



GERMAN-RUSSIAN IMMIGRANTS TO KANSAS AND AMERICAN POLITICS

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IN THE 1972 presidential election, George McGovern received only 30 percent of the vote in 10 predominantly Mennonite townships in central Kansas. Did the members of this traditional peace church distrust McGovern's opposition to the Vietnam war? President Nixon garnered a plurality of 48 percent of the vote in eight predominantly Catholic townships in Ellis county. Were the usually Democratic voting Catholics alienated by McGovern? These two groups, the Mennonites and the Catholics, have much more in common than their advocacy of President Nixon in 1972. Both groups trace their ancestry to immigrants from Russia who settled on the plains of Kansas in the 1870's. During nearly a century of residence in Russia, the Mennonites and Catholics had lived in small clusters along the Volga and Dnieper rivers in southern Russia, where they sought to retain their original German language and culture. Both groups had originally been German; now they were neither quite German nor Russian and were labeled German-Russians upon immigration to the United States. How did these Mennonites and Catholics, separated by their religions but united by their common experiences in Russia and as immigrants, react to American politics?

Opposite page—German-Russian immigrants who settled in Kansas migrated originally from Germany to Russia to escape poverty and oppression in Europe. They moved again to America when political privileges granted by Catherine II were withdrawn. The five "explorer scouts" (above) were selected at the spring, 1874, mass meeting in Herzog to investigate settlement possibilities in America. In Russia the Catholics and Mennonites had clustered in close-knit communities where they preserved their German culture and Christian faith and remained set apart from their Russian neighbors. But when they settled in America they gradually adopted the customs of their new country, becoming citizens and taking an active part in politics. The students from the Girls Catholic High School in Hays (below) showed their support for the late John F. Kennedy for president when he spoke at Jefferson West School in November, 1958. Photographs reproduced from Norbert R. Dreiling, *Official Centennial History of the Volga-German Settlements in Ellis and Rush Counties in Kansas, 1876-1976* (Hays, Volga-German Centennial Association, 1976).

The voting data used to discover the Catholic and Mennonite political responses was collected from 10 Mennonite townships in Marion, McPherson, and Harvey counties and from eight Catholic townships in Ellis county. In each township, the concentration of German-Russians has been sufficiently heavy to justify reference to a Mennonite or Catholic vote.¹ Whenever possible, the drama of national, state, and local politics as portrayed in books, pamphlets, newspapers, and personal papers is presented to illuminate these raw voting statistics.

THE MENNONITES and Catholics who eventually found their way to Kansas had begun their migration in the 18th century when Catherine II of Russia issued an invitation to industrious people throughout Europe to occupy the large unsettled areas of southern Russia. Her offer included such inducements as free transportation, building loans, exemption from military service, freedom of religion, and local self-government.² Thousands immigrated to escape the poverty and oppression which characterized their lives in various parts of Europe. The Mennonites and Catholics established close-knit villages instead of settling on individual farms in Russia. They took full advantage of the promised political and religious autonomy to preserve their German culture and Christian faith. Their agricultural communities were small democratic islands within the autocratic Russian state, and the high level of education among the Mennonites and Catholics coupled with the centrality of religion in their daily lives set them apart from their Russian neighbors.³ These characteristics

1. These townships include Lone Tree, Turkey Creek, Meridian, and Spring Valley in McPherson county, West Branch, Menno, Liberty, and Ritsley in Marion county, Alta and Garden in Harvey county, and Victoria, Herzog, Catherine, Walker, Big Creek, Wheatland, Lookout, and Freedom in Ellis county. Beginning in 1912 Lookout township has been divided into North and South Lookout for voting purposes. The percentage of Mennonites and Catholics in each township was computed by consulting census records and tabulating the number of immigrant family names. This article summarizes the conclusions of a detailed statistical study of this voting data.

