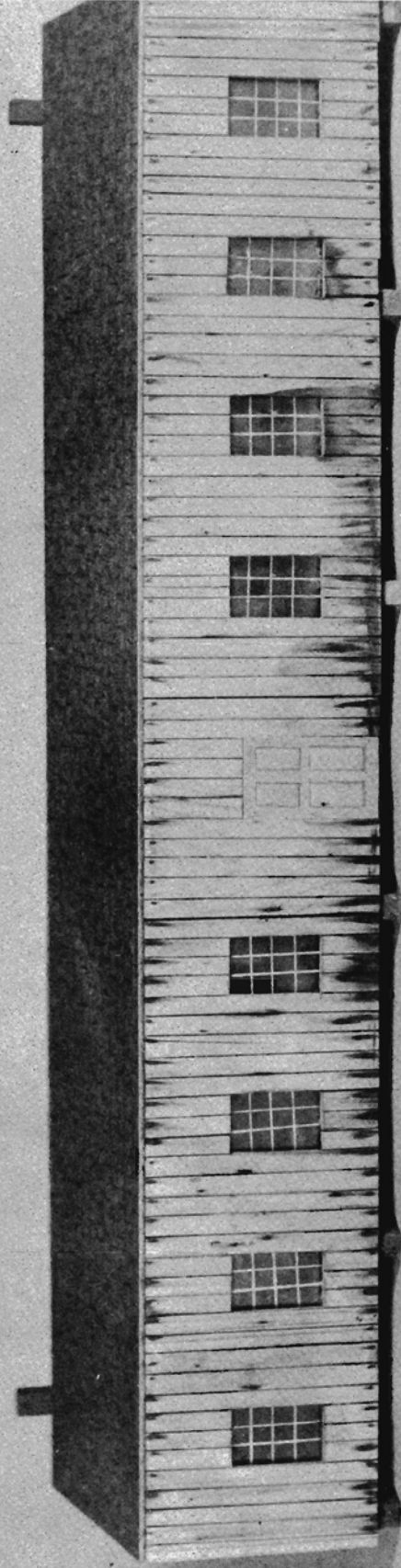


Hamilton Co.



York Co.

Drawn by E.J. Ketch



Model of Henderson Immigrant House (Courtesy Bethel College)



Jacob J. Friesen at Immigrant House marker near Henderson
(Courtesy Bethel College)

men and older boys drove the cows behind the teams while the older people, women and children followed several days later on the Burlington Railroad. Arriving in Sutton they were met by the men and boys and went on to the immigrant house, twelve miles north and four miles east of Sutton. One mile east from the present village of Henderson, the Burlington built the immigrant house in the center of the area within which the Mennonites purchased their lands. Some of the homesteaders and residents of Sutton helped to transport the 207 Mennonites to the immigrant home, where they arrived on October 14, 1874.⁶¹ The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad transported free the eight carloads of lumber the immigrant home required,⁶² but when the Mennonites arrived the home was not quite completed and carpenters were still shingling the roof.⁶³ The home was a large frame building, 24 feet wide and 80 feet long, without any interior partitions. Tar paper covered the walls but not the ceiling, and the rafters, studdings and joints were exposed to view. The floor was made of wide, smooth boards⁶⁴ and the entire building rested on blocks above the ground. Each family was assigned a certain location in the building according to the number in the family and all had to sleep on the floor. Stoves were set up outside to do the cooking. Not all the Mennonites could find room in the immigrant home and some moved into houses which had been built by earlier settlers but had been vacated for the winter. As soon as everyone was temporarily housed, the men and older boys began to build their individual homes, leaving early every morning from the immigrant home. Most of the first dwellings were made of sod. A common size home had walls eight feet high and about two and one-half feet thick, was thirty-two feet long and approximately twenty

⁶¹ Friesen, "Our Fathers Settled Here in 1874," 2-4, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁶² A. E. Touzalin to Charles E. Perkins, November 14, 1874, Burlington Collection.

⁶³ Friesen, Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 9, J. J. Friesen Collection.

