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Source: Toews, Paul & Kevin Enns-Rempel, eds. *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874-2002, An Informal History*, pp. 14-27.

Published by: Kindred Productions (2002)

Stable URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/1304>

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Coming to North America: The Immigrants of the 1870s

Kevin Enns-Rempel

*T*he theme of migration has run through much of the Anabaptist and Mennonite story. From their very beginnings the Anabaptists were a despised and persecuted people, and this fact forced many of them to flee the harsh treatment of civil and religious rulers. As early as 1534 the first Dutch Anabaptists had fled to the area of Danzig (today Gdańsk) in present-day Poland. Because Poland was more tolerant of religious dissent than most other regions, these Dutch Anabaptists were soon followed by Mennonites from various parts of Europe. In Poland (or Prussia, as it is sometimes called), these diverse Mennonites created their own cultural tradition alongside their distinctive religious beliefs.

The Mennonites of Poland faced a new crisis when that region came under Prussian rule in 1772. This new government was less tolerant of Mennonite refusal to participate in the military. Further acquisition of land by Mennonites was prohibited, since military obligations were tied to land ownership. These new pressures caused some Polish Mennonites to consider the idea of migration once again. At about this same time, word had gone out from Russian Empress Catherine the Great that Russia was seeking settlers for lands in “South Russia,” which it recently had acquired from the Turkish Empire. Russia offered generous terms of land and religious freedom to any groups choosing to settle in this region. Many Polish Mennonites chose to accept Catherine’s offer, and the first group established the Chortitza Colony along the Dnieper River in 1789. The larger Molotschna Colony was founded in 1803, and Mennonites continued to migrate into these colonies into the mid-nineteenth century. It was in the Molotschna Colony in 1860 that the Mennonite Brethren Church was born.

The new Mennonite Brethren Church had scarcely established itself when new discussions of large-scale migration began among the Russian Mennonites. Once again, the issue had to do with government policies pertaining to Mennonites and other minority groups in Russia. The Russian government had embarked on a policy of “Russification,” in which these minority groups would be required to give up their special privileges and acculturate more completely into the larger Russian society. Most significantly, the government stated that Mennonites would no longer receive exemption from military service. While military service is most often cited as the chief concern leading to migration, many Mennonites were equally (or more) concerned with losing control over their schools, language, local colony governance and cultural identity. All of these issues caused some Russian Mennonites to reconsider their place in that country.

Negotiations with the Russian government eventually resulted in the establishment of an alternative service system, but even this failed to satisfy all Mennonites; a significant percentage of them began to contemplate migration. From 1873 to 1884 as many as 18,000 Mennonites in

This sod building was an early meeting place for the Kirk (Colo.) MB Church.
(CMBS Fresno)



The home of Elder Abraham Schellenberg, near Moundridge, Kansas, ca. 1890-1891. Left to right: Peter L. Schellenberg, Katharina Schellenberg, Helena Schellenberg, Maria Schellenberg. (CMBS Hillsboro)

Russia emigrated to North America, a number that represented almost one-third of the total Mennonite population in that country.

Of the 18,000 immigrants arriving in North America, nearly 8,000 settled in the Canadian province of Manitoba, and about 10,000 made their homes in Minnesota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas. Canada offered more firm promises of religious freedom and military exemption than did the United States, and so in many cases the most culturally and religiously conservative Mennonites settled in Manitoba. The United States, on the other hand, offered no firm commitments regarding military service, other than a vague promise that demands for such service would be very unlikely. The fact that no widespread demand for military service had ever been made by the United States (except during its Civil War) led most of these Mennonites to believe that their pacifist beliefs would be safeguarded even without formal legal guarantees from the government.

The Mennonite Brethren, all of whom settled in the United States, made up only a small percentage of all Mennonites who migrated to North America. It is estimated that perhaps four hundred Mennonite Brethren members migrated during the years 1874-1880, representing roughly one-third of the group's membership in Russia before migration. The addition of children and other non-member individuals would have increased the size of the total Mennonite Brethren immigrant community, though it remained a tiny portion of all immigrants.

These Mennonite Brethren settlers were not only small in number, they also tended to remain isolated from the other Mennonites. This can be explained in part by the lingering mutual feelings of intolerance between Mennonite Brethren and the larger Mennonite Church in Russia.

