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Source: *California Mennonite Historical Society Bulletin* no. 28 (1993): 1-7.

Published by: California Mennonite Historical Society.

Stable URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/283>

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# CALIFORNIA MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

No. 28

May 1993

## They Came From Many Places: Sources of Mennonite Migration to California, 1887-1939

In the beginning, they had to come from somewhere. Mennonites first began finding their way to California for the purpose of permanent settlement in the mid 1880s. Arriving for the most part from the Midwest, their numbers were small at first, but by the first decades of the twentieth century had risen to a substantial level. Where, precisely, was that "somewhere" from which these Mennonites came? To say simply, "the Midwest," is a vague response that does little to help us understand the nature of this migration. Some precise measurement is necessary if we are to answer this question in a useful manner.

This study is an effort to provide that precise measurement. The data for this project consist of 992 documented "relocations" into California communities by Mennonite Brethren (831), General Conference Mennonite (135) and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren (26) families or individuals from 1887 to 1939. A "relocation" is defined here simply as one individual or household moving from one community to another. Instead of focusing only on the arrival of Mennonite settlers in California from other states, this study documents their arrival in specific California communities, even if they came from another California town. A single family or individual may be included more than once in the sample, since many moved several times within the state or even left California after settling there once and then later returned a second time. Each time such a family moved into a California community is counted as one "relocation."

While the numbers of relocations given above may seem too heavily weighted toward the Mennonite Brethren, it should be remembered that the MB Church made up the vast majority of Mennonite settlers in California. Two groups—the Mennonite Church and the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (or "Holdeman" Mennonites)—do not appear in the study, although each of them contributed more settlers to California than did the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. I have not yet been able to accumulate sufficient data on either of these group's migration patterns and so have excluded them at this time.

This study relies on two primary data sources. The first is obituaries in church periodicals: *Zionsbote* for Mennonite Brethren, *The Mennonite* and *Der Christlicher Bundesbote* for

General Conference Mennonites, and *Der Wahrheitsfreund* for Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. During the period under consideration these obituaries generally provided detailed information on migration patterns. The second source is membership lists of individual congregations in California. In some cases these membership lists indicate the church from which an individual or family transferred, thereby allowing us to determine migration patterns. There are two main limitations with this second source. First, many congregational lists show only the date of membership transfer and not the place from which the new member(s) transferred. Only the Reedley, Dinuba and Lodi Mennonite Brethren congregations and the Immanuel Mennonite Church in Los Angeles (GC) provided consistent information regarding previous locations. As a result, these four congregations are disproportionately represented in this study.

A second limitation of congregational membership lists for this purpose is their occasional imprecision. Many Mennonites of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries moved frequently, and sometimes did not stay in a given community long enough to join a church there. For example, a Mennonite family might have left Hillsboro, Kansas, where they were members of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and moved to Aberdeen, Idaho. After six or seven months they decided to leave Idaho, never having joined the MB congregation there. They then relocated to Reedley and eventually became members of that MB Church. The Reedley membership book notes that they transferred their membership from Hillsboro. While this is true, it only tells part of the story by omitting the fact that the family had actually come to Reedley from Idaho. Comparing membership lists with obituaries sometimes allows for correction of this problem, but it should be assumed that a small percentage of the data for this study are flawed by this limitation within membership lists.

The results of this study appear in five tables. Table I gives the total results for the study, indicating the number of documented families or individuals moving into California communities and the percentage of the total represented by that figure. Table II gives the same percentages for the Mennonite Brethren, General Conference Mennonites and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren churches individually. Table III lists the percentage of Mennonites settling in specific

California communities from within California rather than from outside the state. Table IV gives the percentage of members in each of the three conferences living in particular states or provinces. This is useful when comparing the percentage of Mennonites migrating to California from a given area against the percentage of Mennonites living in that same area. Finally, Table V compares the results of this study to a 1972 study on Mennonite migration to California by Gary Nachtigall.