⁶⁴ Spore, "When the Colonists Arrived in 1874," *The York Republican*, August 12, 1937.

feet wide. A few settlers with ample funds built frame houses and although everyone succeeded in getting his home ready for the winter, a few families spent the first winter in the deserted homes of settlers and homesteaders.⁶⁵

Despite the fact that the Mennonites received valuable assistance from the Burlington Railroad and from their homesteading neighbors, the first winter was a difficult one. Most of the original settlers were poor and purchased their lands on credit.⁶⁶ One of them reported in a letter to *Zur Heimath* that machinery was scarce, there was little opportunity for earning extra money, and that the people were generally poor.⁶⁷ During the first winter, Iowa Mennonites shipped three tons of apples, 240 heads of cabbage, 175 sacks of flour, 82 sacks of wheat, two sacks of oats, 82 sacks of corn, and potatoes to their beleaguered brethren in southeastern Nebraska. The foodstuffs had all been donated by the Iowa Mennonites and were shipped free of any freight charges by the Burlington Railroad to Sutton, Nebraska.⁶⁸

Even prior to their departure for America the Alexanderwohl congregation recognized that there were some poor families in their midst who would be unable to finance their migration. On February 11, 1874, they instituted a treasury into which the wealthy paid cash according to their ability. The funds in the treasury were then loaned, without interest, to the neediest families. Approximately, \$8,486.25 was paid into the treasury and by January, 1875, \$7,610.63 had been loaned to needy individuals. Records were kept in a "Schnurbuch" (Cordbook) so constructed that it was easy to determine if anyone had meddled with

⁶⁵ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 9-14, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

⁶⁶ A. W. Friesen, personal interview with the author in Henderson, Nebraska, June 19, 1962.

⁶⁷ Anonymous, "Aus Nebraska," *Zur Heimath*, February, 1875. Mennonite frugality in purchases and trading even became the subject of a short newspaper account in the *Daily State Journal*, October 11, 1874.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, "Dankabstaltung," *Zur Heimath*, May, 1875.

the records.⁶⁹ The "Schnurbuch" reveals that of the original thirty-five settlers in the Henderson area, thirteen borrowed money from their own congregation.⁷⁰

The grasshopper invasion of 1874 which proved so treacherous to the midwestern states actually aided the Mennonite immigrants. The previous year the grasshoppers had filled the ground with their eggs and many homesteaders feared that they would hatch in the spring and continue to molest the crops. As spring approached, some homesteaders brought some sod out of the field, heated it, and to their dismay found that the grasshoppers hatched. Convinced of the futility of planting crops, many homesteaders were willing to rent their plowed fields to the Mennonites for one dollar per acre. The spring, however, was cold and rainy. The greater part of the grasshopper eggs were destroyed and those that hatched were small and soon died.⁷¹ Most of the Mennonite immigrants had rented homesteader's lands, however, and all who sowed seed in 1875 harvested a small crop—sufficient for bread and feed—and thus the Mennonite farmers were aided by the willingness of the homesteaders to rent their lands.⁷²

Touzalin quickly began to follow through in fulfilling the terms of the agreement. The Burlington Railroad provided a man with well digging equipment who drilled a well for each settler who had purchased land from the Burlington Railroad. The settler assisted with two men and his team of horses, and frequently his neighbors pitched in as well. The wells were approximately ninety to one hundred feet deep and gave good water.⁷³

⁶⁹ Melvin Gingerich, "The Alexanderwohl 'Schnurbuch,' *Mennonite Life*, I (January, 1946), 45.

⁷⁰ The Alexanderwohl "Schnurbuch," located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.

⁷¹ J. J. Friesen, "Jotting Incidences on the Way to America in 1874 & here in Pioneer Life," *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

⁷² Friesen, "Early Nebraska Settlers Faced Grasshopper Plague," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, April 22, 1948; Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 19-24, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

⁷³ Friesen, "Recollections on our Journey in 1874 and of Pioneer Life," 5, *J. J. Friesen Collection*; Anonymous, "The Mennonites of Clay County," *The Daily State Journal*, December 1, 1874.