Many Mennonite Brethren still felt the sting of hostility and harassment from the larger Mennonite Church in Russia, and brought those feelings with them to North America. These other Mennonites, on the other hand, pointed to a "holier-than-thou" attitude on the part of Mennonite Brethren that caused them to hold the others at arm's length.



Anna Neuman and a friend in front of a sod house on the American prairies, undated. (CMBS Fresno)

Heinrich Voth and the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada



In 1883 the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches sent Heinrich Voth to evangelize in Manitoba. Elder Voth accepted the work with dedication and enthusiasm. He endured hardship and persecution during the next several decades as he returned to Manitoba repeatedly.

Some in Manitoba opposed Voth and the message he preached. While traveling down a road one day he was stopped by several men and beaten quite badly; but thanks to the Lord's protection and his heavy winter clothing he was not severely injured.

In one village three leaders, including the mayor, were determined to stop Voth's preaching. They came to his meeting in a school house to capture him, then send him back to Minnesota. The only empty seats left in the building were on the platform directly behind the speaker. As they sat there waiting for the right moment to act, they heard the word of God preached clearly and fearlessly. The mayor was convicted of sin and gave his life to the Lord that evening.

Another time Voth was escorted to the United States border by some of his persecutors and forbidden to return. Undaunted, he walked back into Canada to witness and preach.

Heinrich Voth's fearlessness and determination eventually resulted in the creation of the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church in 1886, the first Mennonite Brethren congregation in Canada.

—Adapted from *Witness Extraordinary: A Biography of Elder Heinrich Voth, 1851-1919*, by J. A. Froese (Board of Christian Literature, 1975).

During both the planning and implementation stages of the migration, Mennonite Brethren tended to remain on the periphery. No Mennonite Brethren representatives joined the group of twelve delegates who visited North America in 1873 to scout out potential settlement sites and negotiate with government officials. This prevented the Mennonite Brethren from making contact with American Mennonites who had established programs to assist the Russian Mennonite immigrants. Further contributing to their isolation was the fact that most Mennonite Brethren immigrants came to North America somewhat later than the first major migration waves of 1874-1875, and in poorly-organized, scattered groups. This meant that they received less assistance from the migration aid committees, most of whom had exhausted their resources with the larger, better-organized groups of earlier immigrants.

Despite their small numbers and isolation, the Mennonite Brethren did succeed in establishing eleven congregations in the United States by 1880: Ebenfeld (Marion County, Kansas), 1874; Henderson (York & Hamilton Counties, Nebraska), 1876; Turner County, South Dakota, 1876; Cottonwood County, Minnesota, 1877; Hastings (Adams County, Nebraska), 1878; Sutton (Clay County, Nebraska), 1878; Buhler (Reno County, Kansas), 1878; Culbertson (Franklin County, Nebraska), 1879; Boone County, Nebraska, 1879; Woodson County, Kansas, 1879; and Goessel (Harvey County, Kansas), 1880.

The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church, established in Crimea in 1869, was also gripped with the desire for migration. The Krimmer migration was unique in several ways. First, almost the entire group left Russia in a single unit of thirty-five families. This was quite different than the roughly one-third of Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite Church members who chose to migrate during these years. Second, they were among the earliest Mennonites to leave Russia, departing that country on 30 May 1874. Third, this group, more than any other, chose to organize its villages in Kansas according to the Russian Mennonite village pattern. Whereas most other Mennonites settling in the United States accepted the scattered "checkerboard" settlement pattern encouraged by government homesteading policies, the Krimmer settlers created more compact settlements in which families lived in close proximity along a common village street.

The first such village was established in Marion County, Kansas, soon after the settlers arrived there. It was named "Gnadenau" (Grace Meadow), and the KMB church there was given the same name. Two other villages, Hoffnungsthal and Alexanderfeld, were soon established in the same area, though residents of all three villages attended the Gnadenau Church. Other Krimmer churches soon followed, at Springfield, Kansas (1878), and Inman, Kansas (1879). In 1881 the KMB established its only congregation in Nebraska at Jansen.

As already noted, all Mennonite Brethren immigrants to North America during the 1870s settled in the United States. The first

A restless and ever-moving people

Mennonite Brethren communities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were characterized by considerable mobility, as families moved about in search of greener pastures. One example of this phenomenon may be found in the family of Peter T. and Katharina Duerksen. Though more extreme than most families, the Duerksens graphically illustrate the restless searching for new opportunity that was so common among Mennonite Brethren families at this time.