**Table I**  
Total Mennonite migration to California communities, 1887-1939

place of origin	# families	% of total	% of total outside Cal.
other California	234	23.6	-----
Oklahoma	183	18.4	24.2
Kansas	182	18.3	24.0
Nebraska	77	7.8	10.2
Saskatchewan	49	4.9	6.5
North Dakota	38	3.8	5.0
Oregon	36	3.6	4.8
Germany, Russia, China	33	3.3	4.4
Minnesota	24	2.4	3.2
Colorado	21	2.1	2.8
Texas	19	1.9	2.5
South Dakota	16	1.6	2.1
Ohio	12	1.2	1.6
Manitoba	10	1.0	1.3
Idaho	9	0.9	1.2
Washington	7	0.7	0.9
Iowa	7	0.7	0.9
Montana	6	0.6	0.8
Louisiana	5	0.5	0.7
Illinois	5	0.5	0.7
Michigan	4	0.4	0.5
Indiana	4	0.4	0.5
Missouri	4	0.4	0.5
Alberta	2	0.2	0.3
British Columbia	2	0.2	0.3
Pennsylvania	2	0.2	0.3
Arizona	1	0.1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>992 (757 excluding California)</b>		

**Movement within California**

When approaching the question of Mennonite migration in California, one might easily focus only on those individuals and families who moved into the state from other places and disregard migration among those already there. To do so,

however, would distort the picture since the largest number of settlers arriving in California Mennonite communities during the years 1887-1939 came from other parts of the state rather than from outside it. Out of 992 total relocations, 234, or 23.6 percent, came from within California, as shown in Table I. This tendency is especially pronounced in the Mennonite Brethren Church, for which 25.9 percent of the total relocations were among families already in California. Only 14.1 percent of General Conference relocations were of this type, while virtually none can be detected in the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Conference (see Table II).

**Table II**  
Migration to California communities by conference, 1887-1939

*Numbers indicate the percentage of all relocations to California from a specific location within each conference.*

place of origin	MB	GC	KMB
other California	25.9	14.1	-----
Oklahoma	19.9	13.3	-----
Kansas	16.8	23.0	46.4
Nebraska	8.3	5.2	7.1
Saskatchewan	5.3	2.2	7.1
North Dakota	4.6	-----	-----
Oregon	3.9	3.0	-----
Germany, Russia, China	3.7	1.5	-----
Colorado	2.5	-----	-----
Texas	2.3	-----	-----
Minnesota	1.7	7.4	-----
Manitoba	1.0	0.7	-----
Montana	0.7	-----	-----
Washington	0.7	0.7	-----
Idaho	0.7	2.2	-----
Michigan	0.5	-----	-----
South Dakota	0.4	1.5	39.3
Louisiana	0.4	1.5	-----
Alberta	0.2	-----	-----
British Columbia	0.2	-----	-----
Arizona	0.1	-----	-----
Illinois	0.1	3.0	-----
Ohio	-----	8.9	-----
Iowa	-----	5.2	-----
Indiana	-----	3.0	-----
Missouri	-----	3.0	-----
Pennsylvania	-----	0.7	-----

This difference may be explained at least in part by the number of members from each group in California and the existing settlement options available to them. By 1940

membership in California stood at approximately 2800 for the Mennonite Brethren, 1400 for the General Conference and 175 for the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. Given that it would have been easier to move relatively short distances within California rather than to come thousands of miles from the Midwest, it seems likely that the amount of intra-state movement would have increased rapidly as the number of Mennonites already living in the state also rose. The other factor that may have played a role in this phenomenon was the number of existing settlement options for each group during these years. Between 1895 and 1939 at least twelve Mennonite Brethren congregations were available for settlement. In contrast there were nine General Conference congregations and only one for the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. A larger number of options probably would have increased the amount of movement within the state.

The amount of intra-state migration was not consistent for all Mennonite settlements in California, as shown by Table III. Several Mennonite Brethren congregations—Los Angeles,

other parts of California who might relocate to these places. The amount of intra-state migration to Martensdale and Escondido was particularly low because they were so short-lived. Martensdale had completely ceased to exist by 1910, and most Mennonite Brethren were moving out of Escondido by 1915. The church continued until about 1924, but would have received very few new members during its last decade. Both churches vanished or began declining before a significant Mennonite Brethren population had arrived in California, and so would have received few of their members from within the state.

