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Henry J. Martens and the Mennonite Land Company:
Benevolence, Entrepreneurship, or Fraud?

Leland Harder & Kevin Enns-Rempel

The decades around the beginning of the twentieth century were times of socio-economic change and instability within the North American Mennonite community. As the availability of desirable farm land in established Mennonite communities decreased and land prices correspondingly increased, large numbers of members left these communities to seek their fortunes in new locations. Attracted by inexpensive land only recently made accessible by expanding railroad systems, they established new communities across the western United States and Canada. Some of these communities blossomed into significant population centers, others withered and died almost as quickly as they began.

Most of the Mennonites who became involved in this migration did so with the intention of settling on their own land and helping to create new communities similar to those they had left behind. A smaller number found their economic opportunity not in their own resettlement but in the land-hunger of their fellow Mennonites. They bought land for speculative purposes. An ambitious corps of Mennonite land agents sprang up to help direct the migration of their fellow church members and, not incidentally, to make a profit in the process. These agents promoted land from Canada to Mexico and almost every region in between, which they described in the most glowing of terms, assuring prospective buyers that their particular site was destined to become the greatest of all western Mennonite settlements.

Perhaps none of these Mennonite land agents was as colorful and intriguing as Henry J. Martens. Martens was likely without peer in his ability to promote himself and his product. This skill brought him some renown and even adoration within midwestern Mennonite communities, but it also brought him shame and condemnation from others who were badly abused or deeply concerned by the way that skill was implemented. The story of Martens' controversial entrepreneurial activities is enlightening both as an individual biographical

study and as an examination of the socio-economic factors at work in the midwestern Mennonite community of his time.

Henry J. Martens was born on November 28, 1867, in the Kuban Colony of Russia. His parents, Jacob and Anna (Schmidt) Martens, were members of the Mennonite Brethren Church and joined several other families from that church in settling this region during the 1860s. Henry's father may have been the same Jacob Martens who signed the community's 1863 petition to the Ministry of Crown Lands¹ and was subsequently listed as a member of the Wohldemfürst Mennonite Brethren Church. The Martens family remained in the Kuban for all of young Henry's growing-up years. He was baptized and joined the Wohldemfürst Church in 1887, and two years later married Liese Giesbrecht. Liese's parents were Jacob and Gertrude Dyck Giesbrecht, and her father had served as a Kuban Colony overseer.² She became a member of the Wohldemfürst Church in 1892. The young couple remained in the Kuban for about ten years after their marriage, and four children were born to them there.

The family of Henry J. and Liese Giesbrecht Martens emigrated from the Kuban in 1899, leaving parents and siblings behind. With others from the Kuban, they settled in Washita County, Oklahoma. They rented a farm north of the town of Corn and joined the local Mennonite Brethren Church. Martens wanted to purchase a quarter section of land, but lack of financial resources prevented him from doing so.³ In 1903 the Martens family moved from Oklahoma to Hillsboro, Kansas, where Henry and Liese joined the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church. By 1907, they had four more children, two born in Oklahoma and two in Kansas.

¹Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* [*Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910): in Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichten*], trans. and ed. J.B. Toews et al., (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), 410.

²C.P. Toews, Heinrich Friesen and Arnold Dyck, *The Kuban Settlement [Die Kubaner Ansiedlung]*, trans. Herbert Giesbrecht, Echo Historical Series, no. 9 (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), 36.

³"Lokales Allerlei," *Der Deutsche Westen* [Hereafter DDW], 14 January 1909, 1.

EARLY IMAGES OF HENRY J. MARTENS

Three images emerge in reminiscences about the early Henry J. Martens. The first had to do with his entrepreneurship, an identity that reportedly started during his last years in Russia.⁴ Soon after his arrival in Oklahoma, he was buying and selling livestock.⁵ In Hillsboro Martens became a sales agent for the Dr. Peter Fahrney Company, selling Magen-Stärker and Alpen Kräuter.⁶ For awhile he was negotiating to buy the production rights to Schlagwasser, and became known as "Home Cure Martens." Later he expanded his wares to include the De Laval Cream Separator, in which trade he became known also as "Creamery Martens." Soon he acquired a third nickname—"Land Agent Martens,"⁷ and it was in the real estate business that the early images of the man were woven into a career that completely absorbed him for the next six years.

The second image of Martens had to do with his piety. "Wherever Mr. Martens went, he was sure to attend midweek prayer service with a big Bible under his arm. Such a man was deemed honest and trustworthy."⁸ It was said that on board the ship from Russia, "he played the role of the preacher."⁹ Although he belonged to the Mennonite Brethren Church, he readily attended meetings in General Conference Mennonite churches.¹⁰ After attending a camp meeting of the Seventh-day Adventists, "he was all enthusiastic about it and said that for a long time he had not so enjoyed himself."¹¹ Nor did he hesi-

⁴B. H. Janzen, interview with Leland Harder, 4 Oct. 1989.

⁵Henry E. Dahl, interview with Leland Harder, 16 March 1987.

⁶Ibid.

⁷A.L. Schellenberg, "Die Geschichte des 'Der Deutsche Westen,' DDW, 29 Dec. 1910, 4.

⁸Regina M. Becker, *A Bundle of Living: Recollections of a Shafter Pioneer* (Shafter, Calif.: Shafter Historical Society, 1986), 16.

⁹B. H. Janzen, interview with Leland Harder, 4 Oct. 1989.

¹⁰DDW, 19 January 1909, 5. [?]

¹¹"Lokales Allerlei," DDW, 3 Sep. 1908, 8.

tate to mix his piety with business. An Oklahoma minister with whom he stayed overnight asked Martens to pray during evening devotions. Martens prayed, "We thank Thee, Lord, for the security Thou wilt give us in heaven, but Thou knowest that we also need security here on earth."¹² A Hillsboro farmer to whom Martens sold land in western Kansas said that when he returned with papers to sign, he said in Low German, "*Ea wie dit Papia unjaschrieve, welle wie onns hankjnee'e enn baede*" ("Before we sign this paper, let's kneel down and pray").¹³

The third image of Martens was his paternalism and patronage. He was a father figure in the settlements he established, and the people wanted him to attend their special family celebrations.¹⁴ He was called their *Grossgutbesitzer*, their "large land patron."¹⁵ It was said that "the people love him" and that "he has something in himself that attracts people to him."¹⁶ When starting a new settlement he talked of providing land and buildings for worship and education. Before his home town of Hillsboro had an institution of higher learning, he promoted this cause wherever he went to sell land in Mennonite Brethren communities.¹⁷ Abraham E. Janzen's history of Tabor College lists all the advance contributions to the cause of opening a college in Hillsboro, and the names of Henry and Liese Martens top the list of contributors.¹⁸

¹²Henry E. Dahl, interview with Leland Harder, 16 March 1987.

¹³Henry J. Schultz, interview with Leland Harder, n.d.

¹⁴Heinrich Janzen, correspondence from Menno, Kansas, *DDW*, 26 Nov. 1908, 3.

¹⁵Heinrich Janzen, correspondence from Syracuse, Kansas, *DDW*, 6 Feb. 1908, 2.

¹⁶"Notizen aus Hillsboro," *DDW*, 13 Feb. 1908, 5.

¹⁷"Lokales Allerlei," *DDW*, 20 Feb. 1908, 5.

¹⁸A. E. Janzen, *A History of Tabor College*, part one (Hillsboro, Kans.: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1958), 18-20.

FACTORS IN LAND DEALING SUCCESS

Why were hundreds of Mennonite families willing to buy land from land agents like Martens, some to leave their communities in the prairie states and establish new settlements in Michigan, western Kansas and California? There were three main factors. First was a desire for economic opportunity for landless Mennonites, not unlike that experienced in Russia, where over half of the Mennonite population in the two main Ukrainian colonies was landless by 1860.¹⁹ Martens pitched his commercials to young families with limited means to acquire their own farms and to immigrants from Russia seeking a new economic start. In both countries the size of family was still large, and only one or two out of a family of eight or more children could inherit the family farm and keep it intact. The amount of available land was declining and the price of it increasing. The younger generation had few choices. They could rent a farm or work as farm laborers, they could move to town and pursue non-agricultural employment, or they could try to get a farm of their own somewhere else on the North American frontier.²⁰

The second factor was a phenomenon called "land fever," the widespread tendency of aspiring American farmers to invest surplus or borrowed funds in cheap land on the frontier in the hope of realizing a profit as land prices increased. This was a new phenomenon in the experience of the Russian Mennonites but certainly not new in America. In the ideology of the American land distribution system the manifest goal was the so-called family farm, but in a highly pragmatic capitalistic system the land distribution policies offered individuals who were otherwise disadvantaged in the competitive struggle of life an opportunity to make a new start in an occupation that was free from many of the requirements imposed by competitive industry. Rural sociologist Roy H. Holmes observed that while the land policies gave ownership

¹⁹James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press Limited, 1989), 196.

