

DOMINION LANDS
INTELLIGENCE AND GUIDE OFFICE,
Winnipeg, Manitoba.
C. P. R. Station Platform.

Report on Mennonite Colonies 70-750
(Mr H. C. Jackson)

14
Winnipeg 9th September 1889.

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To The Hon^{ble} John Carling Esqr
Minister of Agriculture
of the Dominion of Canada
Ottawa.

Sir,
The Commissioner of Dominion
Lands, Winnipeg having been advised that some
of the Mennonites in the Eastern and Western
Reserves contemplated leaving the country in order
to settle on land in the United States, I received
orders to pay a visit to the Eastern Reserve, and
to ascertain the real state of affairs amongst these
desirable settlers.

I now have the honor herewith to submit
to you my report, with regard to the official visit
which I paid to the so-called Eastern Reserve of
the Mennonite settlement situated in townships
4. 5. 6. & 7. ranges 4. 5 & 6 East of the first Meridian
in the Province of Manitoba.

I left Winnipeg on the 28th August last
for Riverville, where I arrived in the evening, and
put up for the night. Here I got the necessary
information with regard to the best and nearest road
to be taken and early on the 29th August I started
on my mission.

~~Attached diagram will show the Mennonite villages
visited by me.~~

I first saw Peter Diek near Riverville, from
his place I went to Berhard Klüver, and then to
Peter Penner, Berhard Soatzky and Diek Penner.

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I then struck off in a South easterly direction towards the villages of Henboden and Grünfeld and thence southerly to Hochstadt, where I put up for the night with David Soewen, an intelligent & prosperous Mennonite of the settlement. On the 30th August I proceeded to the villages of Schönsee, Grünthal, Snadenfeld and Bergfeld returning at night again to Hochstadt, staying over here with David Unger.

On the 31st August I started in a northerly direction for Schönfeld, Rosenfeld, Chortiz arriving at night at the principal village of the Eastern Reserve, called Steinbach. Here I remained over on Sunday, inspecting a cheese Manufactory, Crist Mill, Saw Mill and some large outlying farms all erected by and belonging to Mennonites. This place deserves special mention. When some of the Mennonites who arrived in this country in 1875 located on the spot on which the village now stands, they assured me that then there was nothing but scrub and brush on the land, and some of these people who had all been accustomed to the open steppe or plains of Southern Russia, did not at all relish the appearance of the country here. Wise counsels however prevailed and after considerable labor we now find here large open fields of good soil yielding excellent crops, good pasturage and nice plantations, both useful and pleasant to the eye. In the gardens of Abraham Friesen and Klaas Reimer, I could not help admiring a large number of Plum, Cherry & Apple trees which every year I was told bear abundant fruit. The Plum & Cherry trees were a number of years ago transplanted from the bush and the fruit is said to improve every year. The two above named Mennonites have also many Maple and other shade trees planted around their farm steadings, giving same a very nice appearance indeed.

On Monday the 2^d September I continued my journey to St. Julagen and Bergthal where I arrived in the afternoon. I would have proceeded to some other village that day, but I was anxious to have a conversation with the (Schelste) or Priest of the Mennonites who lives here, and he not being at home I concluded to remain over night in Bergthal awaiting his return. I had a long and satisfactory interview with the Rev. gentleman next morning the 3^d September and intended to visit the villages of Blumenort and Blumenhof, but my time being limited I concluded to return that day to Winnipeg which I did, and where I arrived at night, after having on my way taken in the village of Blumengard.

The dwelling houses, barns & stables of the Mennonites are all after the same pattern and erected by themselves, substantially built of tamarac or spruce, plastered out and inside and mostly straw thatched. They appear to be cool in Summer and comfortable and warm in the Winter. The dwelling house generally connects by a door with the barn & stable, so that during the extreme cold in Winter the Mennonite can attend to his cattle without having to go outside. The lofts over the stable are filled with hay, and most Mennonites have also got a well of first class water in the stable, which of course never freezes during the severest Winter.