The demise of the Martensdale and Escondido congregations, meanwhile, sent many Mennonite Brethren settlers into other California communities. The Kern County congregations at Bakersfield, Rosedale and Shafter received many of these settlers, thereby boosting the percentages of intra-state migration for them.

The Mennonite Brethren Church in Reedley also received a fairly low percentage of its new members via intra-state migration, with a rate only slightly higher than Martensdale and Escondido. This seems true in part because the early success and rapid growth of the Reedley congregation made it the best known of all Mennonite Brethren settlements in California. As such it tended to be a favored destination among settlers from outside the state. Although large numbers of families from within California did move to Reedley and Dinuba, the even larger numbers from the Midwest kept the percentage of intra-state relocation relatively low.

The intra-state migration rate for Lodi was comparable to Reedley, though apparently for different reasons. The Lodi Mennonite Brethren community was populated predominantly by members of "Volga German" Lutheran background who had settled in North Dakota or Saskatchewan before moving to California. The group's name derived from the fact that most of them had once lived in the Volga River region of south Russia, a few hundred miles east of the largest concentration of Mennonites in that country. Some members of this largely Lutheran community had joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia; others did so in the Midwest after their migration to North America in the 1870s. Many of them eventually settled in North Dakota, particularly in the towns of Harvey and McClusky. Another significant group found its way to the Saskatchewan towns of Aberdeen, Flowing Well and Woodrow. Beginning in about 1908 some of these North Dakota families came to California in search of new land. These first arrivals chose the Lodi area, thereby setting a precedent for other Volga German Mennonite Brethren who would follow. In this study there appear 38 families relocating from North Dakota to California; 34 of those families, or 89.5 percent, settled in Lodi. This community also received a disproportionate, though lesser, percentage of relocations from Saskatchewan. Out of 49 total relocations, 18 (36.7 percent) went to Lodi.

These Volga Germans who came from North Dakota and Saskatchewan to Lodi had somewhat different cultural characteristics and even spoke a different dialect of German than did the more numerous "Low German" Mennonites

**Table III**  
**Relocations within California**

Place of arrival	% of total arriving from other locations in California
Los Angeles (MB)	76.9
Orland (MB)	73.3
Shafter (MB)	71.4
Bakersfield/Rosedale (MB)	71.4
Fairmead (MB)	66.7
Livingston/Winton (MB)	57.1
Los Angeles (GC)	22.5
Lodi (MB)	18.1
Reedley/Dinuba (MB)	17.0
Escondido (MB)	11.1
Martensdale (MB)	8.0
Reedley (GC)	5.6
Upland (GC)	4.0
Paso Robles (GC)	-----
Zion (KMB)	-----

Orland, Shafter, Bakersfield, Rosedale, Fairmead and Livingston/Winton—drew most of their members from within California. In contrast, Mennonite Brethren communities in Lodi, Reedley/Dinuba, Escondido and Martensdale drew considerably smaller percentages from within California. These last four communities were the first to be established in California, and thus out of necessity drew their earliest members almost entirely from outside the state. There simply were not then significant numbers of Mennonites living in

who had originally migrated to North America from the Ukraine. Relatively few Low German Mennonite Brethren were attracted to this culturally distinct community, and even fewer Volga German Mennonite Brethren chose to settle in California communities other than Lodi. Both factors kept the amount of intra-state relocations low in this community.

Except for Bakersfield and Rosedale (founded in 1910), all Mennonite Brethren congregations with extremely high intra-state migration levels were established later, most in the 1920s. By this time, the population of Mennonite Brethren in the state had risen to such a level that intra-state migration was more likely than had been the case in previous decades. Furthermore, these later congregations seem to have been less well-known in the Midwest than was Reedley, and therefore attracted fewer migrants directly from those more distant locations. Several were founded primarily by families already in California, and thus might be classified as "secondary" rather than "primary" destinations for those settling in California. Reedley drew the majority of midwestern Mennonite Brethren to California, and in turn sometimes served as a feeder community for these smaller Mennonite Brethren communities founded later.