²⁰David Haury, "Hard the Road to Oklahoma," in *Growing Faith: General Conference Mennonites in Oklahoma*, ed. Wilma McKee, Mennonite Historical Series (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life Press, 1988), 2-5.

of land in small tracts to the occupants thereof and thereby facilitated the development of family farms, those farms were often valued less for themselves than for what they represented in the land market. They were valued not just for the wholesome agrarian communities they helped to create but also for the amount of their selling price.²¹ In his book, *Democracy in America*, the French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville commented already in the 1830s on the American farmer's speculative tendency and desire to drive a clever bargain:

Almost all farmers of the United States combine some trade with agriculture. Most of them make agriculture itself a trade. It seldom happens that an American farmer settles for good upon the land which he occupies. Especially in the districts of the Far West, he brings land into tillage in order to sell again, and not to farm it. He builds a farmhouse on the speculation that as the state of the country will soon be changed by the increase of population, a good price may be obtained for it.²²

Given their rigorous communal work ethic and theology of the land, it seems unlikely that the Mennonites would ever have sanctioned such land speculation out of a purely profit motive; yet hundreds of Russian Mennonite immigrants caught the land fever, buying and selling in the hope of financial gain, although many lost money in the process.

A third factor was the struggle to survive on the small family farm, especially in dryland regions like Oklahoma and eastern Colorado. During the years of Martens' appeals, it was not uncommon for such farms to experience a crop failure for every successful yield. Struggling farmers sent comments like the following to Mennonite papers:

Because of the ongoing unmerciful storm and continuing drought, we have gotten the blues and already have strong symptoms of the California fever We are reading that Mr. Martens will make another excursion there in September. Then not all our hope will vanish if he gives us an opportunity to go along and the California fever has not left us by then; for now the fever here is very high.²³

²¹Roy H. Holmes, *Rural Sociology: The Family Farm Institution* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1932), 69.

²²Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, volume 2 (New York: Vintage Books, 1954) 166.

²³J. J. Decker, correspondence from Galva, Kansas, DDW, 20 May 1909, 4.

For whatever reasons they moved, California was only one of many destinations sought out by these transitory Mennonites. During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, Mennonites with Russian background settled for the first time in the states of Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and California, and the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. It was not uncommon for particular families to settle consecutively in several of these "frontier" regions. Insufficient water, infertile soil, lack of fellowship or inadequate church leadership could cause Mennonites to vacate a new settlement almost as quickly as they had occupied it. The large number of Mennonites so willing repeatedly to seek new homes in relatively untamed regions made them most amenable to the claims of the land agent, particularly when that agent was a known and trusted member of their own church.

THE MENNONITE LAND COMPANY

In response to the rising land hunger among Mennonites, Henry J. Martens in about 1905 or 1906 began to operate under the name of the Mennonite Land Company, with an office in Hillsboro. He employed multiple business methods, which also can be interpreted as sequential phases to his rise as a land agent. The first was to sell land for others on commission, which required minimum controllable capital. Then as accessible capital increased, the second method was to buy and sell land for the profit itself. Finally, Martens and his agents began to develop larger acreages for new housing in Hillsboro and new settlements on distant frontiers. They explored such possibilities as far north as the Quill Lake district of Saskatchewan and as far south as Georgia and Texas. These larger developments were initiated by purchasing land on promissory notes with a partial down payment or perhaps only earnest money.

As the business grew, Martens hired trusted friends as part-time land agents in his company. These included the Hillsboro City Clerk, two prominent Hillsboro merchants, the president of the Hillsboro Bank, and the brother of the president of the McPherson Bank—men by the names of G. G. Wiens, Gus

Weyand, Henry Hodel, John C. Fast and Peter B. Harms. As the business further expanded to frontier areas where cheap land was available, he opened branch offices in Weatherford and Hooker, Oklahoma; Syracuse, Kansas; Pueblo, Colorado; Bakersfield and Macdoel, California. Some time later, Martens opened an office in a downtown building in Omaha, Nebraska. This location probably had less to do with any proximity to his land developments than with his role as a colonization agent for the Union Pacific Railroad, whose offices were adjacent. Before that, Martens had advertised himself as an immigration agent for the Santa Fe Railroad, and later was a colonization agent for the Southern Pacific Railroad. It was reported that he worked for a time in the Southern Pacific's San Francisco colonization office.

DER DEUTSCHE WESTEN

In the fall of 1906 Martens and his agents decided that to promote their land projects they needed a newspaper of their own. They contracted with the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, then located in McPherson, Kansas, to print their paper and provide office space for their managing editor. Then Martens and the Hillsboro banker, John C. Fast, went to Topeka to recruit John's younger brother, Heinrich, as editor. Heinrich Fast had come to Topeka to attempt to revive a dying German newspaper and ended up selling Metropolitan Life insurance and doing free lance writing. He was a well-educated, talented writer, who because of his erratic and sometimes abrasive style was an unlikely choice for the new job. He had a bent for muckraking journalism. Within the first year of publication Martens was slapped with a \$10,000 libel suit for a scorching critique Heinrich had written about Frederick Lohrenz, a right-wing poet from Cordell, Oklahoma. Also, while Heinrich was willing to promote his employer's land business and defend him against the verbal attacks of critics, he could be candid about the conspicuously lavish lifestyle of his boss. For instance, he printed the following story from a correspondent:

A little before evening I went to [the home of] Mr. H. J. Martens to inquire about land opportunities. If someone wants to have land from him, whether in Saskatchewan, Georgia, Texas, Kansas, or California, he can certainly get it from him. His family seemed to be very happy because he had given them presents for Christmas in about the value of \$100 each. His dear wife had given him the present of a gold watch.

Now he also showed me his new sea lion fur that he had bought for himself. What do you think he paid for that? \$500. In addition [he showed me] a \$20 cap from the same material. I was really surprised. But what about a new suit? Yes, that also for \$150. Well! Mr. Martens has joined the ranks of the rich of this world. At the end he will become a millionaire, while people like us remain only [in the realm of] a few thousands.²⁴

The Martens home, incidentally, was the former residence of J. D. Hill, the founder of Hillsboro, situated on ten acres northwest of town that Martens was subdividing into lots for new housing.

Heinrich Fast claimed credit for giving Marten's paper its name, *Der Deutsche Westen* ("The German West"). "As large and as wide as the West, so large shall become this paper," he wrote. "Just as the West implies, so shall *Der Deutsche Westen* be: comprehensive, encompassing, liberal, and beyond all trivialities."²⁵ Featuring a combination of constant promotional advertisements for the Mennonite Land Company and fascinating journalism, *Der Deutsche Westen* attained a readership of 3,300 in two years, though allegedly only two-thirds of these were paid subscriptions.²⁶ Undoubtedly with Martens' approval, Fast sent hundreds of copies for free distribution in the Mennonite colonies in Russia, where his half-page advertisements might be of special interest.

THE HAMILTON COUNTY, KANSAS SETTLEMENT

Although Martens succeeded in resettling an undetermined number of Mennonite families in Michigan, that episode lacked cohesion and little is known of it. Not so his settlement in western Kansas, which grew into a sizable community within several years. Between 1906 and 1910, at least 179 Mennonite family heads or individuals bought land in the western Kansas counties of Hamilton, Kearny and Stanton. Most of them did so directly or indirectly from the Mennonite Land Company. Of these purchasers, about one hundred moved there, most of them concentrated in the southeast corner of

²⁴Jakob Thomas, correspondence from Hooker, Oklahoma, *DDW*, 9 Jan. 1908, 2.

²⁵Heinrich H. Fast, editorial, *DDW*, 28 Feb. 1907, 5.

²⁶Schellenberg, "Die Geschichte 'Der Deutsche Westen,'" 4.

Hamilton County, about twenty miles from the county seat of Syracuse. The other seventy-nine were Mennonite investors, who had little intention of moving there but were speculators in the land market. Among these were several prominent central Kansas leaders including A. L. Schellenberg, the editor for the Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, and Johann Harder, an elder minister-teacher in the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church south of Hillsboro.²⁷

The Mennonite Land Company had a discernible strategy in western Kansas. In the first year (1906), Martens helped a dozen persons file for free homestead land from the U.S. government. Upon arrival in their wagon trains, these people would be "met [at the Santa Fe depot] in Syracuse by Martens, who was then acting as 'spotter.' This meant that Martens would take the various families, or individuals . . . and spot them on some particular quarter section of land which they were expected to homestead."²⁸

Among these early homesteaders were two capable farmers—Heinrich Janzen from Buhler and Peter S. Warkentin from Inman, both members of the General Conference Hoffnungsau Mennonite Church. Within a few months of arrival these men had built attractive homes and quickly brought their land under cultivation. In the Hamilton County Fair that fall, Janzen won first prize for the greatest variety of vegetables and grain grown by any farmer in the county, and Warkentin won the prize for best sugar beets.²⁹ Both men then began to work as adjunct agents for the Mennonite Land Company.

The next part of the strategy was the parade of Mennonite land seekers whom Martens and his Hillsboro agents brought to Hamilton County on the Santa

²⁷The settlers had some negative feelings about these speculators, as indicated by the following comment: "Not everything here can be praised, for there are many quarters taken up in the area by men who think it is enough to see them here every six months, to take a little walk, and then go home again. They simply do not make their home out of it, which hinders fast progress in the area, and this is troublesome for those of us who have good intentions for this settlement." Jakob Thimm, correspondence from Syracuse, Kansas, DDW, 13 Feb. 1908, 4.

²⁸C. V. Mills, "Mennonites Came West in 1906 in Wagon Trains," *The Lamar County Tri-State Daily News*, 26 Oct. 1963, 4.

²⁹Lucile M. Thompson, *Hamilton County and Syracuse, Kansas* (Syracuse, Kans.: author, 1989), 8, 14-15.