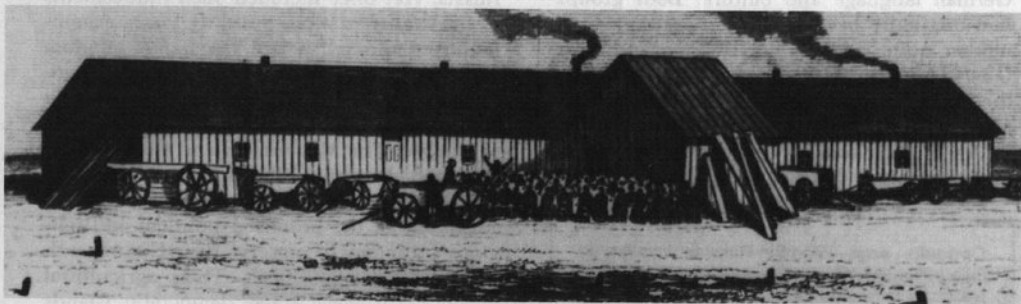
2. For information on the migration, see Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959), v. 4, p. 381; and Rev. Francis S. Laing, "German-Russian Settlements in Ellis County, Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections*, Topeka, v. 11 (1909-1910), p. 490.

3. Agnes C. Dreiling and Amy Brungardt Toepfer, *Conquering the Wind* (n.p.: Victor C. Leiker, 1966); and C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Ind.: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), provide excellent descriptions of life in Russia.



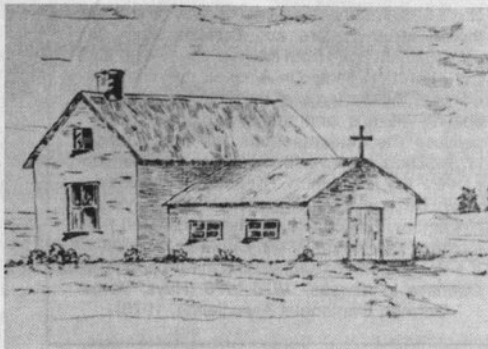
Their faith was central to their lives . . .

German-Russian immigrants who settled in Ellis county were Catholic, while the Mennonites sought religious freedom and new homes in south-central Kansas. Catharine, in Ellis county, was established in April, 1876, by the first group of immigrants to come from Russia. This photograph of St. Catherine's church, dedicated in 1892, is reproduced from *Golden Jubilee of the German-Russian Settlements of Ellis and Rush Counties, Kansas* (Hays, *Ellis County News*, 1926).



This sketch reproduced from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, New York, March 20, 1875, shows buildings erected by the Mennonite colony north of Newton as temporary barrack residences until permanent dwellings could be built. The caption under the picture was "Mennonites at worship on the prairie," the newspaper explaining that religious exercises were held in the open air in pleasant weather.

The largest and most important Volga-German colony in Ellis county was at Herzog. The community absorbed the English colony of Victoria, and the name of the town was changed to Victoria in 1913. This sketch of the first Herzog church, which was an addition to the home of Alois Dreiling, is reproduced from Norbert R. Dreiling, *Official Centennial History of the Volga-German Settlements in Ellis and Rush Counties in Kansas, 1876-1976* (Hays, Volga-German Centennial Association, 1976).



were vital in determining their political responses in Kansas. Why did they abandon their homes in Russia for a hazardous trek to the wild frontiers of America?

The immediate cause of the migration of both the Mennonites and Catholics was the withdrawal in the 1870's of the political privileges granted by Catherine II. Moreover, Russian supervisors would be assigned to their schools and Russian introduced as a subject of study. A new military law would abolish their exemption from national service. B. M. Dreiling explains the basis of the haunting fear of military service which spread even among the Catholics:

Moreover, when we consider the length of service (six years), the religious discrimination which prevented any but orthodox Russians from rising to the rank of officer, the poor treatment accorded the soldiers, and the fact that during the whole of their stay in the army, Catholics were unable to fulfill even their Easter duty, we can readily understand why the colonists should resist such an enactment.⁴

The provision of noncombatant service for the Mennonites did not alleviate their anxiety—the Russianization program would eventually undermine the communities which the Mennonites and Catholics believed were indispensable to the preservation of their culture and faith.

This is not the place to recount the excitement and hardships of the journey which brought many Mennonites to south-central Kansas and Catholics to Ellis county.⁵ Their search was for religious freedom and good land of sufficient quantity to reestablish closed, autonomous settlements. The Kansas Pacific and Santa Fe railroads were major factors in directing the immigrants to their new homes in Kansas. The railroads desired to sell land recently granted them by the government and to import industrious farmers who would soon be valuable customers. Meanwhile the Mennonites and Catholics sought to construct villages as much as possible like those they had just left in Russia. Thus they clustered together in

small communities. How long could these German-Russian immigrants isolate themselves from the pressures encouraging involvement in American society and politics?