Correspondence Burlington officials at the Boston headquarters soon received, however, indicated that all was not well with the new Mennonite settlement. After leading a group of Russian Mennonites in a survey of Union Pacific and Burlington Railroad lands in Nebraska, J. J. Rochussen returned to Minnesota where he was living when Touzalin requested his assistance in immigration matters. Rochussen declined the offer and took it upon himself to write to John N. Dennison, Secretary-Treasurer of the Burlington and Missouri in Boston,⁷⁴ to explain that "great discontent" prevailed among the Russian-German Mennonites who had settled north of Sutton. The discontent, Rochussen felt, stemmed from the 1874 agreement embodying "extravagantly favorable conditions" which Touzalin had concluded with the Mennonites and which he had not kept after the first year.⁷⁵ Touzalin extended identical terms to the Mennonites who might come in 1875,⁷⁶ and Isaak Peters accordingly wrote numerous letters to Russia in an attempt to interest future Mennonite immigrants in purchasing land from the Burlington Railroad. Peters, like Cornelius Jansen, had been expelled by the Russian government. He had arrived in the settlement on January 6, 1875, and settled two miles west and three and one-half miles south of the immigrant home on land near the Little Blue River⁷⁷ which was given to him free by the Burlington Railroad.⁷⁸ Peters' arrival had been quite unexpected but he immediately became the

⁷⁴ Dennison was serving as Secretary-Treasurer in 1858 and continued in that position for some time. He was also active in organizing townsite companies in Iowa and Nebraska. Overton, *Burlington West*, 108, 183, 285-288.

⁷⁵ J. J. Rochussen to John N. Dennison, May 15, 1875, *Burlington Collection*.

⁷⁶ A. E. Touzalin to Isaak Peters, February 1, 1875, *Burlington Collection*. In the letter Touzalin also promised to assist the poor families by building wells for them and releasing them from any land payments for two years.

⁷⁷ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 15-17; Friesen, "The Car Procession and Sight Seeing Trip to Some of the Corners of the Land on Which our Fathers Settled in 1874," 9, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

⁷⁸ A. W. Friesen, personal interview with the author in Henderson, Nebraska, June 19, 1962.

elder and leader of the entire sttlement.⁷⁹ In his letters to Russia Peters explained the conditions Touzalin had extended to those Mennonites who would come in 1875, emphasizing the fine climate and lands which made Nebraska "the best state."⁸⁰ In one of those letters Peters admitted that deep well water was a hindrance, but pointed to the wonderful American machinery which obviated the problem. Peters also mentioned that four families had returned from Minnesota and had taken land in Nebraska. Peters felt that the only major difference among the various states was climate—those preferring cold climates could go north, those partial to hotter climates could go south, and those favoring a moderate climate could choose a middle state such as Nebraska. Hard work and trust in God would mean success no matter where the immigrants would settle, although Peters wondered whether Kansas could escape droughts and noted that Minnesota's winters were very severe.⁸¹ Some Mennonites did come to Nebraska as a result of Peters' letters and become disillusioned when Touzalin's promises remained unfulfilled, especially those relating to the boring of wells. The settlers began to ask Peters "where are all thy promises?" Because they communicated their discontent to their friends and relatives still in Russia, Peters expected that though some Mennonite immigrants would still come to Nebraska, a large group could hardly be expected.⁸² According to Rochussen, Touzalin had not paid the cost of boring five wells, had not granted the rebate on a few cars of lumber and on several occasions had not waived small sums of purchase money. Rochussen encouraged Dennison to investigate the situation and informed him that he was refusing Touzalin's offer of employment because Touzalin

⁷⁹ Friesen, "Recollections of the Emigration from Russia and the Pioneer Life in America, 1874," 21, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

⁸⁰ Isaak Peters to Leonhard Sudermann, September 13, 1875, *J. J. Friesen Collection*. Suderman was planning to emigrate to America and came in 1876, settling in Kansas. He had been a member of the committee of twelve which visited North America in 1873.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Isaak Peters to Cornelius Jansen, March 17, 1876, *Burlington Collection*.