Peter T. Duerksen was born in 1881 in Hillsboro, Kansas, the son of Russian Mennonite Brethren immigrants who came to this country in the 1870s. In 1898, Peter's family moved to Weatherford, Oklahoma. He was married there in 1903 to Katharina Neufeld. Katharina had been born in Russia in 1883, and migrated with her parents to Hillsboro in 1891 before moving on to Oklahoma.

In 1909 Peter and Katharina Duerksen left Oklahoma, and began a remarkable odyssey across western North America that would continue for the next quarter-century. They moved first to the recently established Mennonite Brethren settlement at Escondido, California, near San Diego. A few hard winters and loss of church leadership caused the Duerksens to leave Escondido in 1915, and move north to another new Mennonite settlement at Fairmead, in Madera County. They stayed in Fairmead for about two years, and after living briefly in the nearby town of Madera, went to Reedley, California. They remained there until 1919, at which time the family left California and went to Dallas, Oregon. After only a few months, they moved to Portland and then returned south by ship to San Francisco, where they stayed briefly before settling at Lodi, California.

The 1920s were as full of movement as had been the previous decade. From about 1921 to 1924, the Duerksens lived in Reedley; then in Bakersfield until 1926. In that year they moved to a new, short-lived Mennonite settlement at Kerman, in western Fresno County. Disillusioned with that location, the Duerksens returned to Lodi later in 1926. Turning his sights further afield, Peter Duerksen moved his family to Mud Lake, Idaho, in 1927. That location did not live up to the land agent's claims, and the family moved to Salem, Oregon, in 1928. It was back to Bakersfield later that year and then on to the Fraser Valley of British Columbia in 1929. Three days of incessant rain in B.C. soured Peter Duerksen on that location, so he hooked the as-yet unloaded trailer back to their vehicle and returned to Salem. They stayed there until 1930 and then moved back to Bakersfield.

In 1931 another land agent caught Duerksen's ear and lured the family to Coldwater, Texas. Within a year, however, they had packed to move back to Oregon. But first Peter decided to visit relatives in Weatherford, Oklahoma, whom he had not seen for twenty-three years. He died of a stroke there in 1932. Katharina Duerksen and the children went ahead with the move to Dallas, but soon relocated to Salem in search of work. Within a year the family moved again to Bakersfield. In 1934 Katharina was struck by a car and killed while crossing a street, thus ending the saga of the wandering Duerksen family.

—Based on interviews with Erma Duerksen Neufeld, Dallas, Oregon.



Heinrich Adrian in front of his adobe house, Turner County, South Dakota.
(CMBS Hillsboro)

Mennonite Brethren congregation in Canada was established not by migration from Russia, but through evangelistic efforts by these American Mennonite Brethren. Elder Heinrich Voth of Minnesota began visiting Mennonites in the West Reserve of southern Manitoba in 1884. His preaching resulted in several conversions, and in 1888 sixteen members organized the Burwalde Mennonite Brethren Church near the present-day town of Winkler.

By the end of the 1870s, the migration of Mennonite Brethren from Russia had slowed to a trickle. While others continued to migrate throughout the 1880s and 1890s,