DURING the first years after their immigration to the United States, the German-Russians were primarily concerned with economic survival. The pioneers faced hardships which had to be overcome, but new ideas also had to be absorbed or rejected. Political participation was a major issue facing the Mennonites, and *Zur Heimath*, the major newspaper of the Mennonite immigrants, carried several articles debating the advantages and disadvantages of political involvement. One writer argued, "To vote for the government which wields the sword is to express approval of and responsibility for the use of the sword. If we vote, we are logically 'obligated to do military service'."⁶ The foundations of the Mennonite view of government were laid in the 16th century Reformation, and most Mennonites believed that they owed obedience to the government if prior claims of God were not violated by this action. Nevertheless, the extent to which Mennonites should participate in the American political process has remained a controversial issue during a century of residence in the United States.⁷ The Catholic religion did not pose similar moral and theological questions for the immigrants to Ellis county.

Both the Mennonite and Catholic immigrants arrived in America with a positive view of American democracy. They gradually began to think of themselves as Americans, abandoning European dress, changing strange mannerisms, and learning enough English to communicate. Thus when an American politician arrived at the immigrant's farm with a stack of naturalization papers and a well-rehearsed talk on the benefits of becoming a citizen and voting for him in an election, it was difficult to

4. B. M. Dreiling, *Golden Jubilee of the German-Russian Settlements of Ellis and Rush Counties* (Hays: Ellis County News, 1926), p. 13; Dreiling and Toepfer, *Conquering the Wind*, pp. 93-94, 164.

5. For accounts of this adventure, see David V. Wiebe, *They Seek a Country* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1959); John D. Unruh, Jr., "The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Brings the Mennonites to Nebraska, 1873-1878," *Nebraska History*, Lincoln, v. 45 (March, June, 1964), pp. 3-30, 177-206; Helen B. Shipley, "The Migration of the Mennonites From Russia, 1873-1883, and Their Settlement in Kansas" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1954).

6. D. S. H. "Zur Buergerrechts-Frage," *Zur Heimath*, Halstead, September 1, 1876. This article is translated by James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1975), p. 20. Juhnke's study of the political acculturation of the Mennonites was a valuable source of information for this article, and he originally suggested the possibility of comparing Mennonite and Catholic political experiences in Kansas.

7. For discussion, see Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptists and the State," *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, Guy F. Herschberger, ed. (Scottsdale, Pa., 1957), pp. 189-191; Elmer Neufeld, "Christian Responsibility in the Political Situation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Goshen, Ind., v. 32 (April, 1958), p. 153; and J. Winfield Fretz, "Should Mennonites Participate in Politics?" *Mennonite Life*, North Newton, v. 11 (July, 1956), p. 140.

refuse to sign on the dotted line. The result was a steady stream of naturalizations.

Suddenly the German-Russians had a new and strange power. For the first time they had a share in determining political questions beyond the scope of their own families and villages. They must decide among various candidates not only for county and state offices but also for national positions. How would these well-educated, serious-minded farmers exercise their novel authority? Would they register as Democrats or Republicans? On what bases did the immigrants rest their early political decisions? They were not familiar with any of the national issues or party platforms. They were not even acquainted with state or county concerns. The political acculturation of the immigrants began at the local level.

The first politician who came into contact with the Catholics and whose political affiliation is known was Charles Miller. He was from Germany and ran for county sheriff in Ellis county in 1885. His German-language newspaper appealed to the German-Russians to vote for Democrats, and he offered to pay the poll tax of those who would support him. These tactics were successful, and without the votes of the Catholic immigrants he would have lost the election. Several years earlier a Republican newspaper had complained: "They [the Democrats] confidently expect to carry this [the Russian] vote solid, and to obtain this result have spared neither money nor work. It is said that the village of Hartzog (said by the Russians) was purchased outright."⁸ Whether purchased or persuaded, the Catholics soon began voting a solid Democratic ticket. That the only men in the county who spoke German and the only German newspapers were Democratic provides the best explanation of this decision.