Fe Railroad. These excursions of groups of ten or more persons would arrive in Syracuse, where they would be met by Janzen and Warkentin and escorted to their farms. There they would be shown their land and produce, treated to a meal by their wives, and returned to the Harvey House in Syracuse, where Martens would deal with them. For their services, the two men received gratuities of \$5.00 per diem.³⁰

Sometimes Martens would act as the realtor for other land sellers and dealers, but by July of 1907 he also had eighteen quarter sections of his own Hamilton County land to sell.³¹ Peter Warkentin wrote that

we can consider the publisher, H. J. Martens, as belonging to us, for he owns most of the land around us, and we must look up to him as the soul of the settlement. Had he not called it into life, had he not always pushed a little and helped, it would have taken ten years to establish a settlement that has developed in two years.³²

The records of the Register of Deeds Office in Syracuse indicate that Henry or Liese Martens purchased at least 10,560 acres there and sold 16,320 acres. Subtracting the two totals, we assume that 5,760 acres of the land Martens sold was for other dealers.

In the first year of operation in Hamilton County, land could still be purchased for \$2.50 per acre³³, but by 1907 Mennonite buyers reported paying anywhere from \$6.25 per acre for a relinquishment to \$14.00 per acre for non-government land.³⁴ In Syracuse it was reported that in three years, the Mennonite settlers had raised the cash value of land in their community from \$2.50 to \$20.00 per acre.³⁵ At \$10.00 per acre, the total amount of Martens'

³⁰J. D. Reimer, correspondence from Menno, Kansas, *DDW*, 7 Nov. 1907, 1.

³¹P. S. Warkentin, correspondence from Syracuse, Kansas, *DDW*, 18 Sep. 1907, 5.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Thompson, *Hamilton County*, 24.

³⁴Hermana Neufeld, correspondence from Menno, Kansas, *DDW*, 20 June 1907, 2; "Lokales Allerlei," *DDW*, 6 Feb. 1908, 5.

³⁵Thompson, *Hamilton County*, 24.

land sales would have totaled \$163,200.³⁶ Assuming a 25 percent profit from the sale of his land plus a 10 percent commission from the sale of land belonging to others, his net income could have totaled \$32,160, had all his notes been paid in full. However, following a severe drought, many of these notes were defaulted.

THE FLOURISHING OF MENNO

Before that happened, however, there were three flourishing years in the brief history of this settlement. In the fall of 1906, Henry L. Janzen (not to be confused with the older Heinrich Janzen) opened a general store. With the help of influential Republican party officials, Janzen secured an official mandate to open a post office there as well, which was given the name of Menno Post Office and General Store. This became the gathering place for the surrounding community. It was reported that "there was hitchrack space for about forty teams and at times they were pretty well filled up" as families arrived for their Saturday evening socials.³⁷ Next door David Janzen opened a blacksmith shop, and there was the beginning semblance of the village of Menno, which was on the Rand-McNally map of Kansas as late as 1960.

The erection of three one-room schools and two churches followed within a matter of months. The "Hill School" was built on a little knoll one mile to the west. Then came the General Conference Mennonite Church, named "Ebenflur," because it was built on the corner of a "level field." The ten acres on which the church stood were donated by Henry and Liese Martens with a check for \$200, approximately half the cost of the building materials.³⁸ The Tabor Mennonite Brethren Church stood three and one-half miles southwest of the Menno Store. It was known in the community as the *Schalenboya* Church

³⁶This was at a time when eggs sold for 10¢ a dozen, butter for 7¢, and houses could be built for \$500. Herman Neufeld, correspondence from Menno, Kansas, DDW, 25 July 1907, 4; H. Janzen, correspondence from Syracuse, Kansas, 24 Oct. 1907, 2.

³⁷Foster Eskelund, "Menno," *History of Kearny County, Kansas*, vol. 1 (Lakin, Kans.: Kearny County Historical Society, 1964), 165.

³⁸Heinrich Janzen, correspondence from Syracuse, Kansas, DDW, 31 Oct. 1907, 4.

after Elder Abraham Schellenberg of Buhler, Kansas, who helped organize it. The other two schools were called "Ebenflur" near the Ebenflur Church, and "Antelope" near the Tabor Church.

A few years later most of the Mennonite settlers had left Menno, but "the name lived on . . . in memory of the people who founded it."³⁹ They sold their farms to families of other denominations who united with the few remaining Mennonites to form the Menno Community Sunday School and Church in the Ebenflur building, and the Menno Community Club, which purchased the Tabor Church building.⁴⁰ The Menno Store and Post Office exchanged ownership several times and closed in 1924. In 1935, for the payment of \$200, the trustees of the Western District Conference (GC) sent a Quit Claim Deed to the trustees of the Ebenflur Community Church. A Sunday school was conducted there until about 1975, when a Menno farmer bought it to be remodeled into a home. In 1937 the old Tabor Church building was replaced by a more attractive and functional native stone structure built by the federal Works Project Administration, and it continues in use to the present. Although the village of Menno became a ghost town, the Menno community lives on; even today a sign on state Highway 25 southwest of Lakin identifies its area residents.

FACTORS IN THE COLLAPSE OF MENNO

In view of this remarkable communal continuity, one wonders why the Mennonites pulled out. The factors precipitating the exodus of the Mennonite settlers were multiple, but the main factor was the dry land conditions in this part of the state. The settlers came from counties in which the annual average precipitation was over thirty inches; they hardly knew how to farm in a county where the rainfall averaged less than seventeen inches. Western Kansas is a semi-arid region with no surplus of water in any season of the year. Variations in weather may result in excellent yields one year and

³⁹Eskelund, "Menno," 165.

⁴⁰Floyd Edwards, *Hamilton County, Kansas History* (Syracuse, Kans.: Hamilton County Historical Society, 1979), 54.

complete crop failures the next.⁴¹ In 1906 as the Mennonites arrived, the precipitation totalled twenty-three inches. Almost every letter they wrote to the central Kansas newspapers raved about the plentiful rains, and the yields that year were excellent. In 1907 and 1908, the precipitation totalled only about twelve inches each year, and the moods at Menno turned to depression. Then 1909 was a good year again, and spirits revived, only to be followed by another two dry years.

When the Mennonite land seekers were coming to western Kansas, an old rancher reportedly told one of them, "'Don't try it.' The rancher said that it was not that they objected to breaking grazing land, [but] that they just felt sure the Mennonites would be wasting their time on this dry land."⁴² The Mennonites were optimistic, but despite all their skill and experience in farming, "they became victims of the dry conditions of that period . . . [and in one of those years] they lost a thirty bushel wheat crop in only a few days when the hot winds cooked the heads of the wheat when they were still in the milk state."⁴³

Martens, who had been so visible in Menno during the early successful phase of the settlement, rarely appeared there during these days of crop failure. The people of Menno, who had looked to him as "the 'originator' of this blossoming settlement,"⁴⁴ now felt deserted. "Our '*Grossgutbesitzer*' does not let himself be seen [here anymore]."⁴⁵

A related factor in the failure of Menno was the banker's panic of 1907. Many of the investors bought their land at speculative prices and sold it at

⁴¹*Soil Survey: Hamilton County, Kansas* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1958), 16

⁴²Mills, "Mennonites Came West," 4.

⁴³Edwards, *Hamilton County*, 54.

⁴⁴P. S. Warkentin, correspondence from Syracuse, *DDW*, 25 July 1907, 5.

⁴⁵Heinrich Janzen, correspondence from Syracuse, *DDW*, 6 Feb. 1908, 2.

heavy losses or simply let it go into default.⁴⁶ Martens claimed to have lost over \$40,000, and as his editor explained,

The fact is that many speculations failed, that many a person who bought land in western Kansas . . . and expected mountains of gold finds himself bitterly disappointed as it becomes terribly hard now to pay the notes. . . . But the land is there, it is good land, and if it rains next year again as it did in preceding years, the buyer still has the opportunity to earn something. Mr. Martens himself probably has the hardest losses, for in down payments alone that he gave to secure certain pieces of land, he lost over \$40,000. That is a heavy blow, and it will not be easy to wipe out his losses, but he is not a person who hangs his head. He does not give in easily and will find a way out. We have not had an opportunity to investigate all cases. We did investigate a little, and we think that the fault is to be found on both sides. The speculation passion was simply too great. The people bought and signed notes without thinking of miscalculation; now that the banks want their money, there are heated-up heads.⁴⁷

LEGAL AND CHURCH ACTIONS AGAINST MARTENS IN KANSAS

There were threats of law suits against Martens resulting from the collapse of Menno. One was from Menno settler Fred Nuss, and two others by Mrs. H. G. Schmidt of Burrton and H. A. Heidebrecht of Inman—both investors in Hamilton County land. Mrs. Schmidt wanted her note of \$1,040 cancelled, plus \$800 in damages, but for some unknown reason the case never came to trial.⁴⁸ The McPherson and Marion County attorneys investigated the other two complaints, but the latter said "that he had not found a single case in which Mr. Martens had cheated anybody."⁴⁹

Martens may have avoided legal charges in the aftermath of the failed Hamilton County settlement, but he did not fare so well with his own congregation. Concerns about his apparently improper dealings caused the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church, where Martens was a member, to request already in February of 1907 that he appear before the congregation to answer for himself. When this did not happen, the congregation two months later barred Martens from communion and other privileges of membership, though his membership was

⁴⁶Cornelius C. Janzen, "Americanization of the Russian Mennonites in Central Kansas" (M.A. Thesis, University of Kansas, 1914), 107-108.

⁴⁷"Lokales Allerlei," *DDW*, 3 Sep. 1908, 8.