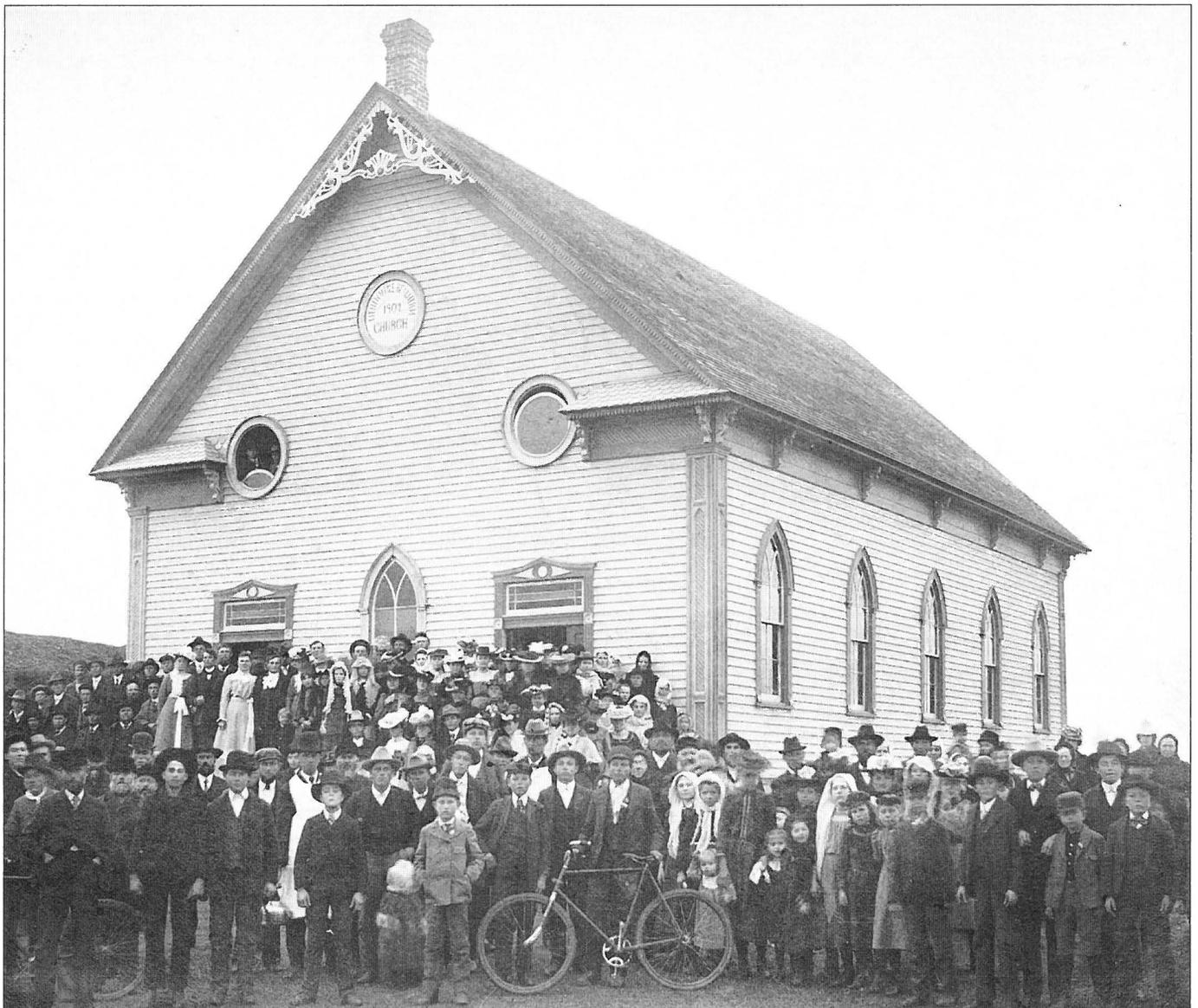
their numbers were very small. Almost all of these initial immigrants had settled in a narrow band running from north to south between the 97th and 98th meridians. Only the settlement to the northeast in Cottonwood County, Minnesota, and to the west in Culbertson, Nebraska, broke the almost perfectly straight line of Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren settlements in North America by 1880.



Brothers Isaak, Martin and C.E. Harder making hay on their farm near Henderson, Nebraska, 1914. (CMBS Fresno)

This arrangement would remain intact for most of the 1880s. While new congregations were established, most were located in the original settlement area. Perhaps the most significant development during this decade was the establishment of several Krimmer Mennonite Brethren congregations in South Dakota. No Krimmer immigrants had settled in that state, and relatively few moved there from Kansas. These South Dakota congregations came into existence largely through Krimmer evangelistic efforts among “non-communal” Hutterites. These Hutterites had come to North America from Russia simultaneously with Mennonites, and all settled in the southeastern corner of South Dakota. Though Hutterites are known for their belief in “community of goods,” a significant percentage of those who migrated from Russia at this time did not live in such communities. These non-communal Hutterites, isolated from the influence of community life, were particularly open to the influence of evangelists from nearby Mennonite groups. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren were among the most successful in such evangelistic efforts. Elder Jacob A. Wiebe of the Gnadenuau KMB Church in Kansas visited this area as early as 1884, and by 1886 several people of Hutterite background had been baptized and joined the KMB Church. Many more non-communal Hutterites joined the KMB during the ensuing years, until they became the majority of that conference’s membership.

Members of the South Fairview (Okla.) MB Church in front of their meeting house, constructed in 1902. (CMBS Fresno)





Windsor Grammar School was the first meeting place of the new Reedley (Calif.) MB Church. This photo was taken in 1905.