The first experiences of the Mennonites with political parties were similar to those of the Catholics. The politicians in Marion and McPherson counties recognized the advantage of recruiting the Mennonites into their party; however, it was the Republicans, not the Democrats, who gained the upper hand with

the Mennonites. A correspondent of a Marion newspaper noted the results as early as 1876: "It was a grand sight to see 40 or more of our Russian-German neighbors in solid phalanx, march up to the polls and vote for Hayes and Wheeler. . . ." ⁹ The Democratic party was practically nonexistent in south-central Kansas at this time; the local Republicans held many rallies and controlled the newspapers; and, perhaps most significant with regard to capturing the Mennonite vote, the Republicans often spoke German. Thus the party of Lincoln, the party which provided their homestead land and built the railroads, gained the support of the majority of the Mennonites. The son of one of the original immigrants stated, "They all wanted to be good citizens. Good citizenship in central Kansas entailed Republican politics in the 1870's." ¹⁰

ALTHOUGH most casual observers would conclude that the last 20 years of the 19th century was a period of Republican supremacy, a clear winner never emerged from the hectic fight for control of the national government. The appearance of populism during the 1890's brought additional confusion to the political scene while the German-Russian immigrants were endeavouring to make their first national political decisions. A significant number of immigrants first voted in the presidential election of 1884—an election characterized by a mudslinging campaign which left the immigrants voting primarily on the basis of their faith in local newspapers and politicians.¹¹ The Catholic immigrants gave the Democrat, Grover Cleveland, a solid 63.5 percent of their votes, while the Mennonites gave a plurality of 45.4 percent to the Republican, James G. Blaine. The Mennonites gave nearly 20 percent of their votes to the Greenback candidate, Benjamin Butler, initiating a trend among the Mennonites to support third-party candidates. Almost the same statistics apply to the immigrants' vote in the 1888 presidential election (except on this occasion the Mennonite third-party vote went to the National Labor candidate).

9. *Marion County Record*, Marion, November 10, 1876, p. 3.

8. Hays City *Sentinel*, November 2, 1878, p. 2; November 9, 1878, p. 1. For further information on Miller, see Albert J. Petersen, Jr., "The German-Russian Settlement Pattern in Ellis County, Kansas," *Rocky Mountain Social Science Journal*, Ft. Collins, v. 5 (1968), pp. 59-60. This is the only study which considers the Catholics' politics in any detail.

10. James C. Iuhnke, "The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites, 1870-1940" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1966, from an interview with Herman Loewen, May 9, 1967), p. 66.

11. For general background on this election, see H. Wayne Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley—National Party Politics, 1877-1896* (Syracuse, 1969), pp. 214-216.

**Woman's place was
in the home . . .**



Mennonite home in Marion county.



German-Russian
couple at Hays.

Although the Mennonites in south-central Kansas and the Catholics in Ellis county demonstrated opposite trends with regard to party affiliation by the beginning of the 20th century, they agreed on one major issue facing American voters in that period. Both in 1894 and 1912 when Kansans voted on the woman suffrage question the German-Russians opposed it. And after women were allowed to vote, few German-Russian women took advantage of the right.



Mennonite couple
in Marion county.

The appearance of the Populist party disrupted the frontier political scene during the 1890's as the battle cry of reform for the workers and farmers was raised. Falling agricultural prices and drought had plagued the farmer—it appeared that the established parties were becoming callous and undermining the democratic system. The choice was made to form a third party to mount a national campaign.¹² Did the Mennonites and Catholics join other disenfranchised newcomers in voting for the Populists? How did they respond to a campaign flavored with moral and emotional arguments? In fact, the Republican vote of the Mennonites increased slightly with the People's candidate, James Weaver, receiving only a handful more of their votes than had the Greenback or National Labor candidates. Weaver's name was not on the ballot in Ellis county, and the Catholics increased their votes for Cleveland to 73.9 percent. The gubernatorial candidate who ran on a joint Populist-Democrat ticket attracted a smaller share of Catholic votes than Cleveland. Neither the Mennonites nor Catholics joined the Populist bandwagon.