⁴⁸*The Newton Journal*, 12 Nov. 1909, 1; 19 Nov. 1909, 4; 26 Nov. 1909, 1.

⁴⁹*DDW*, 28 May 1908, 8. [?]

not revoked entirely. In so doing, the congregation cited verses from I and II Thessalonians concerning unfair business dealings and idleness to clarify their reasons for taking this action. This situation remained until January of 1908, when the congregation requested several brethren to seek out Martens and discuss the complaints against him. They were unable to do so, causing the congregation to issue an ultimatum on March 24, 1909 that he should appear before the membership to explain his behavior, which was "not according to God's Word or the standards of his testimony." Should he fail to do so, he would be removed from church membership. We can only assume that no meeting ever took place, since the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church membership records contain an undated note, "excommunicated because of dishonest dealings" next to Martens' name.⁵⁰

THE CALIFORNIA PROJECT

While in the midst of this controversy with his home church, Martens continued to enlarge the scope of his land business. In November of 1908 he visited California for the first time. Within the first few days of his arrival there, he wrote effusively to Heinrich Fast: "California is beautiful! I have gotten around a lot in this world, but something like this I have never seen until now . . ." Several days later Martens informed Fast that "California is the land where the farmers make money. Push California in the paper."⁵¹

On November 28 Martens reported that he had secured fifty thousand acres of land for a German settlement in the San Joaquin Valley some fifteen miles from Bakersfield, which he planned to place on the market for \$75-\$100 per acre.⁵² The report stirred considerable interest within the Mennonite commu-

⁵⁰Orlando Harms, *The Journey of a Church: A Walk Through One Hundred Years of the Life and Times of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church, 1881-1981* (Hillsboro, Kans.: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1987), 95-96; "Bericht der Gemeinderatungen," 12 Feb. 1907, 5 April 1907, 1 January 1908, 24 March 1909, Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church Records, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Hillsboro, Kans.

⁵¹"Lokales Allerlei," *DDW*, 26 Nov. 1908, 1.

⁵²Henry J. Martens, "Ein Brief aus Kalifornien," *DDW*, 10 Dec. 1908, 4.

nity. *Der Deutsche Westen* reported in late December that Martens had sold several thousand acres to Mennonites already in California, and that over one hundred readers had asked Fast how soon Martens would begin selling the California land.⁵³

Despite his announcement in November, it was not until February of 1909 that Martens first purchased land in Kern County, when he bought eight sections (5120 acres) of land near present-day Wasco from Sidney J. Goldman and Allen L. Chickering.⁵⁴ To finance the purchase, Martens secured a loan for almost \$30,000 from Joseph Goldman and Robert J. Tyson.⁵⁵ Given the state of Martens' finances after the failure of the Hamilton County settlement, one must wonder whether he was in any position to secure a loan of this size. One also must wonder about the discrepancy between Martens' fifty thousand acre announcement in November and his five thousand acre purchase in February.

To promote his Kern County land, Martens travelled widely across the Midwest, seeking buyers. Most of his efforts focused on Mennonite Brethren and Seventh-day Adventist communities in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota. A report from Meno, Oklahoma in mid-January noted that ten people there had purchased a total of 240 acres from Martens.⁵⁶ A visit to Marion Junction, South Dakota netted another thirty buyers.⁵⁷ In early May Martens visited Fairview, Oklahoma, where Fast reported that he sold over \$100,000 worth of land.⁵⁸ Another article in the *Der Deutsche Westen* noted that some

⁵³"Lokales Allerlei," *DDW*, 24 Dec. 1908, 1.

⁵⁴Deed Book 209, p. 22, Kern County Hall of Records, Bakersfield, Calif.

⁵⁵Deed Book 177, p. 440, Kern County Hall of Records.

⁵⁶Fredrick Fritz, correspondence from Meno, Oklahoma, *DDW*, 14 Jan. 1909, 2.

⁵⁷J.F. Vogt, correspondence from Armour, South Dakota, *DDW*, 11 Feb. 1909, 3.

⁵⁸Heinrich H. Fast, correspondence from Okeene, Oklahoma, *DDW*, 13 May 1909, 4.

ninety people had bought or traded for land from Martens.⁵⁹ In most of these cases Martens' buyers gave him the deeds to their farms plus cash in exchange for land in Kern County.

THE EXCURSIONS TO CALIFORNIA

Martens attempted to heighten interest in his new settlement by bringing potential settlers to see the land in person. Between April and October of 1909 he organized and led five major excursions from the Midwest to Kern County, besides several other small excursions for people already living in California. Each midwestern excursion followed a similar format. Between fifty and one hundred participants boarded a special train in Kansas, from where they travelled to Los Angeles. There Martens treated them to the sights: the Tilton Trolley Trip, the Ostrich Farm, the San Gabriel Mission, Chinatown, orange groves and the Pacific Ocean. After a day or two in Los Angeles the excursionists headed north for Kern County. Upon arrival in Bakersfield they gathered at the Southern Hotel, where a fleet of as many as thirty automobiles waited to drive them to Martens' land. Many excursionists were so enthusiastic about the land at this point that they signed papers on the spot.

After viewing the colony site, the excursion again proceeded north, stopping in San Francisco for another day of sightseeing. At this point, most of the excursions turned east for the journey home. The August excursion travelled as far north as Seattle, where the participants took in the World Exposition before going home via Yellowstone Park. Following each excursion a detailed glowing report appeared in *Der Deutsche Westen* in multiple installments. At the conclusion of the report the excursionists expressed their satisfaction with the trip and their new land, and urged others to follow their example.⁶⁰

⁵⁹"Unsre nächste Exkursion nach California," *DDW*, 13 May 1909, 5.

⁶⁰"Resultat der ersten California-Reise," *DDW*, 29 April 1909, 8.

Martens seems to have carefully planned the excursions to maximize the excitement for the participants. While in Los Angeles, he personally led the members of one group into the ocean for a time of swimming and horseplay.⁶¹ When visiting other sights he regularly lined up the travelers for photographs, which they could then take back to show to the less fortunate ones who had stayed home. In Bakersfield he adorned excursionists with ribbon-badges inscribed "Henry J. Martens' Excursion."⁶² The Bakersfield newspapers repeatedly noted the extravagant squadrons of automobiles that Martens marshalled for the drive to his land.⁶³ The tactics seem to have worked well. By his accounting Martens sold almost \$500,000 worth of land during the first two excursions alone.

Not all those interested in the land could join the excursions. Those who stayed behind received much of their information from Martens' other primary promotional device, the midwestern German-language newspapers. His paper, *Der Deutsche Westen*, played the major role in this media blitz, but Martens used other area newspapers as well. As early as February of 1909 there appeared in the *Hillsboro Journal* a three-quarter page advertisement entitled "Would You Like to Have a Home in Beautiful California?" Here Martens claimed that he had reserved 100,000 acres for a German settlement in Kern County. This was twice the acreage cited in his November report and twenty times more than he seems to have bought. Martens further claimed to have sold thirty thousand acres, six times more than he evidently purchased.⁶⁴

This type of hyperbole characterized much of the newspaper reporting submitted by Martens and his assistants. Preliminary announcements in *Der*

⁶¹H.H. Fast, "Unsre Kalifornia-Reise," *DDW*, 27 May 1909, 4.

⁶²"Big Excursion to Wasco Land," *The Bakersfield Californian* [Hereafter *BC*], 27 Sep. 1909, 1.

⁶³"Mennonites Here In Force," *BC*, 9 Aug. 1909, 1; "Mennonites' Auto Party," *BC*, 1 Oct. 1909, 4.

⁶⁴*Hillsboro Journal*, 22 Feb. 1909, 3.

Deutsche Westen regarding the first excursion set the number of participants at five hundred; in reality about fifty people joined the trip. In March of 1909 Martens wrote from California to say that "all our Germans living there already bought land," an exaggeration at best.⁶⁵

THE FOUNDING OF MARTENSDALE

Until about June of 1909 all Martens' promotional efforts focused on the land he had purchased in February near Wasco. In June he began showing potential buyers another tract of land in an area known as Lerdo about ten miles east of the first site. This second location soon became the primary focus for Mennonite land seekers. Despite Martens' promotional claims, the land in the Wasco settlement proved less than satisfactory because of heavy alkali deposits; few Mennonites seem to have settled there. After June Martens focussed most of his Kern County promotional efforts on the land at Lerdo.

The excursion that visited Kern County in June was the first large group to see the site of the proposed Lerdo colony. The day after examining the Wasco colony they visited the new land, and agreed that here they would establish their settlement. While gathered at Lerdo the excursionists heard a message from Rev. Cornelius Kliever of Fresno, who challenged them to outlaw saloons in their new city. Following this service, the excursionists discussed a name for their future home. According to Marten's agent Georg Jacobsen, "All agreed that Henry Martens had gone through so much trouble to found a great German colony here, and that his intentions [had] been so outrageously misjudged, that this city must carry his name. After some consulting back and forth [they] agreed on the name Martensdale."⁶⁶

Back in Bakersfield, the group discussed the founding of a college in Martensdale. They pledged some \$16,000 on the spot for this undertaking and

⁶⁵"Hillsboro Nachrichten," *DDW*, 25 March 1909, 5.