was "so changeable, so wild in his ideas, so prone to abandon plans after having only just commenced to work them out, so uncertain as to temper and so arrogant and domineering."⁸³ George Tyson of the Burlington's Boston office acknowledged Rochussen's letter, expressing regret that the Mennonites were discontented and promising that attention would be given to the matter.⁸⁴

Rochussen also wrote Touzalin and respectfully declined to work with him because "the feeling among the Sutton Mennonites about your breach of the contract you so rashly concluded with them in 1874 is too strong." Rochussen indicated that when the immigrants had asked Touzalin to have the freight on wheat reduced he had done nothing, but when they had written Dennison concerning the matter the concession had been promptly granted.⁸⁵

The following year a young Catholic priest, Father Lechlestner, reported to Touzalin on the Mennonite situation in Peters' congregation.⁸⁶ He ventured the opinion that the Mennonites were being "troubled by outsiders," and suggested Rochussen, who had had previous dealings with the Union Pacific land department, as a possibility. Lechlestner informed Touzalin that the Union Pacific had offered the Mennonite settlers near Sutton favorable terms if they would purchase Union Pacific lands and would

⁸³ J. J. Rochussen to John N. Dennison, May 15, 1875, *Burlington Collection*.

⁸⁴ George Tyson to J. J. Rochussen, May 25, 1875, *Burlington Collection*.

⁸⁵ J. J. Rochussen to A. E. Touzalin, May 15, 1875, *Burlington Collection*.

⁸⁶ Rochussen, aware of Touzalin's plans to have Lechlestner assist him in promoting Catholic immigration to Nebraska had earlier advised Touzalin to be wary of relying on the "energetic but indiscreet" young priest. Rochussen urged Touzalin not to give Lechlestner a season's pass on the Burlington's lines, not to send him to Chicago to meet a group of Franciscans, nor to send him to Russia as an agent of the Burlington land department. Rochussen thought Lechlestner to be "very unpopular with his fellow priests by reason of his . . . conceit," and advised Touzalin to deal with any prospective Catholic immigrants himself, although it might be useful to give Lechlestner a salary to stand alongside "with his mouth shut." J. J. Rochussen to A. E. Touzalin May 15, 1875, *Burlington Collection*.

furthermore make good any losses the Mennonites might sustain by selling out at Sutton. Moreover, some of the Mennonites believed that the Burlington Railroad was favoring Jansen and his friends in Jefferson County by charging them lower freight rates. Lechlestner saw an additional contributing cause to the general dissatisfaction in Isaak Peters, "the unruly soul in the settlement."⁸⁷

In the past Isaak Peters had been the cause of a considerable amount of dissension. As Preacher and elder of his congregation in Russia, Peters maintained strict and rigorous requirements, exercising such strict church discipline that a division developed in the congregation from which Peters was finally expelled shortly before he emigrated to America. The Russian government expelled him too, because he advocated non-resistance and emigration. Arriving in Nebraska in 1875, Peters was chosen elder of the Bethesda Mennonite Church but by 1880 he withdrew with a minority of the congregation to organize a new church.⁸⁸ It is entirely possible that some of Peters' religious disagreements with his fellow Mennonites may have caused him to blame Touzalin and the Burlington Railroad for some difficulties; nevertheless, it seems clear that Touzalin was somewhat lax in fulfilling all the provisions of the 1874 agreement and the extension of its provisions to later Mennonite immigrants. According to the contract, for example, the immigrant home the Burlington had constructed in the center of the community was to be the property of the Mennonites and for some years the Mennonites did use the building in summers for a church meeting place, but during the winters they met in the warmer homes of settlers. The Burlington finally sold the immigrant home to one of the Mennonite settlers who transported it to his farm and for a time the Mennonites continued to use one-half of it for their church.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ferd. Lechlestner to A. E. Touzalin, April 24, 1876, *Burlington Collection*.

⁸⁸ H. F. Epp, "Isaak Peters," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, IV, 153.