The Catholic vote for the Democrat (and Populist) party remained constant in 1896 and 1900 with William Jennings Bryan receiving respectively 79.8 and 78.9 percent of the vote in the Catholic townships. However, the Mennonites' 60.8 percent vote for McKinley in 1896 and increase to 65.4 percent in 1900 comes as a surprise. During McKinley's first term, imperialism had surfaced as a major issue, and the United States was involved in its first war since the Mennonites had arrived in America. Why did the nonresistant Mennonites support the McKinley administration. James C. Juhnke answers, "The Mennonites were wholesale dupes of the American myth that McKinley had delayed the war 'as long as possible.'" ¹³ Perhaps the Mennonites also believed local newspaper accounts that Bryan was conspiring with Filipino rebels against the United States. One Mennonite leader even accused Bryan of encouraging the revolt. Bryan

had also gained a damaging reputation as an opponent of recent immigrants.¹⁴

For the next three presidential elections the pattern which had been established among the Catholics continued with the Democratic vote gradually increasing until it reached 86.2 percent in 1912 for Woodrow Wilson. The nonresistant Mennonites continued their rather puzzling behavior by presenting the militaristic, nationalistic hero, Theodore Roosevelt, with 78.8 percent of their votes in 1904. Perhaps his dislike of pacifist groups was outweighed by his strongly Christian pronouncements. When forced to choose between Roosevelt's hawkish successor, Taft, and the more pacifistic Bryan in 1908, the Mennonite Republican vote decreased to 64.7 percent. Conclusive evidence that the vote for Roosevelt and Taft was not just part of a Mennonite adherence to the Republican party is provided in 1912 when Roosevelt left the Republican party but received 49.6 percent of the Mennonite vote. Taft was left with only 13 percent of the vote.

Although the Mennonites and Catholics demonstrated opposite trends with regard to party affiliation by the beginning of the 20th century, they agreed on one major issue facing American voters during this period. The German-Russians had the opportunity to vote twice on the woman suffrage question in Kansas. The Kansans defeated a constitutional amendment the first time in 1894, but it finally passed in 1912. The German-Russian attitude toward this issue was determined largely by the position of women in a German family. Both Catholics and Mennonites agreed that a woman's place was in the home. An edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* at this date endorsed opposition to woman suffrage.¹⁵ In 1894 only 11.9 percent of the Mennonites and 16.8 percent of the Catholics voted in favor of the suffrage amendment. The supporters of the suffrage amendment were far better organized in 1912, and a headline in the conservative *Marion County Record* recorded that women are people.¹⁶ Nevertheless, although the vote for woman suffrage increased in Kansas, the support of the amendment increased only

12. On populism, see O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism, Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), p. 1; W. G. Clugston, *Rascals in Democracy* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1940), p. 87; Solon J. Buck, *The Agrarian Crusade; A Chronicle of the Farmer in Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920), p. 126.

13. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, p. 59.

14. For example, *Marion County Record*, September 7, 14, 1900, both p. 10.

15. *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), v. 15, p. 694.

16. Lenore Doster Cooke, "Are Women People?" and "Her 'Proper Sphere,'" *Marion Record*, October 17 and 24, 1912, p. 1.

slightly to 14.2 percent for the Catholics and 20.5 percent among the Mennonites. After women were allowed to vote, the German-Russian women rarely took advantage of their right as the failure of the number of voters to increase in the Catholic and Mennonite townships illustrates. One source observed, "Even as late as the early 1940's, the rural farm wife could be seen in Hays City walking several paces behind her husband. . . ." ¹⁷

Even though the Mennonites and Catholics agreed about woman suffrage, their positions with regard to another proposed constitutional amendment were diametrically opposed. Kansas voters approved a prohibition measure in 1880, but the polls show 42.6 percent of the Mennonites and only 9.9 percent of the Catholics in favor of the measure. On the one hand, the use of alcoholic beverages was a social custom which the Catholics believed was outside the government's right to regulate. Even after the law passed, Ellis county was notorious for its bootleggers.¹⁸ On the other hand, the Mennonite immigrants were not as fond of alcohol as the Catholics. In fact, the prohibition issue encouraged some Mennonites to vote for the first time since this was a moral issue and avoided partisan politics.¹⁹ The passage of the national prohibition amendment in 1919 and its repeal in 1933 were not considered by the voters of Kansas, but when the state amendment of 1880 was reaffirmed in 1934, only 20.0 percent of the Mennonites voted to repeal prohibition, while 82.6 percent of the Catholics favored repeal. By a narrow margin in 1948, prohibition was finally defeated in Kansas with 14.6 percent of the Mennonites and 89.5 percent of the Catholics favoring repeal.