⁶⁶Georg Jacobson, "Nach California," *DDW*, 24 June 1909, 4.

designated 100 acres near the city for that purpose.⁶⁷ Martens contracted with the *Hillsboro Journal and Vorwärts* to print one thousand large plat maps of this "college addition" as they envisioned it. The paper's editor, J. G. Ewert, reported to his readers,

This week we have printed a thousand large maps for Mr. Henry J. Martens, which beautifully present the new college addition to Martensdale in California. We see there the names of various avenues, such as Duerksen Avenue, Wiens Avenue, Harms Avenue, Unger Avenue, Classen Avenue, Nickel Avenue, Kliewer Avenue, etc. In the middle of this addition is a large empty space for the college there to be erected, and next to it three other empty spaces, two for student houses and one for a large dining hall."⁶⁸

The land on which the town of Martensdale was to be established belonged to John McWilliams, Jr., a member of an influential family from Livingston County, Illinois.⁶⁹ McWilliams' father, John Sr. (b. 1832), first came to California during the Gold Rush and spent four years mining gold. He returned to Illinois and later fought for the North in the Civil War. Following the war he homesteaded in Odell, Illinois, where he became wealthy as a merchant, banker and land speculator. His land deals extended over Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, the Dakotas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and California. As early as 1909 he moved to Bakersfield, where he established the McWilliams Land Company, of which he was president. He evidently lived the rest of his life in California, and died in Pasadena in 1924.

We know less about John McWilliams, Jr. (b. 1879?), who assisted his father in banking and land speculation, and became successful in his own right in Kern County land investment. Despite his involvement in California real estate, he apparently retained an address in Odell, Illinois, his home town.⁷⁰ In 1908 he purchased approximately 4,600 acres at Lerdo from the

⁶⁷Georg Jacobson, "Nach California," *DDW*, 1 July 1909, 4.

⁶⁸"Lokale Notizen," *Hillsboro Journal and Vorwärts*, 15 Oct. 1909, 7. Apparently the map was printed and distributed, but neither author has been able to find a copy extant anywhere.

⁶⁹Christopher C. Strawn, Fordyce B. Johnson and George H. Franzen, eds. *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois* (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1909), 991-995.

⁷⁰*Marion Record*, 17 March 1910, 12.

Kern County Land Company.⁷¹ Martens apparently became acquainted with McWilliams and his Lerdo land soon after his first visit to California. As early as February of 1909 he was working with Henry W. McCray, a land surveyor and Vice President of the McWilliams Land Company. McCray regularly helped Martens with his excursions through Kern County and sometimes even led them in Martens' absence. Despite the early contact with McWilliams and his associates, Martens does not seem to have begun negotiations to buy the Lerdo land until late spring or early summer of 1909.

The enthusiasm for Martensdale exhibited by the members of the second excursion led Martens, never one for understatement, to announce in *Der Deutsche Westen* during July that Martensdale was now "more than three times as large as the German settlement in Reedley. As time goes on, it will be just as beautiful, and . . . more valuable than . . . Reedley."⁷² Martens based his claims not on actual residents of Martensdale, of which there were none yet, but merely on those who planned to purchase there. On July 12 Martens sent a telegram from Bakersfield reporting that he would have to postpone a third excursion, "for the land business here with the people from California keeps on increasing in volume. We drive out daily with four or five automobiles, and there is no end in sight."⁷³

Meanwhile, more wild claims made their way back to the Midwest. In July H. J. Heinrichs reported from Bakersfield that Martens had given \$25,000 each to the Baptists, Mennonite Brethren, Adventists and Lutherans for the establishment of schools in their Kern County settlements. There is no evidence that significant numbers of Baptists or Lutherans even considered settling on Martens' land; neither is there evidence that Martens ever made such large contributions to those who did settle there. Heinrichs also claimed that Martens had sold sixty thousand acres thus far and that 100,000 were still

⁷¹Deed Book 205, p. 224, 376, Kern County Hall of Records.

⁷²"Hillsboro Nachrichten," *DDW*, 1 July 1909, 4.

⁷³Henry J. Martens, telegram from Bakersfield, California, *DDW*, 15 July 1909, 8.

available for purchase.⁷⁴ As with earlier extravagant claims, Heinrichs' reports seem either the product of misinformation or willful deception.

During the summer of 1909 a few individuals began moving to Martensdale. Reports from the excursion in September noted that there were eight families in the fledgling town and that Emil C. Kliever had already built a grocery store there.⁷⁵ On the 6th of October, a train with seventeen freight cars, two overcrowded passenger cars, two sleeping cars and one wagon car left Oklahoma for Kern County. On October 12 at 1:00 in the morning, the group of some 225 settlers, mostly Mennonite Brethren, reached its destination.⁷⁶ After sunrise the settlers unloaded the train and set out to their homesteads where they put up tents for temporary dwellings. On October 16 the group celebrated its first Sunday in Kern County, meeting together in the unfinished home of C. C. Duerksen.

During the next few weeks Martensdale buzzed with activity. By the 22nd of October twelve houses had been completed and streets laid out. Two months later Martensdale boasted a partially finished Mennonite Brethren church building, a lumber yard, a post office, six stores and a temporary hotel.⁷⁷ The *Bakersfield Californian* quoted Martens as saying that he would bring at least two hundred more settlers to Kern County in the next few months.⁷⁸

THE COLLAPSE OF MARTENSDALE

The residents of Martensdale were not aware that when they moved onto their new land, John McWilliams, Jr. had not yet deeded any of it to Martens. On October 30 the two men finally signed deeds transferring land to Martens, but even then for only a small portion of the land Martens was selling to his

⁷⁴H.J. Heinrichs, correspondence from Bakersfield, *DDW*, 22 July 1909, 2.

⁷⁵"Die vierte Exkursion nach Kalifornien," *DDW*, 14 Oct. 1909, 4.

⁷⁶J. J. Fast, correspondence from Martensdale, *Zionsbote*, 27 Oct. 1909, 6.

⁷⁷Geo. Jacobson, "Unsere Reise nach Kalifornien und eine Beschreibung der Stadt Martensdale," *DDW*, 6 January 1910, 8; Vernon H. Neufeld, "The Martensdale Colony, 1909-1910," photocopy, 1989, 5.

⁷⁸"75 Settlers for Lerdo are Here," *BC*, 1 Jan. 1910, 1.

clients.⁷⁹ No deeds are recorded for most of the land that Martens claimed to have either bought or sold.

Within a few months after the founding of Martensdale, Martens' Kern County dream began to crumble. On December 29 an anonymous correspondent wrote cryptically to the *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, "Several people must move off their land. There has been a mistake."⁸⁰ During the first few days of January angry crowds of Mennonites gathered at the Southern Hotel claiming that the deeds Martens had given them for their land were worthless and demanded an explanation from him. Several families who had bought land from Martens reported receiving visits by third parties who claimed that the land belonged to them and insisted that they leave. It seems that Martens had failed to make any payments on the colony land beyond the earnest money put up in October, and thus had no right to settle others on it. Most of the colonists stood to lose almost everything if their Kern County deeds were invalid. They had surrendered the deeds on their midwestern farms to Martens and most had paid significant sums of money in addition. Despite the clamor for answers, none were forthcoming at this time.⁸¹

The clamor did, however, attract the attention of Southern Pacific Railroad representatives in California. Since Martens was an agent for the Southern Pacific, the company was understandably concerned when the Martensdale situation became critical. On February 2 James Horsburgh, Jr., general passenger agent for the Southern Pacific in San Francisco, sent a telegram to company agents in Bakersfield flatly denying all charges against Martens.⁸² The following day Southern Pacific representatives E. W. Clapp and H. W. Smith travelled to Bakersfield to meet with the settlers and defend Martens against their charges. Once Clapp and Smith heard the exact nature of

⁷⁹Deed Book 221, pp. 248, 255-256, 280-281, Kern County Hall of Records.

⁸⁰*Mennonitische Rundschau*, 19 Jan. 1910, 5.

⁸¹"Lerdo Colonists, Enraged, Are Threatening to Cause Trouble for H. J. Martens," *BC*, 4 Jan. 1910, 1.

⁸²"Henry J. Martens an S. P. Employee," *BC*, 3 Feb. 1910, 1.

the charges, however, they "seemed to doubt the wisdom of this course. . . . [and] were careful not to commit the Southern Pacific in any degree." Following this meeting the railroad made no further effort to defend Martens.⁸³

CIVIL AND CRIMINAL WARRANTS

During January Martens was sued twice for nonpayment—once on a purchase of land and then for failure to pay a well-drilling bill.⁸⁴ On January 29 Emil C. Kliewer brought criminal charges against Martens for selling land to Kliewer's father-in-law for which Martens did not hold title. Two days later, however, Kliewer and "a delegation of Mennonites" returned to the judge, asking him to quash the charges. No reason for this turnabout was given.⁸⁵

Martens' legal problems worsened throughout the Spring of 1910. On February 3 Peter Elrich sued Martens for \$10,750. On February 21 two more suits were filed. C. K. Eidsen, deacon of the Martensdale Mennonite Brethren Church, sued him for \$10,125 and Jacob Buller filed suit for \$13,205. All three suits alleged that Martens sold them land that he did not own. In the cases of Eidsen and Buller the land involved was not part of the McWilliams parcel but belonged to the Kern County Land Company.⁸⁶ No deeds for any transactions between the Kern County Land Company and Henry Martens were ever recorded with the county.

On February 26 a warrant for Martens' arrest was issued, based on criminal charges brought by Buller. Martens, who was in Hillsboro at the time, was placed under arrest on March 11. The state of California filed extradition papers and sent a deputy sheriff to Kansas to take Martens into

⁸³"Warrant Out for Martens," *BC*, 26 Feb. 1910, 1.