⁸⁹ Friesen, "The Landseeking Expedition in 1872 and Incidents on Their Way to America & in Pioneer Life," 8, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

An incident which occurred during one of the first years of the settlement evidenced the continued rivalry between the various states and land agents for the Mennonite settlers. One of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite immigrants, Gerhard Petker, built his sod house in a low basin in York County. A heavy spring rain threatened to flood the home and Petker's family was evacuated by another of the Mennonite settlers living nearby. The home was flooded and the mud walls collapsed. When news of the event reached Kansas, some of the settlers and land agents there wrote to Mennonites still in Russia indicating that most of the entire Mennonite settlement in Nebraska had been "drowned out by a flood."⁹⁰

In 1887 the town of Henderson sprang up in the midst of the Mennonite settlement, approximately one mile west of the immigrant home. It was named after one of the original homesteaders, David Henderson, who homesteaded in Henderson township in 1866.⁹¹

For a number of years additional Mennonites from Russia joined the small settlement and the Mennonites slowly purchased the land from the homesteaders situated among them—generally paying about \$25 to \$30 per acre of land in the early years—until the Henderson community became almost exclusively Mennonite. In 1962 there were at most two or three non-Mennonite families living in the town of Henderson, which had a population of approximately 750. The surrounding area too was almost completely Mennonite—for ten miles to the east of Henderson, five miles south, eight miles north, and ten miles west.⁹² Though Congressional legislation never provided the solid Mennonite communities the original immigrants had desired, the growing prosperity of the immi-

⁹⁰ Friesen, "The Map of the First Mennonite Settlement in 1874 in York and Hamilton County, Nebraska," 2, *J. J. Friesen Collection*.

⁹¹ J. J. Friesen, "Why This Historical Marker?" *Mennonite Weekly Review*, September 8, 1937.

⁹² A. W. Friesen, personal interview with the author in Henderson, Nebraska, June 19, 1962.

grants and the passage of time eventually achieved the same result.

Though competition for the Mennonite immigrants remained keen throughout the 1870's, the settlements in Jefferson and Gage County and Hamilton and York County were the only major Burlington successes. Disturbed at the Burlington's success in settling Mennonite immigrants on its Nebraska lands, in 1875 the Union Pacific Railroad Company made a concerted effort to secure Mennonite settlers for its own lands. Convinced that the immigrating Mennonites had never properly investigated its lands, the Union Pacific invited the Mennonite Executive Aid Committee to send a delegation to inspect the Union Pacific lands in Nebraska. Six men made the journey and viewed Union Pacific lands north of Columbus and in other localities. They found the land extremely productive and discovered that wells needed to be only ten to twenty feet deep before "excellent drinking water" was found. The land prices ranged from two to ten dollars per acre and the Union Pacific offered either a ten per cent reduction for cash payments or a ten year credit plan. The Union Pacific also promised liberal freight reductions, even if the Mennonites would purchase government lands. Elder Isaak Peters of the York and Hamilton County Mennonite settlement accompanied the delegation for part of the journey and was favorably impressed with the Union Pacific lands. The delegates were enthusiastic enough to utilize the *Herald of Truth* to encourage the immigrating Mennonites to view the Union Pacific lands which were "as rich as, and more favorably located than, any of the unsettled lands which we saw on this or any other trip through the West."⁹³

Thus, both the committee of twelve in 1873 and the delegation of 1875 noted that the Union Pacific Railroad Company possessed much high quality land in Nebraska which they were prepared to sell at reduced prices.

⁹³ John Shenk, et al., "A Trip to the Far West," *Herald of Truth*, September, 1875.

Though the reductions were not as generous as those offered by the Burlington, it is unlikely that that was the sole reason why the Burlington secured Mennonite settlers and the Union Pacific did not. The Union Pacific also advertised its lands in German pamphlets and brochures,⁹⁴ but they were of a general nature and the Union Pacific did not make any really concentrated attempts to interest Mennonite settlers in its lands until the summer of 1875. By then it was too late as most of the incoming immigrants were determined to locate where their friends and relatives had already settled. The failure of the Union Pacific to attract Mennonite settlers for its Nebraska lands while the Burlington was enjoying a modicum of success further attests to the influence of Touzalin and the Burlington on the coming of the Mennonites to Nebraska.