A more serious issue for both the Mennonites and Catholics than either woman suffrage or prohibition was the commencement of World War I. The immigrants still considered Germany in many ways to be their homeland

and opposed the United States' entry into the war. However, the 1916 election, before the United States had entered the war, did not reveal any unusual reaction as the Mennonites voted 66.0 percent for the Republican candidate, and the Catholics gave 78.1 percent of their votes to Woodrow Wilson. Contrary to some myths, the Mennonites did not support Wilson for "keeping us out of the war."

The political reaction to the war was delayed until 1920 when the Mennonite Republican vote zoomed to 78.3 percent, the highest level since Roosevelt's election in 1904. Even more astounding was the Catholic reaction. Warren Harding, not only received a majority of Catholic votes for the Republicans for the first time, but he gathered in an amazing 83.5 percent of the Catholic votes. The previous high had been 35.8 percent for Roosevelt in 1904. The German-Russians were bitterly displeased with the Democrats, who did not recover their prewar popularity with the immigrants for over a decade.

Whereas the war against Germany had been over for nearly five years, it had not been forgotten by the German-Russians when the campaigning began for the 1924 presidential election. The Mennonites gave the Democratic candidate, John Davis, the lowest percentage of their votes ever received by a major party candidate, and even the Catholics gave Davis a mere 27.1 percent of their votes. Only James Cox, the Democrats' candidate in 1920, had received less support from the Catholics. These results should not imply that the German-Russians turned automatically to the Republicans after the war. Robert LaFollette, the energetic and inspirational leader of the Progressive party, had joined the race as a third-party candidate. His agrarian reforms appealed to farmers throughout the country, but more importantly, he had been one of the few major politicians who had not supported the war effort. LaFollette garnered 47.9 percent of the Catholic vote and 32.2 percent of the Mennonite vote in 1924. Perhaps Theodore Roosevelt's earlier denunciation of LaFollette as a traitor had reduced his popularity among the Mennonites.²⁰

17. Petersen, "German-Russian Settlement Pattern," p. 57. Also see Cornelius Cicero Janzen, "A Social Study of the Mennonite Settlement in the Counties of Marion, McPherson, Harvey, Reno, and Butler, Kansas" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1926), p. 55.

18. Sr. Mary Eloise Johannes, *A Study of the Russian-German Settlements in Ellis County, Kansas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1946), p. 131. When the author arrived in the Catholic town of Schoenchen he was greeted by a group of junior high youngsters who were just finishing a bottle of wine, and the only activity in any of the Catholic towns in the middle of a hot summer afternoon appeared to be at the local saloons.

19. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, pp. 43-45.

20. For background on LaFollette, see Herbert F. Margulies, *The Decline of the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1920* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1968), pp. 25-26, 201.

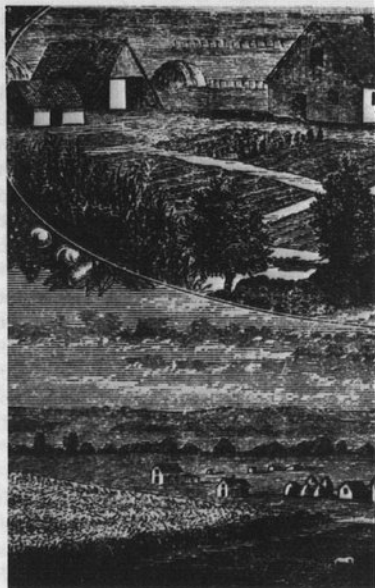
The Mennonites and Catholics returned to their traditional political affiliations in 1928. The Catholic faith and antiprohibition stand of Alfred Smith, the Democrats' candidate, became major issues, but these controversies gave him an almost unlimited appeal to the Catholics in Ellis county. They responded with an all time high vote of 94.2 percent for Smith. Meanwhile the factors which attracted the Catholics to Smith were equally effective in alienating the Mennonites who gave Herbert Hoover 86.0 percent of their votes. Only World War I had caused a deviation in the trend for the Catholics to become a solid bloc of Democrats, and the Mennonite Republicans, though never as united as the Catholics, adopted the political affiliation of the earliest Mennonite voters. However, the depression and another world war soon tested these tendencies.

What economic and moral directives would guide the honest, hardworking farmers as they faced economic collapse? The Mennonites were carried along with the stream of discontent against the Republicans who happened to be in power when the depression commenced. For the second time in 50 years, they did not give the Republicans a majority, and Hoover's popularity fell to 47.3 percent with Franklin D. Roosevelt capturing a plurality of 49.6 percent. Even Roosevelt's stand on prohibition did not discourage them. The 93.7 percent vote of the Catholics for Roosevelt needs no explanation. Roosevelt's popularity among the Mennonites and Catholics dropped only slightly in 1936; this in spite of the Republican candidacy of Kansas' own Alf Landon.