Among General Conference congregations, only Los Angeles had a higher rate of intra-state migration than did any of the Mennonite Brethren congregations. Reedley, Upland and Paso Robles all received less than ten percent of their new members from other locations in California. These were the first three General Conference congregations established in the state, and the same comments would hold true for them as made earlier regarding early Mennonite Brethren congregations. The Los Angeles church, in contrast, was not organized as a regular congregation until 1918. Thus it would have been in a better position to benefit from internal migration from its inception.

It should be noted here that small General Conference congregations organized at Escondido (1911), Woodlake (1915), Shafter (1922) and Winton (1938) are not included in these statistics, since I have not yet been able to gather adequate data for them. It seems likely that at least the latter of these congregations would have followed a pattern of higher intra-state migration similar to that of the later Mennonite Brethren congregations.

The Zion Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church received virtually no new members from other parts of the state before 1940. This was because there were no other KMB congregations established in California either before or after Zion. Under the circumstances, there was little reason for KMB settlers to go elsewhere in California before moving to the Dinuba area; most of them relocated from the Midwest directly to Zion.

### External sources of migration to California

Outside of California, Oklahoma and Kansas were the two dominant sources of Mennonite Brethren settlement to that state, followed by Nebraska and Saskatchewan. Within the General Conference, Kansas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Ohio, Nebraska and Iowa all contributed at least five percent of

that conference's total migration, while Kansas and South Dakota accounted for over 85 percent of all Krimmer Mennonite Brethren relocations.

Oklahoma and Kansas were far ahead of all other locations in providing Mennonite settlers for California, accounting for over 48 percent of the total external migration to there. Though Oklahoma and Kansas were virtually tied in terms of total settlers sent to California, only Kansas provided more than ten percent of the new California settlers for all three of the Mennonite groups studied here. Since there were almost no KMB congregations in Oklahoma, one would not expect that state to have provided many migrants to California from that group.

In several cases, the places from which Mennonites came to California had been settled only a short time before large numbers of Mennonites began moving from those places to California. Oklahoma, which provided the largest number of California settlers, received its first Mennonites in 1892, five years after the first Mennonites came to California and only about a decade before the first significant migration. Saskatchewan was first settled by Mennonites in 1891, North Dakota in the mid 1890s, Colorado in the late 1890s, Texas in the early 1900s. Many families had scarcely established themselves in these places before packing up and heading for California.

North American Mennonites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exhibited a remarkable willingness to move repeatedly. It was not uncommon for such families to live in five, six or even a dozen widely scattered locations in the space of a few decades. Mennonites, along with many other groups in North American society at the time, exhibited what might be called a "culture of migration." This culture, which first becomes obvious among Mennonites of Russian background in the 1890s, was characterized by a sense of restlessness and the belief that prosperity and comfort always lay over the next horizon. Many Mennonites crossed several horizons in their search for these things; their arrival in California marked only one stop along the way to that goal.

Sometimes, the number of Mennonites migrating to California from a given state or province corresponded closely to the number of Mennonites already living in that place. That is to say, a state with a large population of Mennonites was more likely to send large numbers of migrants to California than was a state with a very small population of Mennonites. A comparison of Tables II and IV suggests something about relocations from specific states and provinces relative to the actual membership there. The state of Kansas is a good example of this phenomenon. In Table II we see that Kansas provided 16.8 percent of the Mennonite Brethren migration, 23.0 percent of the General Conference Mennonite migration, and 46.4 percent of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren migration to California. Turning to Table IV we discover that Kansas at the time was home to 15.4 percent of all North America Mennonite Brethren, 22.1 percent of all General Conference Mennonites, and 43.1 percent of all Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. The two sets of numbers correspond very closely. Again comparing Tables II and IV, we note that Mennonite Brethren relocations for

Oklahoma, North Dakota, Colorado, Montana and Michigan also roughly correspond to the total membership in those states. The same can be said for General Conference relocations from Ohio, Indiana, Nebraska and Oregon. These states simply sent settlers to California at about the rate one would expect based on the relative numbers living in each state.