(CMBS Fresno)

These narrowly-defined boundaries of Mennonite Brethren settlement, however, would soon change dramatically. Beginning in 1891, Mennonite Brethren individuals and families began a remarkable process of scattering across the western United States and Canada, a process that would continue almost unabated for nearly forty years. From its original base of eleven communities located in four states, Mennonite Brethren of the original 1870s immigration would establish congregations in approximately eighty-six communities across fifteen states and provinces between 1891 and 1929. This does not include the new immigrants who began arriving from Russia in the late 1920s; that story will be told in another chapter. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren participated in this process as well, though to a much smaller extent than the Mennonite Brethren.

Why did so many Mennonite Brethren choose to uproot themselves so soon after arriving in a new homeland? They had, after all, scarcely established themselves in their original communities before many of them began moving to new and often far-flung locations. For the most part, they sought new homes for economic reasons. As more settlers, both Mennonite and otherwise, flocked to the communities where Mennonites had initially settled, available agricultural land became scarce and the prices for that land increased accordingly.

Most Mennonite Brethren farmers (and almost all of them were farmers) at the time desired to help their children establish themselves on their own farms in close proximity to the original family farm. As the land supply decreased (and the price of what was left increased), however, this goal became increasingly difficult to achieve. The fact that Mennonite Brethren families of the time commonly had six or more children (sometimes more than a dozen) meant that many of them could not fulfill the goal of farm ownership in their original communities. Subdividing farms among so many children was not a practical option, since larger farms were more viable



than small ones. Some without land of their own rented farms, though this provided less economic security than actual farm ownership. Still others left the farm and sought occupations in nearby towns. The remaining option was to seek more plentiful land elsewhere, on which extended families could re-establish themselves. This was the option pursued by many Midwestern Mennonite Brethren, and was the single largest factor fueling the migration of this period.

The first Mennonite Brethren known to have ventured out of the original 1870s settlement area was a small group from Manitoba that moved to Dallas, Oregon, in about 1891. Together with members of other Mennonite groups, they fled land shortages and harsh winters in Manitoba for the more inviting climate of Oregon's Willamette Valley. Concerned that these far-flung settlers would be lost to the church, the Mennonite Brethren conference sent Elder Heinrich Voth of Minnesota and Rev. Gerhard Wiebe of Manitoba to minister to them. In late 1891 Elder Voth helped organize the first Mennonite Brethren congregation on the West Coast. By spring of 1892 it had a membership of seventeen.

The little church would not survive long. Some members moved away within the first few years, while most others joined a nearby German Baptist congregation. By 1896 the congregation had dissolved, and not until 1904 would enough new Mennonite Brethren settlers arrive in the Dallas area to re-establish a congregation there.

At about the same time another group of Mennonite Brethren moved from Nebraska to Portland, Oregon. These were mostly "Volga Germans" who had joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia shortly before the migration to North America. They for the most part settled in Hastings, Sutton, and Culbertson, Nebraska, largely separate from the "Low German" Mennonite Brethren who dominated the other original settlements. Several families from these Nebraska Volga German Mennonite Brethren groups had migrated to Portland by 1891, where they organized a congregation. By 1895 it had a membership of thirty-five, but eventually lost membership and closed in 1937.

Members of the Henry J. Martens excursion sightseeing in Riverside, California. Martens led several groups of Mennonite land seekers to California to see land he was selling in Kern County.

(CMBS Fiestio)

Another small group of Mennonite Brethren at about this time set their sights on land somewhat closer to home, establishing the Kirk Mennonite Brethren Church in the eastern part of Colorado. This congregation later came to be known as the Joes Mennonite Brethren Church, and existed until 1987.

Though Oregon and Colorado were the first destinations for Mennonite Brethren land seekers, these isolated outposts were only a tentative preview of the mass movement that was soon to come. That movement began in earnest in 1892, when the first Mennonite Brethren established settlements in the newly-opened territory of Oklahoma.

The present-day state of Oklahoma became part of the United States in 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase. As early as 1820, this region was considered “Indian Territory,” and white settlement was forbidden there. Despite these (and many other) promises to the Indians, the federal government opened Cheyenne and Arapaho land to homesteaders in April 1892. Mennonite Brethren who took up homesteads in this area eventually established communities in Okeene, Corn, Bessie and Hitchcock.