⁸⁴"Henry J. Martens Sued in Visalia," *BC*, 13 Jan. 1910, 1; "Martens' Check Worthless; Sued," *BC*, 24 Jan. 1910, 1.

⁸⁵"Warrant Issued for Martens, Then Complaint is Quashed," *BC*, 29 Jan. 1910, 1; "Charge Against Martens Not Quashed by Kliewert [sic]," *BC*, 31 Jan. 1910, 1.

⁸⁶"Martens Faces Another Charge," *BC*, 21 Feb. 1910, 1.

custody.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Martens had dispatched his agents, G. G. Wiens and Gus Weyand, to Minnesota and Oklahoma, respectively, for the purpose of "looking after business."⁸⁸ Martens' attorney, W. H. Carpenter, made a two-week trip to California "on legal business,"⁸⁹ and Henry and Liese Martens decided to transfer ownership of their Hillsboro house and a half section of nearby land to their twenty-year-old daughter, Gertrude.⁹⁰

On March 18th, following a hearing in his office, Kansas Governor Stubbs denied the California extradition request on two grounds. First, Martens' lawyer, W. H. Carpenter, claimed that Martens had been victimized by John McWilliams, who reneged on his deed to Martens. According to Carpenter, McWilliams gave Martens clearance to sell land at Lerdo beginning the previous summer although no deeds had yet been signed. Carpenter alleged that only after Martens had completed contracts with several buyers did McWilliams tell Martens that he could not give him title to the land.⁹¹ Carpenter claimed that Martens was filing a law suit for \$250,000 against McWilliams for this reason.⁹² Also, Carpenter presented two witnesses from Martensdale who testified in Martens' defense.⁹³ According to the *Marion Record*, published by ex-Governor E. W. Hoch, private attorney Carpenter was supported in his defense of Martens by the Marion County attorney, Sam Burkholder, a member of

⁸⁷Warrant of Arrest for Henry J. Martens, 26 Feb. 1910, Henry J. Martens extradition file, California State Archives, Sacramento, Calif.

⁸⁸*Marion Record*, 3 Feb. 1910, 2.

⁸⁹*Marion Record*, 10 Feb. 1910, 12; 3 March 1910, 12.

⁹⁰*Marion Record*, 26 June 1910, 5.

⁹¹W. H. Carpenter, "Regarding Requisition for Henry J. Martens," 18 March 1910, Kansas State Archives, Topeka, Kans.

⁹²During the week of March 17th, Martens filed the \$25,000 suit in Marion County Probate Court, claiming a violation of contract in the sale of eight hundred acres of land. It happened that McWilliams had arrived in Marion that same week (*Marion Record*, 17 March 1910, 2, 12). No record has been found concerning the disposition of this suit, and it is probable that it never came to trial following Martens' fugitive status.

⁹³H. C. Bowman to C. E. Krehbiel, 20 June 1910. Photocopy of letter in possession of authors; "Stubbs und Martens," *Der Herold*, 19 May 1910, 1.

the (Old) Mennonite Church. After hearing the facts, Governor Stubbs decided that "there was no real merit in the case of those making the requisition and refused to grant it."⁹⁴

The governor's second reason for denying the extradition request was that the plaintiff Buller had changed his story. He now reported that Martens had offered him another parcel of land with which he was completely satisfied and considered the matter settled.⁹⁵ The Kern County deputy returned to California empty handed.

Given the traditional reluctance of Mennonites to use the courts for settling their grievances, the number of settlers who brought civil or criminal charges is striking. Besides the suits mentioned above, at least seven others filed similar charges, though non-Mennonite persons brought some of them.⁹⁶ When asked about this by a newspaper reporter, Rev. Jacob Kliever, minister of the Martensdale Mennonite Brethren Church, replied: "It is true we do not believe in having anything to do with actions at law, but when one has been stripped to the bone--well, it is different."⁹⁷ There is no evidence that any of the Mennonite Brethren congregations whose members were involved in such lawsuits took disciplinary action against them, even though such action was a clear violation of the nonresistant principles set forth in the church's confession of faith.

Most of the Mennonites involved, however, chose not to sue Martens, and many seemed to accept their unfortunate circumstances with remarkably little bitterness. The daughter of a settler wrote many years later,

I remember my father . . . sitting on the floor of the kitchen where Mom . . . was busy. Dad was worrying about the uncertainty of our future, and Mom comforted him by saying, "God will take care of us." She was

⁹⁴Marion Record, 24 March 1910, 12.

⁹⁵W. H. Carpenter, "Regarding Requisition."

⁹⁶Anon. correspondence from Dinuba, California, *Vorwärts*, 8 April 1910, 4.

⁹⁷J. R. Nourse, "Simple Farmers Given Fake Deeds to Lerdo Lands," *The Los Angeles Examiner*, 10 March 1910, 2.

right. In spite of our loss, we were never homeless or without a supply of food.⁹⁸

Throughout the spring and summer, displaced settlers began to move away from Martensdale and seek new homes elsewhere. In mid-February several evicted families investigated land in Delano, about twenty miles north of Martensdale, and rented property there. On March 9 they mounted their homes on log rollers and pulled them to Delano. This poignant scene captured the attention of the California news media; the *Los Angeles Examiner* published a lengthy front page article with photographs on the Martensdale debacle the day after the move.⁹⁹ Other displaced settlers found new homes elsewhere. Some moved to Reedley, where the largest population of Mennonites in California had already established a successful community. Peter Thiessen and P. B. Harms travelled to the north Sacramento Valley to see land offered by Julius Siemens, another Mennonite land agent. They bought land in Los Molinos from Siemens in May.¹⁰⁰ The largest number of Martensdale residents, however, moved several miles south to the Rosedale area, where they reorganized their Mennonite Brethren congregation begun several months earlier.

Rival Mennonite land agent Julius Siemens apparently saw in the Martensdale disaster an opportunity for his own gain, since he was quick to visit the settlers there and encourage them to visit his settlement to the north. He took great pains to assure them that his land was unencumbered by title problems like those that plagued Martensdale. The reports and advertisements Siemens submitted to the Mennonite press at the time stressed the same points.¹⁰¹ For reasons that are unclear, however, few Mennonites accepted Siemens' offer of land in the north Sacramento Valley. Negative reports about the area that later appeared in Mennonite newspapers indicate that it may not

⁹⁸Becker, *A Bundle of Living*, 21.

⁹⁹Nourse, "Simple Farmers," 1-2.

¹⁰⁰P. B. Harms, correspondence from Martensdale, *Vorwärts*, 20 May 1910, 3.

¹⁰¹Julius Siemens, "Beschreibung von Los Molinos, Tehema County, Kalifornien," *Vorwärts*, 17 June 1909, 4; Julius Siemens, correspondence from Los Molinos, *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 28 Dec. 1910, 3-4.

have been all that Siemens claimed it to be,¹⁰² but the disastrous experience of the Martensdale settlers with one land agent may also have soured them on entering too quickly into a deal with another such agent.

Meanwhile, Henry Martens had not given up on finding suitable land for his disgruntled clients. On January 27 an article in a Siskiyou County, California newspaper reported that Martens had purchased twenty thousand acres of land a few miles south of the Oregon border and planned to settle Mennonites there.¹⁰³ During the spring of 1910 he and his agents were offering land in Butte Valley to the now homeless settlers in Kern County. Most rejected the offer outright, angrily denouncing it as another swindle. It is unclear whether any settlers moved to Butte Valley or if Martens ever really took title to the land there.

LEGAL ACTION IN OKLAHOMA

By late summer of 1910 almost no trace of Martensdale remained. The demise of Martensdale, California, however, is not the end of the story. On September 10 C. C. and Mary Ortner, who had moved back to Oklahoma, filed a complaint in Blaine County District Court accusing Martens of fraud.¹⁰⁴ Several weeks later a Blaine County judge issued a warrant for Martens' arrest. On the following day, while the Oklahoma extradition papers were being prepared, Martens was taken into custody in Hillsboro and released on his own recognizance.

By this time, the climate in the Kansas Governor's office had changed. Following his rejection of the California requisition, the governor received two petitions from Hillsboro. The petitions were spearheaded by the editor of the *Vorwärts*, J. G. Ewert, and signed by 152 and 107 Hillsboro citizens,

¹⁰²Johann and Elizabeth Nipkau, correspondence from Lodi, California, *Zionsbote*, 25 Jan. 1911, 4; J.J. Entz, correspondence from Los Molinos, California, *Zionsbote*, 24 Jan. 1912, 3; Cornelius Fiedler, correspondence from Atwater, California, *Zionsbote*, 24 April 1912, 4.

¹⁰³"Colonization of Mennonites," *Siskiyou News*, 27 Jan. 1910, 3.

¹⁰⁴Christian C. Ortner & Mary Ortner, Statement of Information in Blaine County Court, 10 Sep. 1910, Kansas State Archives, Topeka, Kans.

respectively. The first was a declaration of their "surprise and disappointment" when they heard that the governor

had refused to sign the extradition papers to bring Henry J. Martens, President of the so-called Mennonite Land Co., before a court of justice in California to answer to a charge of embezzlement presented by members of the colony of Martensdale who have by their deal with said Martens been swindled out of their possessions and most left destitute.