**Table IV**  
**Distribution of membership in Mennonite Conferences, 1910-1940.**

*Numbers indicate percentages of total conference membership within each state or province. Figures for the MB represent an average for the period 1910-1940; figures for the GC and KMB are for 1940.*

State/province	MB	GC	KMB
Saskatchewan	19.7	12.5	11.8
Oklahoma	16.3	4.3	-----
Kansas	15.4	22.1	43.1
California	14.7	3.4	13.4
Manitoba	11.3	11.9	-----
Nebraska	4.0	3.2	-----
Minnesota	3.7	3.7	-----
North Dakota	3.6	1.0	-----
British Columbia	3.0	1.1	-----
Alberta	2.9	2.3	-----
Oregon	1.8	1.2	-----
Montana	1.1	-----	-----
Colorado	0.9	-----	-----
South Dakota	0.8	3.9	31.8
Michigan	0.4	-----	-----
Texas	0.2	-----	-----
Washington	0.1	1.9	-----
Pennsylvania	-----	8.6	-----
Ohio	-----	7.2	-----
Indiana	-----	3.6	-----
Ontario	-----	3.1	-----
Iowa	-----	2.0	-----
Idaho	-----	0.9	-----
Illinois	-----	0.8	-----
Missouri	-----	0.3	-----

In other cases, however, the rate of relocations is far out of proportion to the actual membership in a given area. Manitoba accounted for an average of 9.5 percent of the total MB membership and 12 percent of GC membership, but only about 1 percent of all MB and GC relocations to California came from there. In the same way, Saskatchewan was home to almost 20 percent of all Mennonite Brethren in North America and 12.5 percent of all General Conference Mennonites, yet it sent only 5.3 and 2.2 percent of its respective members to California. Within the United States, Pennsylva-

nia was home to about 8.5 percent of all GC members, but accounted for only about 1 percent of the GC relocations to California.

Why did Mennonites in these places not come to California in proportion to their total numbers? The most obvious discrepancies are in the Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, suggesting that one might look for answers first in that direction. Clearly, crossing international borders would have been more difficult than simply moving within one's own country. This fact might have kept some Canadian Mennonites from moving to the United States at all, whether to California or any other location. Furthermore, a large percentage of the MB and GC membership in Canada arrived directly from Russia during the 1920s and 1930s. Having only recently escaped the terrors of the Russian revolution and civil war, few of these Mennonite refugees were likely to be searching for greener pastures in other parts of North America so soon.

The percentage of migration to California from Saskatchewan is much higher than for Manitoba primarily because that province by the turn of the century had already received large numbers of Mennonite Brethren families who had come to North America beginning in the 1870s. Having been here longer, such people were more likely to consider relocation to places like California than were the recent refugees to Canada of the 1920s and 1930s. Many Mennonites, furthermore, had moved to Saskatchewan beginning in the 1890s as part of the above-mentioned "culture of migration," searching for fertile farmland on the northern prairies. Their arrival in Saskatchewan for these reasons suggests that they were already predisposed toward migration as a means of social betterment and would likely move again if a good opportunity presented itself. The percentage of actual settlers from Saskatchewan, however, remains far lower than the percentage of Mennonite Brethren who lived in that province (5.3 percent migration compared to 19.7 percent membership). This reinforces the theory that the international border did serve as a deterrent to large scale migration into California.

The low number of General Conference Mennonite relocations from Pennsylvania probably can be explained by sheer distance. Pennsylvania and California were farther apart than any other two major centers of Mennonite population in North America; it would have been the rare family that chose to move all the way from one to the other. Sometimes, Pennsylvania Mennonite families did move to California in stages—perhaps first to Ohio, then to Kansas, and finally all the way to California. Given the methodology of this study, however, such a family would be considered to have come to California from Kansas although they had lived previously in other states.

Other states also sent a disproportionate number of settlers to California. Texas accounted for 2.5 percent of all external MB relocations to California although there were MB congregations in that state only intermittently through the 1930s and at most made up less than 1 percent of the total conference membership. Oklahoma, meanwhile, with only 4.5 percent of the GC members accounted for 13.5 percent of that group's relocations.