The Mennonite migration was at its peak during 1874 when nearly 6,500 immigrants arrived in the United States.⁹⁵ In addition to settling the Kleine Gemeinde and the Alexanderwohl Mennonites on its lands during that summer, the Burlington attempted to sell lands to a group of Mennonites under the leadership of Jacob A. Wiebe. But the Nebraska nemesis, deep well water, was the reason that Wiebe gave for choosing to settle in Kansas rather than in Nebraska. The group had left Russia on May 30, 1874, and arrived in New York on July 15, 1874.⁹⁶ At the time that Wiebe and the approximately twenty-four families in his group arrived in New York, Cornelius and Peter Jansen were also in the city and persuaded Wiebe to temporarily leave his followers in Elkhart, Indiana, until suitable lands for settlement had been located in Nebraska or other states.⁹⁷ Though Wiebe and another member of the

⁹⁴ Anonymous, *Land-Buch der Union Pacific Eisenbahn-Länderein*, 1874, Union Pacific promotional brochure, located in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas.

⁹⁵ Georg Leibbrandt, "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from Russia to the United States and Canada, 1873-1880," II, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, VII (January, 1933), 28.

⁹⁶ Jacob A. Wiebe, "The Founding of Gnadenau," Krahn, ed., *From the Steppes to the Prairies*, 98-99.

⁹⁷ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, July 20, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*.

party travelled throughout Nebraska they finally decided to locate in Kansas because there wells were shallow. Since the members of the group were not particularly wealthy, Wiebe felt that if they would remain in Nebraska the expenses connected with drilling deep wells would prove a real hardship. Until the transaction with C. B. Schmidt for Santa Fe lands in Kansas was concluded, however, Schmidt feared that the Mennonites would still decide to locate in Nebraska. As for many of the Mennonite immigrants, the first years were trying ones for Wiebe's group, and Cornelius Jansen loaned the settlers \$1000 to assist them in their beginnings.⁹⁸

The Burlington and Missouri also attempted to settle a large colony of Hutterian Brethren on its Nebraska lands in the summer of 1874. The Hutterian Brethren had originated in Austria as part of the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century and have continued to practice non-resistance and the community of goods in colonies they have established in England and in North and South America. The American press commonly regarded the Hutterites as Mennonites, though that was technically not true. In 1874 Peter Jansen informed the *Daily State Journal* that though the Hutterites had some of the distinguishing characteristics of Mennonites, they were not "regular Mennonites."⁹⁹ A group of Hutterian Brethren arrived on the *S. S. Hammonia* in New York City on July 19, 1874, and the approximately eighty families proceeded immediately to Nebraska under the charge of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad.¹⁰⁰ The group of approximately 250 adults and 150 children arrived in Lincoln on July 22, 1874, and the 400 Hutterites filled nine railroad coaches and one baggage car. The Burlington Railroad housed the immigrants in the Lincoln immigrant house, in the fair-

⁹⁸ Wiebe, *Founding of Gnadenau*, 99-101.

⁹⁹ Anonymous, "More Russians," *The Daily State Journal*, August 4, 1874.

¹⁰⁰ Bernhard Warkentin to David Goerz, July 20, 1874, July 21, 1874, and July 22, 1874, *Bernhard Warkentin Collection*; John F. Funk, "The Russian Emigration," *Herald of Truth*, August, 1874.

ground buildings, and at an old "Union House,"¹⁰¹ while the Burlington land agents showed the group its lands, especially 10,000 to 15,000 acres south of the Platte River.¹⁰² At first, the Hutterites were quite pleased with the Nebraska lands where they planned to settle. While the leaders were viewing the various Burlington lands the group made only the most necessary purchases in Lincoln, even though they appeared to be amply supplied with cash—the *New York Herald* had reported that the colony brought \$120,000 in gold along with them. In addition to farmers, mechanics, carpenters, blacksmiths, tinsmiths and shoemakers were found in the group, all intending to practice the community of goods in the Nebraska colony they planned to establish.¹⁰³