The petition claimed that the governor had heard only one side "of this sad affair." Otherwise he "could not have refused to permit taking this land schemer to California to be tried before a fair and impartial court."¹⁰⁵

The second petition, signed by persons who for reasons of conscience, could not take Martens to court, was "a declaration of protest against the use of the name Mennonite Land Co." by one who "has forfeited all claims to the name Mennonite, having been excluded from the Mennonite Church . . . on account of his business methods as promoter of colonies, said methods being inconsistent with our views of justice and brotherly love." This petition ended with the assertion that "his use of the name Mennonite Land Co. to cover his objectionable business methods we consider as an unbearable blot on the name of our church [and] whatever aid you can offer to relieve us of this burden will be regarded as a lasting favor by all to whom the name Mennonite is dear."¹⁰⁶

What is most striking about the two petitions is that some of the most prominent church and community leaders of the time were asking the highest official of the state "to relieve us of this burden."¹⁰⁷ As the editor of the *Vorwärts* put it in a letter to the State Board of Control:

Several prominent Mennonites of this community have . . . circulated two different petitions among the Mennonites this county which I

¹⁰⁵Petitions A and B addressed to the Governor of Kansas from 152 and 107 Hillsboro citizens respectively, March 1910. Photocopies in possession of authors.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Just what was meant by "burden" is subject to several interpretations. One is the "burden" of purging the *community* of an unwanted blight on its moral character. Another is the "burden" of creating and implementing an effective accountability system in the *church* that otherwise could not resolve the problem without the help of the state.

herewith send to you . . . with the request that you present them to His Excellency, the Governor, with expressions of our respect and good will. One of these documents is a protest against Martens using the name Mennonite land Co. for his firm, and the other is an expression of our surprise that said H. J. Martens was not surrendered to the courts. *Of course, this second document did not receive as many signatures as the first, and those Mennonites who do not believe in political action at all refused to sign either paper.*¹⁰⁸

For pragmatic if not ethical reasons, the governor had reason to take these petitions seriously. He was up for reelection in November and the threat of the disaffection of the Mennonite vote in Marion County frightened him. He now knew that he had been wrong to assume that he had done them a service by refusing to extradite one of their own; he had heard otherwise not only from the Hillsboro community but also from his attorney general, whom he had sent there to investigate.¹⁰⁹ This time the governor approved the extradition request.

Through his attorney, Martens appealed his extradition in the Probate Court of Marion County. The appeal was heard by Judge Charles M. Vaughn, who was in the last weeks of his election campaign for the office of County Attorney. The hearing was scheduled for Saturday, October 1, and meanwhile Martens was released to the supervision of the Marion County sheriff. According to the *Marion Record*,

The charge against him is obtaining property under false pretense, it being alleged that he traded a California farm for an Oklahoma farm and that he misrepresented the California property. Counsel for the defense will contend that it was a fair open trade and that there was no misrepresentation and that this effort to return him to Oklahoma is a criminal proceeding to coerce him in a purely civil matter and that therefore he is not extraditable under the law.¹¹⁰

At the hearing, the case against Martens was presented by Blaine County, Oklahoma District Attorney Dyer and Kansas Attorney General Jackson, representing Governor Stubbs (the latter two also being in the last weeks of their political campaigns for a seat in Congress and for reelection as Governor,

¹⁰⁸J. G. Ewert to H. C. Bowman, June 5, 1910. Photocopy of letter in possession of authors. Italics added.

¹⁰⁹"Stubbs und Martens," 1.

¹¹⁰*Marion Record*, 29 Sep. 1910, 1.

respectively). Defending Martens was his attorney, W. H. Carpenter, a future Kansas representative to Congress. After hours of wrangling, Judge Vaughn granted the appeal on a writ of habeas corpus and released Martens. The details of the hearing leading to this outcome were reported by the *Marion Record* as follows:

There have been "things doing" in the much discussed H. J. Martens case this week. . . . On Saturday the Oklahoma sheriff, Mr. McMurray, and the county attorney of Blaine County, Oklahoma, Mr. Dyer, were here to attend the hearing. Attorney General Jackson was also here to assist Mr. Dyer. The hearing took most of the day Saturday and at times the temperature grew rather high, especially in the exchange of courtesies between Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Jackson. The principal points made by Mr. Carpenter were that the Oklahoma papers charged the defendant with "perjury" but that they showed on their face that he was not guilty of "perjury"; that he was not a "fugitive from justice" as the alleged offense . . . was committed over a year ago and that Mr. Martens had been in Oklahoma many times since then; that the papers issued Governor Stubbs' office were vitally defective since they recited that he was wanted for the offense of "false pretenses" while the Oklahoma papers asked for him on the charge of "forgery" and that no man could be extradited except for the offense charged in the information or indictment and further that there is no such crime known either to the Oklahoma or Kansas statutes as "false pretenses"; also that the papers were issued by Governor Stubbs on Sunday and that that made them illegal; also that the Oklahoma papers were not sworn to before a person legally qualified.

The lawyers for the defense [of the extradition] combatted most of Mr. Carpenter's contentions. With reference to the argument that the papers showed . . . that the defendant was not guilty of "perjury"—though if the facts set forth were true he would be guilty of obtaining property under false pretenses—they said nothing, except that Mr. Dyer said that he had already convicted several men on an information drawn exactly as this one was drawn. He did not argue the point aside from that. With reference to the mistake made by Governor Stubbs' office in wrongfully writing into the warrant that he was wanted for "false pretenses" and saying nothing about the charge of "perjury" which was the only one contained in the Oklahoma papers, Mr. Dyer and Mr. Jackson both admitted that it was a mistake but insisted that it was not material and did not prejudice the rights of the defendant. It was also admitted that the papers were drawn in Governor Stubbs' office on Sunday although they were dated on Saturday but contended that that did not invalidate them. They also argued . . . that the person before whom the papers were sworn to in Oklahoma was legally qualified to perform the act. They also argued at considerable length that [Martens] was a "fugitive from justice" under the meaning of that expression as contained in the Federal law relating to extradition.

After hearing the arguments Judge Vaughn decided that the prisoner was not legally held and released him. He said that to his mind the papers were defective in that they did not set forth facts which if true constituted the crime of "perjury" and that Governor Stubbs' office had made a mistake in making out a warrant under the charge of "false pretenses" when the Oklahoma papers asked for him on the charge of "perjury." He said nothing about the other points discussed by the attorneys. When the decision was announced . . . Mr. Dyer stated so that all could hear, "I want to . . . give you notice . . . that we will have another warrant for this man and that we will get him in Oklahoma or we will bankrupt him, if there is any law that can do it. . . ."

Mr. Martens was released between four and five o'clock. Sometime that evening a telegraph was received from the sheriff of Shawnee County [Kansas] to arrest Martens and that he would be down to get him. The telegraph said nothing as to the nature of the charge. . . . Under-sheriff Armstrong who was in Peabody, was summoned at once. . . . He reached here sometime late in the evening and as soon as he saw the telegram he . . . hurried to Hillsboro where he found Martens had gone. . . . [While] he found that Martens had been there, he could find him nowhere. He stayed there Saturday night and Sunday and continued the search but without success. He found that he left town in an auto but has only some faint clues [sic] as to his destination. The wires were warmed up over Kansas and the officers all over the state are on the look-out for him.¹¹¹

With a touch of comic relief, H. H. Fast, the former editor of *Der Deutsche Westen* now working as a reporter for the *Marion Record*, commented:

There was much talk the last day or so about a "hokus-pokus" trial last Saturday at the court house. So far it is difficult to ascertain the facts. When the smoke of the carnage has cleared away, it will be in order to say something. There is [too] much smoke now.¹¹²

Over the next few days, several persons reported having seen Martens, but he was never apprehended.¹¹³ Various rumors circulated regarding his whereabouts; some said he had gone to Canada, others said to Mexico.

Meanwhile, only days remained in the election campaign, during which some additional information was released to indicate how politics was playing a role in the Martens affair. J. G. Ewert, the editor of the *Vorwärts* and the one who had spearheaded the Hillsboro petitions against Martens, claimed to have a letter from Attorney General Jackson stating that before the hearing Judge Vaughn had appeared in Topeka on behalf of Martens and was therefore not an unbiased judge in the case. This allegation was published in the *Marion Review*, a competitor newspaper to the *Marion Record*.¹¹⁴ The *Record* then secured a copy of the letter from the County Republican Chairman and published it, thereby denying that either the Attorney General or the Probate Judge had any prejudicial attitude in the Martens case. Moreover, during the weeks of

¹¹¹*Marion Record*, 6 Oct. 1910, 1.

¹¹²*Marion Record*, 6 Oct. 1910, 2.

¹¹³"Lokal-Neuigkeiten," *Vorwärts*, 21 Oct. 1910, 5; "Lokal-Neuigkeiten," *Vorwärts*, 4 Nov. 1910, 5.

¹¹⁴*Marion Record*, 3 Nov. 1910, 1.

the campaign, letters were exchanged between the editor of the *Vorwärts*, the editor of *Der Herold* in Newton, and the Secretary of the Board of Control under Governor Stubbs, alleging political prejudice in the case. As it turned out, Judge Vaughn lost the election to a Democrat by the narrow margin of 195 votes (not many more than signed the Hillsboro petitions), Attorney General Jackson won his seat in Congress, and Governor Stubbs won reelection by a 62 percent majority, although his support in Marion County dropped from 59 percent in 1908 to 51 percent in 1910, a loss that may well have been caused by what *Der Herold* called the "Stubbs and Martens Affair."¹¹⁵

For the next thirty years Martens lived as a fugitive, eventually taking up residence in a rooming house in Kansas City, where he apparently lived until his death in 1941.¹¹⁶ The last known documentation of his life is a 1940 letter from the Custer County, Oklahoma Clerk addressed to Martens at 912 Tracy, Kansas City, Missouri, concerning a piece of land that Martens believed he still owned. Otherwise, he lived in almost total isolation from his family and rejection by his former Mennonite communities.