Most of the unusually large number of relocations from Texas took place during the 1930s and seem to have been among families living in the northern part of the state. This part of Texas was in the heart of the "Dust Bowl" region, a factor that might have driven many of them away to places like California in the 1930s. Disproportionately large General Conference relocations from Oklahoma do not seem to fall into the same category, and it remains unclear why the percentage of GC relocations from Oklahoma is 300 percent higher than its share of total GC membership. Perhaps the extremely large number of Mennonite Brethren families moving from Oklahoma to California might have had some influence on General Conference Mennonites living in that state.

The data in Table II for the General Conference Mennonites reveal migration from several states that do not appear in either the Mennonite Brethren or Krimmer Mennonite Brethren lists. States such as Ohio, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri and Pennsylvania are almost exclusively General Conference in terms of this study. The reason for this is the different cultural configurations and resultant migration patterns of these Mennonite groups. The Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren both consisted primarily of members out of the Prussian-Russian tradition. Mennonites of this kind migrated to North America beginning in the 1870s and settled in Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota and Manitoba before moving to other locations throughout the west in subsequent decades. The General Conference Mennonites, on the other hand, included large numbers from both the Prussian-Russian tradition as well as the Swiss-South German tradition. This latter group had come to the United States earlier, settling for the most part in a band running across the eastern United States from Pennsylvania to Iowa. A few states, such as Kansas and Nebraska, were home to Mennonites from both traditions, but for the most part the two cultural groups settled in distinctive regions.

### All roads lead to Reedley

Given the sheer numbers of Mennonites who moved there, it goes almost without saying that the Reedley/Dinuba area was the most significant destination for Mennonites relocating in California. By the end of the first decade of this century, Reedley had established itself as the fastest growing Mennonite center in the state. Yet total numbers alone tell only part of the story. The Reedley/Dinuba area also drew its Mennonites from more places than did any other California community. This is particularly true for Mennonite Brethren families. Mennonite Brethren settlers came to the Reedley/Dinuba area from 22 of the 26 locations listed in Table I. The next most diversified MB community was Lodi, which received settlers from 8 such locations. The only other Mennonite congregation to come even close to Reedley in terms of migratory diversity was the General Conference congregation in Los Angeles, which drew from 15 locations.

This diversity says much about the attraction that Reedley held for Midwestern Mennonite considering migration to

California. Whereas other communities drew settlers from narrower geographic spectrums, Reedley attracted Mennonites from almost everywhere. The Kern County settlement of Martensdale, in contrast, was heavily promoted in a few midwestern areas, and thus drew most of its settlers from those states and almost none from anywhere else. Escondido received most of its MB settlers from Oklahoma, while Paso Robles received many GC settlers from Beatrice, Nebraska. Settlements like these occasionally become quite popular with Mennonites in specific regions, but never drew the kind of diversified migration that did Reedley.

### The South Dakota-Dinuba connection

South Dakota was not a major source for Mennonite relocation to California. Only 16 families directly from that state appear in the study, representing 1.6 percent of the total sample. However, 11 of those families joined the Zion Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church in Dinuba, representing 39.3 percent of the total settlement in that congregation (See Tables I and II). These unusual numbers may be accounted for by the power of the extended family in influencing Mennonite migration.

In 1909 Johann Z. Kleinsasser, a former Hutterite who had joined the KMB Church, became dissatisfied with South Dakota and set out in search of a new place to settle. He and two of his sons discovered a favorable location near Dinuba, where they purchased 3200 acres. In 1910 Kleinsasser led his own and 8 other KMB families to Dinuba. The following year they established the Zion KMB Church there. All 8 of these families were related to Johann Kleinsasser, either through birth or by marriage, a clear case of family ties influencing the decision to migrate.

### The Harbin Mennonites

Few Mennonites came directly from Europe to California; only 4.4 percent of the total migration into California during these years came from outside North America. This is largely because California Mennonite settlements were established after the end of large-scale Mennonite migration to the United States from Europe. Swiss and South German Mennonites came to this country beginning in the late seventeenth century and continuing through the first half of the nineteenth century. Settlement in California would have been impossible—or at least unimaginable—during this period. California for most of that time remained a possession of Spain and later Mexico, and attracted almost no European settlement of any kind. By the time Russian Mennonites began arriving in North America in the 1870s, California had become a state and conceivably would have been an option for Mennonite settlement directly from Russia. There is no evidence, however, that any did so. California in the 1870s remained largely isolated from the rest of the country, the victim of inadequate railroad connections across two ranges of rugged mountains and a formidable desert between them. By the mid-1880s, when settlement in California first became a realistic option, significant

Mennonite migration from Europe had already come to a stop. Most of the Mennonites who chose to relocate to California during the next few decades would have done so from other locations in North America rather than directly from Europe.