A large portion of the Hutterites soon decided, however, that the Dakota Territory—where some of their friends had already settled—was more appealing than Nebraska and left by train for Dakota.¹⁰⁴ An incident reported in the *Daily State Journal* revealed how difficult it could be for the immigrants to decide where to locate—disagreements concerning the final location sometimes even split families. A father of three or four boys was determined to journey to Dakota and his wife was equally determined to remain in Nebraska. A long argument in German and Russian settled nothing. One of the colony's leaders was called, and, on the floor of the immigrant house, counted out one thousand dollars in gold coin for the husband and another thousand for the wife. After the division was made, the couple shook hands and separated, the husband boarding the Dakota bound train, his wife remaining in Nebraska with the children.¹⁰⁵ It is likely that those who initially remained eventually also left Nebraska,

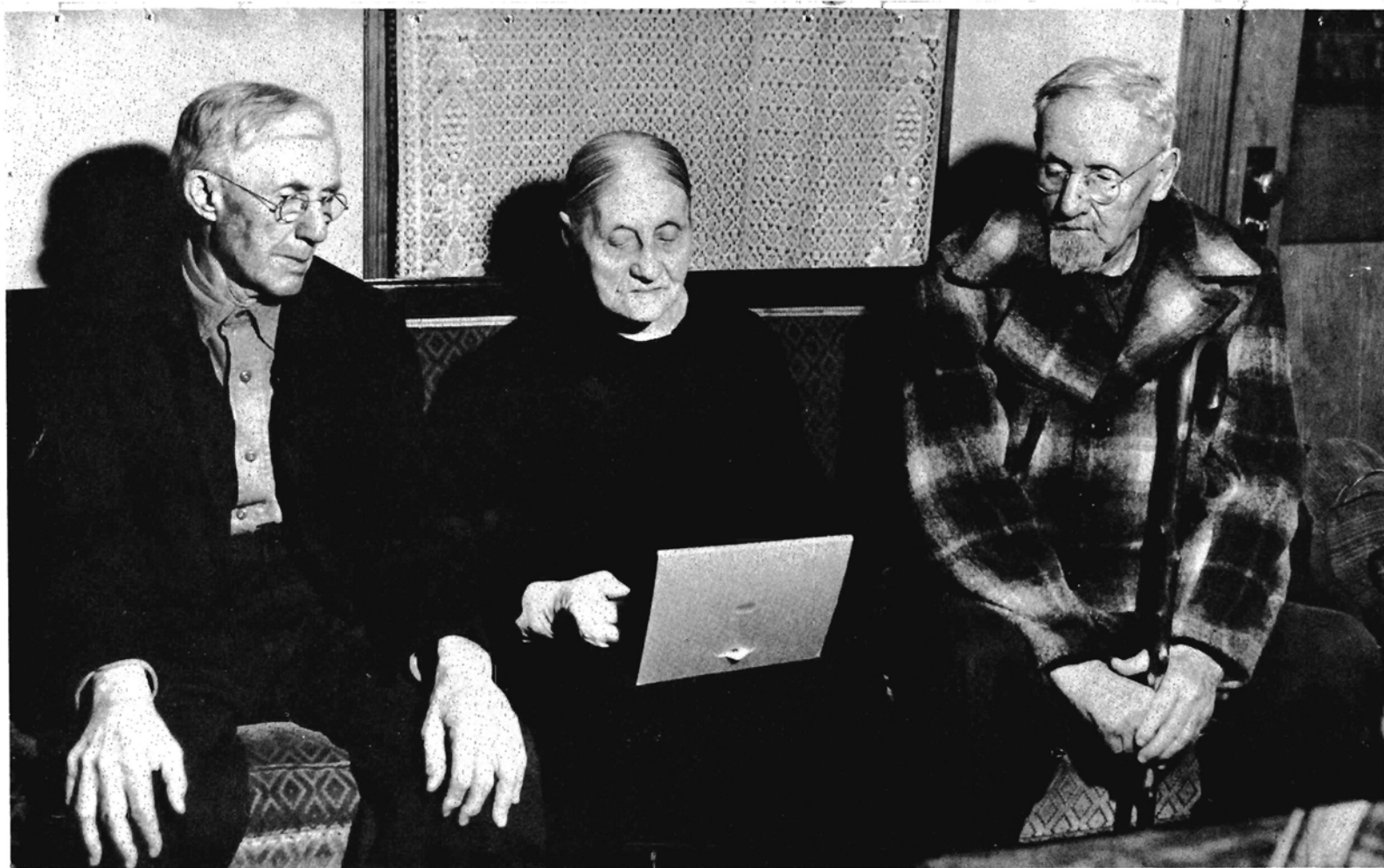
¹⁰¹ Anonymous, "A Big Accession," *The Daily State Journal*, July 23, 1874.