They all have vegetable gardens which in ordinary years produce plenty, this year however have suffered considerably both by the prolonged draught and the early frosts of the 2^d & 3^d of August last.

All the Mennonites according to their wealth possess more or less cattle, horses, pigs and poultry the latter in abundance. Some of the more prosperous have also started sheep farming, which they told me paid them well, and at different points I saw considerable flocks of sheep.

The grain crop in the Eastern Mennonite Reserve is this year I am sorry to say, rather poor, the cause of course being the extreme draught and excessive heat of the past season. The highest average yield per acre which I could ascertain were 11 1/2 to 12 bushels of wheat near Steinbach. Numerous other points however did not show more than from 3 to 5 bushels per acre. At one threshing at which I was present, the farmer did not obtain more than about 130 bushels of wheat of 30 acres of land. The grain in places will decidedly go it's hard, but there is also a good deal which will not grade, being shrivelled up by the excessive heat at the time it was in the milk. As far as I could ascertain all the Mennonites have used it's 1 quality only for seed.

Barley and Oats are very short and light indeed, especially the latter and what the Mennonites have harvested of these, they will probably have to use for their own cattle and horses. Flax has not been cultivated at all this year, or where any was put in, it never showed above ground.

Potatoes are good in size and mealy, but the yield on account of the night frosts in early August, as previously stated, will only be middling.

The health amongst the people is on the whole good, and notwithstanding the many drawbacks to their success this year, they mostly all seem to be content.

I met with some grumblers, who appeared to be inclined to leave their lands and go over to the United States where they have friends and relatives, parts of Kansas, Nebraska, Idaho and Oregon possess each a number of Mennonite settlements.

The greatest grievance however about which the Mennonites in this country complain, is that

They have not land enough for their fast increasing families in their Reserves here, and that even some of the land which they possess, is in many places too stony and sandy for proper and advantageous cultivation. This is especially observed to be the case near the villages of Gnadenfeld, Grünthal and Bergfeld.

When the Mennonites emigrated to this country in 1874. 75 & 76 many heads of families who then took up 160 acres homestead and some also 160 acres preemption had with them children from 10 years and upwards. These children have grown into men and women now, have married and have got issue of their own. The old homestead is not now sufficient to support the whole family. Where the father has had means he has bought land either adjoining or at some distance for one son or son in law as the case might be. He is however unable thus to provide for 3 or 4 boys or as many girls, and hence a keen desire on the part of the younger generation to look for pastures new. This is perhaps the principal reason why we have heard of dissatisfaction and Emigration schemes amongst the Mennonites. My attention was first drawn to this matter about the middle of last year, when I communicated same to the Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Winnipeg. No further steps however were then taken. I knew then, that the younger element amongst the Mennonites were on the move or were going to move sooner or later. The old people would willingly remain where they are, but if the young people go, it may not be so easy to keep the former back, as these people dread and are averse to separation from their kindred.

In conclusion I beg to say, that at the different interviews which I had with the principal

and most influential men of the Reserve, I did my utmost according to my Duty as Dominion Government Official to persuade these people that Canada its lands, laws and institutions, were far better and more suitable for them, than those of the United States and I believe my mission has thus far been successful.

In the Western or Southern Mennonite Reserve round Morris, Humboldt, Morden, Gretna &c. however the trouble is greater, notwithstanding that they have had better crops there than in the Eastern Reserve. The Western Reserve is much larger, contains a great many more young men who are also more enlightened, numbers of them knowing the English language thoroughly. These wish to spread out and unless good inducements are held out to retain them on this side of the boundary line, they may do a good deal of harm.

I have thought out a plan by which the thousands of acres of good vacant Government land in Southern Manitoba and Southern Alberta might be looked over by a Deputation of influential and able Mennonites from the Eastern Reserve, with the assistance of the Canada Pacific Railway Co., the carrying out of which of course entirely rests with you.

A similar report has been handed in by me to the Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Winnipeg.

I have the honor to be
Sir,

Your most obedient servant
Henry C. Jacobsen
Dominion Government Intelligence Officer.