An even larger influx of settlers arrived when the Cherokee Outlet in northwestern Oklahoma was opened for settlement on 16 September 1893. Homesteads in the Cherokee Outlet were made available through a spectacular “land run,” in which over 100,000 prospective settlers lined up along the northern and southern borders of the strip. At the signal, they literally raced across the line to stake out and thereby lay claim to 160-acre plots of land. Many Mennonites, including Mennonite Brethren, participated in the land run, and many were successful in claiming homesteads. A few, however, lost land when they refused to fight others who falsely asserted prior claims to land the Mennonites had staked out. By the time the dust had settled, Mennonite Brethren land runners had established communities in or near Fairview, Ringwood, Lahoma, Enid, Medford, Lookout and Coy.

Krimmer Mennonite Brethren settlers also participated in these land runs, though in far fewer numbers than Mennonite Brethren. Only two KMB congregations—at Medford and Weatherford—were established during this time, neither of which survived beyond the first few years.

Other Mennonite Brethren looked north for new lands. The most significant Canadian settlement was to the present-day province of Saskatchewan, then still a part of the North West Territories. The first Mennonite Brethren settlement there was near Laird in 1892, but many others followed over the next several years—Waldheim (1898), Dalmeny (1901), Borden (1903), Main Centre (1904), Herbert (1905), Aberdeen, Flowing Well and Hepburn (1906), Hodgeville (1907), Woodrow (1909), Rush Lake and Lichtfeld (1910), Landis (1911), Turnhill and Greenfarm (1912) and Fox Valley (1914). While some of these Canadian settlers were from Manitoba, many others crossed the border from the United States and took up settlement in a new land.

Mennonite Brethren Settlements Established Out of the 1870s Migration That Survived Twenty Years or Less:

Woodson County, Kansas: 1876-1892
 Boone County, Nebraska: 1879-1899
 Coffey County, Kansas: 1883-1884
 Parker, South Dakota: 1896-1912
 Westfield, Texas: 1897-1900
 Medford, Oklahoma: 1899-1909
 Pueblo, Colorado: 1902-1914
 Hitchcock, Oklahoma: 1902-1919
 Lahoma, Oklahoma: 1902-1919
 Caddo, Oklahoma: 1905-1919
 Hamilton, Kansas: 1907-ca. 1910
 Nolan, Michigan: 1907-1919
 Hooker, Oklahoma (KMB): 1907-1919
 Henrietta, Texas: 1910-1915
 Lichtfeld, Saskatchewan: 1910-1920
 Landis, Saskatchewan: 1911-1912
 Herington, Kansas: 1912-1925
 Donald, Oregon: 1913-1915
 Vinita, Oklahoma: 1913-1919
 Littlefield, Texas: 1915-1923
 Chinook, Montana: 1916-1923
 Goodrich, North Dakota: 1916-1936
 Norheim, Montana: 1917-1936
 Kingwood, Oklahoma: 1918-1928
 Garden City, Kansas (KMB): 1918-1936
 Lake Charles, Louisiana: 1920-1923
 Aberdeen, Idaho: 1920-1926
 Cleveland, North Dakota: 1921-1925
 Chasely, North Dakota (KMB): 1921-1932
 Detroit, Michigan: 1923-1933
 Tuttle, North Dakota: 1924-1936
 Keenesburg, Colorado: 1927-1934
 Chico, California: 1931-1932



Still others went north without quite crossing into Canada. Promotional efforts by the Great Northern Railroad Company attracted many Mennonite Brethren to North Dakota, where they established settlements in Munich (1897), McClusky (1902), Mountain City (1905), Velva (1909), Goodrich (1910), Kief (1911), Dodgen (1912), Cleveland (1921), Sawyer and Tuttle (1924). A similar but much smaller migration took a few Mennonite Brethren into eastern Montana beginning in 1916 and 1917.

*Dedication of the Lustre
(Montana) MB Church,
1924.*

(CMBS Fresno)

Though few did so immediately, it was probably inevitable that large-scale Mennonite Brethren migration would eventually reach the West Coast. Other than the above-mentioned settlements in Oregon and a very short-lived community founded in Walla Walla, Washington, in 1896, West Coast settlement did not really begin until after the turn of the century. The first such significant settlement was to Reedley, California, beginning in 1904. A Mennonite Brethren congregation was established there the following year, and the new community quickly experienced rapid growth. By 1920 it had over five hundred members, and was the largest Mennonite Brethren congregation in North America. So successful was the Reedley community that it became a sort of “gold standard” by which other new Mennonite settlements were judged. Promoters of other Mennonite communities would claim that their location was “as good as Reedley” when they wished to attract the attention of potential settlers.