¹⁰² *The Beatrice Express*, July 30, 1874.

¹⁰³ Anonymous, "The Mennonites," *The Daily State Journal*, July 29, 1874.

¹⁰⁴ Anonymous, "Bound to Dakota," *The Daily State Journal*, August 8, 1874.

¹⁰⁵ Anonymous, "A Russian Divorce," *The Daily State Journal*, August 15, 1874.



Mennonite Pioneers of 1874 who came to Henderson: Joham W. Friesen,
Mrs. Peter P. Regier, Jacob J. Friesen (Courtesy Bethel College)



Peter Jansen on his favorite horse

for no Hutterite colonies were ever established in Nebraska, and the Nebraska newspapers did not mention that any Hutterites remained in Nebraska. When the first group of Alexanderwohl Mennonites arrived in Lincoln the *Daily State Journal* commented that "they are a better looking class of people than the blue-jacket men and women who were here a short time since [Hutterites], and who went up to enjoy the barrenness and inviting insalubrity of Dakota."¹⁰⁸

The Mennonite Board of Guardians estimated that approximately eighty Mennonite immigrant families, numbering over 400 persons, had chosen to make their homes in Nebraska by the fall of 1874.¹⁰⁷ The ensuing years brought more Mennonite immigrants to Nebraska, but the later arrivals tended to locate in the general area where their friends and former neighbors had earlier settled—often on the excess land the earlier settlers had purchased or reserved, or on lands purchased from other settlers, the government, or the railroad. In 1875 at least twenty additional families chose to settle in Nebraska,¹⁰⁸ and additional persons came in 1876,¹⁰⁹ 1877,¹¹⁰ and later years. Of the ten thousand Mennonites who emigrated from Russia to America during the Mennonite migration wave of 1873 to 1883, approximately one-half chose Kansas as their new home. The other five thousand Mennonites located in Nebraska, Dakota, and Minnesota.¹¹¹

The Burlington officials were well aware that they had not been as successful in colonizing Mennonites as they had hoped, but they were well satisfied with those settlers they had secured. Professor James D. Butler, Burlington

¹⁰⁸ *The Daily State Journal*, September 5, 1874.

¹⁰⁷ Krehbiel, "Second Report of the Mennonite Board of Guardians," *Herald of Truth*, November, 1874.

¹⁰⁸ John F. Funk, "The Emigration from Russia," *Herald of Truth*, September, 1875.

¹⁰⁹ A. E. Funk, "Russian Emigration," *Herald of Truth*, August, 1876; John Shenk, "Arrival of the Vaterland," *Herald of Truth*, September, 1876.

¹¹⁰ John F. Funk, "The Russian Emigration," *Herald of Truth*, August, 1877.

¹¹¹ Leibbrandt, "Emigration of Russian Mennonites," II, 33.

publicist,¹¹² explained in a pamphlet how the Mennonites utilized prairie grass for fuel and concluded that of all the Mennonite immigrants "the best class have made their homes in Nebraska, and in that State are to be found the most prosperous colonies."¹¹³ Thus, the early realization by Burlington officials of the desirability of securing Mennonite settlers, the carefully planned and executed advertising campaign directed specifically to them, the willingness to change state laws if necessary to provide more appealing conditions, the extremely liberal financial terms offered, and the great ability of A. E. Touzalin all contributed to the Burlington's success in settling some Mennonite immigrants on its Nebraska lands.

¹¹² Overton, *Burlington West*, 319.

¹¹³ James Davie Butler, *Cheap Fuel for the Prairies* (pamphlet probably written in the late 1870's, located in the Library of Congress, Washington D. C., photostat copy in the Bethel College Historical Library, North Newton, Kansas).