In March of 1911 John McWilliams, Jr. sold the land in Lerdo on which Martensdale had stood to the Lerdo Land Company.¹¹⁷ The new owners of the land faced some difficulty gaining clear title because of the various contracts on it from the Martensdale episode. Because of this problem the Lerdo Land Company filed suits in Kern County Superior Court to quiet title on the land in 1912 and again in 1942.¹¹⁸ In both cases neither Martens nor any other defendants appeared in court to dispute the plaintiff's claims, and the judge ruled in the land company's favor both times. Why the case had to be revisited thirty years after the first court decision remains an unanswered question.

¹¹⁵"Stubbs und Martens," 1.

¹¹⁶Henry E. Dahl, interview with Leland Harder, 16 March 1987.

¹¹⁷Deed Book 250, pp. 23, 25, Kern County Hall of Records.

¹¹⁸Deed Book 264, p. 479 and Deed Book 1056, p. 288, Kern County Hall of Records.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The story of the rise and fall of the Mennonite Land Company can best be summarized by reviewing the arguments for the three hypotheses in our subtitle. The thesis of fraud was the conclusion drawn by most of the Mennonite investors and settlers who were hurt by their dealings with Martens, especially those who sought justice in the courts. They believed that Martens sold land under false pretenses, that he was a *Schwindler*.¹¹⁹ This also was the point of view of the Hillsboro citizens who signed the petitions to Governor Stubbs and the Board of Elders of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church when they recommended his excommunication. Nevertheless, the charge of fraud is attenuated by evidence of Marten's seriousness in establishing Mennonite communities with churches and schools in Menno, Kansas and Martensdale, California, notwithstanding gross failures in both settings.

The opposite thesis of benevolent resettlement of landless Mennonites can also be documented. Martens constantly made his appeal to young people who did not have the means to buy a farm and Mennonite immigrants from Russia who needed help in resettling.¹²⁰ Abraham Woelk, of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, was totally convinced about Martens' good intentions. "When I was in Russia," he wrote,

I noticed that the rich people there were getting richer, and the poor always remained poor, because they worked for the rich farmers for a small daily wage, and thus could not save anything with which to buy a piece of land. I would like to advise all those to come to America and turn to Mr. Martens, for he sells land also to those who cannot pay cash.¹²¹

To be sure, the case for benevolent resettlement is seriously undermined because in the end few were really helped and many were badly abused. In reply to this charge, Attorney Carpenter told the Kansas Governor, "Mr. Martens is a German with a good deal of ability but no business system I have done business for him and know that to be the cause of his trouble, his

¹¹⁹"Lokales Allerlei," *DDW*, 18 Feb. 1909, 3.

¹²⁰*DDW*, 5 Feb. 1909, 2. [?]

¹²¹*DDW*, 6 May 1910, 2. [?]

lax method of doing business,"¹²² J. D. Schroeder argued the same point when he said that Martens was guilty only to the extent that he had not done his paperwork properly. He trusted the word of a man rather than insisting that the papers were in order.¹²³

The third hypothesis is the easiest to document. Martens and the vast majority of the Mennonites from Russia were eager for the "pursuit of happiness" in America's free enterprise system. Most of them were capitalists and did not hesitate to admit it. One of the few exceptions was J. G. Ewert, the editor of the *Vorwärts*. Ewert was a severe critic of Martens and an avowed socialist, whose booklet on "Socialism and Christianity" elicited angry protest from his readers.¹²⁴

Certainly Martens was a free enterprise capitalist; by selling land to his people, he alleged that he was helping them escape the plight of landlessness. Following the demise of Martensdale, a California correspondent suggested ironically that this episode might cause some people to embrace socialism as "the only way to end the current speculation system."¹²⁵ A Martensdale settler echoed these same sentiments with the comment, "This whole affair was nothing but a giant lottery, just as is the entire Capitalist system."¹²⁶

The commentators quoted above seemed to believe that disasters of the sort illustrated by Martensdale were the inevitable outcome of free enterprise capitalism. Yet other Mennonite land promoters of the time can be cited as

¹²²W. H. Carpenter, "Regarding Requisition."

¹²³J. D. Schroeder, "Nach Kalifornien," *DDW*, 21 April 1910, 3.

¹²⁴In the defense of capitalism the Mennonite poet, Peter Lohrenz, quoted the words of Jesus, "The poor you have with you always" (Mark 14:7), adding the following versified lament of socialists like Ewert:

By speaking and writing of [capitalist] wrongs
They kill self reliance instead . . .

By wishing and willing to share what is yours
They strip you and leave you in dread. (*DDW*, 5 Aug. 1909,

2.)

¹²⁵Anon. correspondence from Dinuba, *Vorwärts*, 8 April 1910, 4.

¹²⁶"Lokal-Neuigkeiten," *Vorwärts*, 4 March 1910, 6.

examples of a very different approach to resettlement. Perhaps the best such example is David Goerz of Newton, Kansas. At one level, the parallels between Goerz and Martens are many. Both led organizations concerned with the resettlement of "Russian" Mennonites on the western frontier of America—the Mennonite Board of Guardians and the Mennonite Land Company. Both published newspapers designed to promote that cause—*Zur Heimath* (Toward Home) and *Der Deutsche Westen*. Both worked closely with government agencies and railroad companies, and traveled widely and constantly in the pursuit of their goals. Both used complex entrepreneurial procedures and claimed religious motives for their respective enterprises. Both men used capital in their respective enterprises and accumulated sufficient private funds to live in beautiful homes in Newton and Hillsboro—Goerz by means of the economic success of his Western Publishing Company¹²⁷ and Martens by means of his real estate business. Moreover, both tried to be good Christian stewards of their wealth by contributing generously to the founding of Mennonite institutions of higher learning in their respective home towns.

Despite these similarities, one can easily recognize significant differences between the business methods of Goerz and Martens. While Martens' brand of enterprise took its cues almost exclusively from his own interests and goals, Goerz adopted a form of entrepreneurship that was guided and shaped by the larger church community of which he was a part. Even before his baptism at the age of eighteen, Goerz exhibited qualities of character as well as talents for ministry and leadership that were recognized and affirmed by members of his family and community¹²⁸, while for Martens spirituality seemed predominantly an individualist expression separated from the community around

¹²⁷C. E. Krehbiel, who knew Goerz personally, wrote that he "prospered financially" from his publication and book distribution enterprises (Krehbiel, p.353). His Western Publishing Company was chartered in Kansas with 1,000 shares of stock, and in seven years of operation had stockholders in ten states and territories, German and Russia. J[ohn] F. S[chmidt], "Western Publishing Company," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959), 934.

¹²⁸D.C. Wedel, "Contributions of Pioneer David Goerz," *Mennonite Life* 8 (1952): 170.

him. Goerz invariably operated in a corporate structure of accountability that included the church and para-church agencies. His publishing enterprise was not self-directed, as in the case of Martens, but was governed by a board of directors that included Mennonite ministers and respected laymen.¹²⁹ While the Mennonite Land Company was a one-man operation with an inner cadre of hired agents, the Mennonite Board of Guardians was an inter-Mennonite agency formed expressly for the purpose of aiding Mennonite immigrants who could not pay for their passage or get established on family farms without substantial financial help. The Board negotiated with the government and railroads to secure the most favorable terms for their people, and to solicit gift and loan funds from Mennonites already living in America. Martens' interest in government was to promote the Republican Party through his newspaper and to back the candidacies of men who subsequently helped him in his legal defense. Perhaps the most revealing contrast is the editorial policy and content of their respective newspapers. *Zur Heimath* began publication as an organ of the Mennonite Board of Guardians and most of the articles concerned the resettlement of impoverished brothers and sisters in the faith, while *Der Deutsche Westen* concerned the promotion and sale of land to Mennonite investors as well as prospective settlers for profit to the Mennonite Land Company.

When Henry J. Martens' vision for Mennonite resettlement failed, the capitalist Mennonite community tended to place all the blame on him. Yet that very community made possible—and even encouraged—Martens' ill-fated schemes. Many Mennonites of the time seemed to prefer Marten's individualistic, largely unaccountable model of resettlement to the more church-focused, communitarian approach of David Goerz. Not even Martens' excommunication from the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church "for dishonest dealings" dissuaded large numbers of Mennonites from enthusiastically hitching their fortunes to the Mennonite Land Company train.

¹²⁹H. S. B[ender], "Mennonite Board of Guardians," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1957), 591.

After the demise of the Menno, Kansas, settlement, the Western District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church appointed a Colonization Committee to counsel and assist younger families in subsequent resettlement and formation of new Mennonite communities. After six years of effort, the committee gave up in despair, lamenting that "our people are too independent to pay attention to the judgement of the committee."¹³⁰ Perhaps Heinrich Fast was right after all that "the fault is to be found on both sides."¹³¹

The Mennonite Land Company—a brief, forgotten episode in Mennonite history—was not just the failure of one self-appointed entrepreneur from Hillsboro. It was also the failure of the whole Mennonite community.

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¹³⁰Haury, "Hard the Road," 9.

¹³¹"Lokales Allerlei," *DDW*, 3 Sep. 1908, 8.