Other Mennonite Brethren settlements in California soon followed. Church members living in various parts of the Los Angeles Basin (some of whom had arrived already in the 1890s) pulled themselves together into a loosely-knit group and gathered for quarterly meetings beginning in 1905. Some of them ventured further south to Escondido beginning in 1907. Of particular public interest was a group of over two hundred Midwestern Mennonites (mostly Mennonite

Brethren) who purchased land in Kern County from Kansas Mennonite Brethren land agent Henry J. Martens. The town, known as Martensdale, collapsed a few months later when settlers learned that Martens had not owned the land he sold to them. Evicted by the true owners, and unable to recover the money and Midwestern land they had given to Martens, most of these now-homeless settlers started over at new locations around Bakersfield or Reedley.

California soon became the strongest magnet for Mennonite Brethren families seeking new land. Additional settlements sprang up at Fairmead (1913), Lodi (1915), Shafter (1918), Livingston (1922), Orland (1923) and Chico (1931). Krimmer Mennonite Brethren entered the state in 1910 when John Z. Kleinsasser and his extended family purchased land near Dinuba and established the Zion KMB Church—the only congregation of that conference ever founded on the West Coast.

One might have expected this West Coast settlement pattern to have extended into Canada as well, but in fact very few Mennonite Brethren of the 1870s migrations settled in British Columbia. The only congregation established there during these years was in Vanderhoof, over



The short-lived Vanderhoof (B.C.) MB Church met in this log building.
(CMBS Fresno)

three hundred miles north of Vancouver. Founded in 1918, the Vanderhoof congregation disbanded only a few years later. The population of Mennonite Brethren in British Columbia, of course, would eventually grow quite large, but most of these people were part of the 1920s and 1940s migrations from the Soviet Union.

Most of these wandering Mennonite Brethren moved in a more-or-less westerly direction. That was, after all, the direction of the frontier, and a farming people such as they were naturally drawn toward the frontier. Yet a few Mennonite Brethren turned farther south and even east in their search for new settlements. Texas attracted the first such “non-conformist” settlers. Before the turn of the century there were small Mennonite Brethren communities in Westfield (north of



Houston) and the Richmond/East Bernard/Rosenberg area (southeast of Houston). Both settlements were plagued by outbreaks of malaria, and nature dealt an even harder blow on 8 September 1900 when a massive hurricane struck the Texas coast at Galveston. Two mothers and two children from the Mennonite Brethren community at Rosenberg were killed in the storm, in addition to extensive property damage. By the end of 1900 all Mennonite Brethren had apparently left these settlements.

Building a house in the Mennonite Brethren Settlement at Lake Charles, Louisiana, in the early 1920s. (CMBBS Fresno)

Fifteen years would pass before more Mennonite Brethren ventured into Texas, this time to the northwestern part of the state. Congregations were eventually established at Littlefield (1915) and Coldwater (1928). The only group of Mennonite Brethren to venture back into southern Texas established a community at Premont in 1927. None of these congregations still exist today.

Even more unlikely were Mennonite Brethren settlements during this time in Michigan and Louisiana. In 1906 several families from Corn, Oklahoma, moved to Nolan, Michigan, where a Mennonite Brethren congregation was established the following year. Most families did not stay for long, and by 1919 all of them had left the area. A few years later, in 1923, several families from various other places had moved to Detroit, where a loosely-organized congregation existed for perhaps ten years. The settlement at Lake Charles, Louisiana, meanwhile, took shape in 1918. By 1920 it had a Sunday school attendance of one hundred. By 1923, however, a combination of wet weather, unfamiliar agricultural methods, and malaria, were driving most Mennonite Brethren settlers away from the area. Minister J. P. Wall left in 1924 and the congregation dissolved soon thereafter.

By the 1930s this unorganized, undisciplined movement of Mennonite Brethren across the West had for the most part come to a close. Migration into the region did not end, but it took on a different character. Subsequent migration flowed either into well-established rural communities

or—more often—into urban areas. The new demands and opportunities of a wartime economy during the 1940s did much to pull Mennonite Brethren away from the search for agricultural opportunity and into the cities. They increasingly looked to occupations in industry and the professions for their livelihood, and thus the ceaseless wandering in search of greener agricultural pastures became less important. This movement of Mennonite Brethren into the cities and professions became the dominant demographic theme of the post-World War II era, and brought to a close a unique era in the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church.