During the 1920s and 1930s another large wave of Mennonite settlers came across the Atlantic to North America. Most of these immigrants settled in Canada rather than the United States, since the U.S. had placed tight restrictions on immigration from southern and eastern Europe by this time. Without the option of coming to the United States, few of these immigrants found their way directly to California.

One unique group forms an exception to this rule, and accounts for most of the non-North American immigration into California. This group, which came to be known as the "Harbin Mennonites," had settled in the far eastern part of the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s, near the China border. Unable to receive permission to emigrate legally, many of these Mennonites fled across the Amur River to China beginning in 1928. Most of them found their way to the Chinese city of Harbin, from where they hoped to receive permission to enter the United States. Given U.S. immigration restrictions this seemed impossible, and the Harbin Mennonites faced the prospect of remaining in China indefinitely. Their plight reached the attention of American Mennonites, some of who petitioned the U.S. government on their behalf. These requests were effective and 256 of the refugees received permission to enter the United States. A large number of this group settled in the Reedley/Dinuba area in 1929 and 1930; few went immediately to any other part of the state. The Harbin Mennonites make up the majority of Mennonites migrating to California from areas outside North America.

### Comparisons with the Nachtigall study

This study represents the second statistical survey of Mennonite settlement in California. The first was completed by Gary Nachtigall in 1972 as a Master's thesis entitled "Mennonite Migration and Settlements in California," at California State University, Fresno. In the more than twenty years since Nachtigall's study, no follow-up has been made to determine the accuracy of his findings. At the same time, the existence of Nachtigall's thesis also allows us to draw better conclusions about the accuracy of this study.

The studies are not completely analogous, either in methodology or scope. Instead of using periodical and congregational documentary records, Nachtigall relied on a survey of individual Mennonites who had migrated to California. His study drew from 139 completed questionnaires, as opposed to 992 relocations in this study. Nachtigall also limited his study to Fresno and Tulare Counties, and did not include information on relocation within California.

Table V provides the comparative data for these two studies. This table includes only data for relocations in Fresno and Tulare counties, since those were the only areas included in the 1972 study. It also excludes all relocations within California, since that was not considered in the

Nachtigall study either.

Once these adjustments have been made for the current study, the two sets of data shown in Table VI reveal considerable agreement. Only the figures for migration from South Dakota and possibly Oregon show a discrepancy of more than 2.5 percent. The general agreement between the two studies suggests that we now have a fairly accurate set of statistics for Mennonite migration into Fresno and Tulare counties, and that the figures for the rest of the state in this study are likely to be quite accurate as well.

**Table V**  
**Comparison of Enns-Rempel and Nachtigall data on Mennonite migration to Fresno and Tulare Counties from outside California**

*Numbers indicate percentages of total relocations for each study.*

place of origin	Enns-Rempel	Nachtigall
Kansas	28.7	27.7
Oklahoma	24.0	26.1
Nebraska	14.3	11.9
Canada	6.8	6.7
Russia/China	5.6	6.7
Oregon	4.8	?
Colorado	2.9	2.2
Minnesota	2.9	2.2
South Dakota	2.5	6.0
Texas	2.5	3.0
Other	5.0	8.2

Statistical analysis is but one way to tell the story of Mennonite migration to California. As with any methodology, it has both advantages and disadvantages. A statistical approach creates a story largely without individual actors. We see no specific faces and hear no distinctive voices in history of this kind. Yet the statistical approach helps to contextualize those individual stories when they appear in other settings. Their voices become more understandable when we recognize the larger setting of which they were a part. We can better determine whether a particular character is typical by placing him or her into the context provided by statistical research. It by no means tells the story of migration to California in all its drama, but it helps to deepen the significance of that drama.

—Kevin Enns-Rempel