WITH RECOLLECTIONS of the horror of war with Germany still in their memories, a second war with Germany crept up on the Catholics and Mennonites. Even before our nation had entered the war in 1940, the American anti-German policy was quite clear. Although diminished since World War I, the same pro-German sentiments lurked in the backgrounds of the Catholics and Mennonites. The German-Russians again registered their protest. One Mennonite editor wrote that the unfriendly stand against Germany was "very unfortunate, for our country owes much to Germany and its many citizens of German extraction."²¹ Roosevelt's support among the

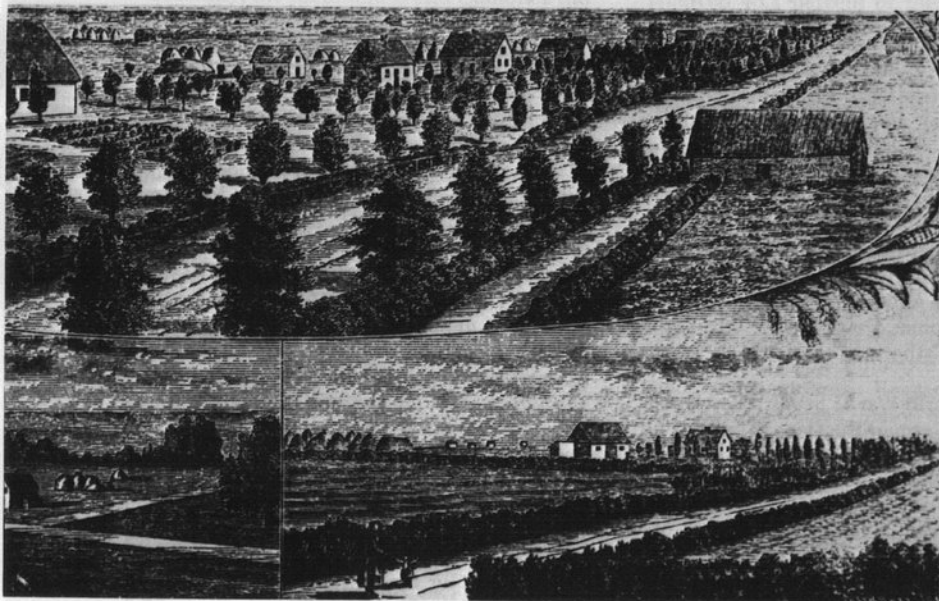
21. "An Unfortunate Situation," *The Mennonite*, North Newton, November 29, 1938.

They prospered



The above sketch of a Mennonite colony in Harvey county is reproduced from *The Western Magazine*, Chicago, v. 4, no. 10 (1881). The drawing showing the colony four years after settlement illustrated an article on the Mennonites which commented on the industry of the people and how they prospered "on the rich and fertile lands" of Kansas. At right, a group of loyal German-American farmers posed beside their farm machinery in Marion county in the World War I era. The immigrants still considered Germany in many ways their homeland and opposed the United States entry into the war. But they were loyal citizens, and expressed their opinions at the ballot box, both Catholics and Mennonites registering their displeasure with the Democrats in 1920.

and became loyal citizens . . .



Mennonites plummeted to only 14.3 percent in 1940. The Catholic reaction was equally pronounced as Wendell Willkie, the Republican candidate, received 53.5 percent of their votes to become only the second Republican presidential candidate to win the Catholics' approval in 60 years. Kansas was on the way to economic recovery, and there was no sudden rejection of the New Deal. The combination of the threat of war against Germany and the equation of Roosevelt's seeking a third term with totalitarianism swayed the German-Russians. The fears of autocratic government transported from Russia were still alive. These trends were more pronounced when Roosevelt ran again in 1944. The Mennonite Democratic vote dropped to a new all time low of 9.5 percent, and Thomas Dewey gathered in 62.2 percent of the Catholic vote for the Republicans.

The end of World War II began a new era of politics for the German-Russians. The life and culture carried to the United States from Russia was 70 years in the past, and acculturation had produced a new American style of life. Their political reactions during this era would reflect the responses not of a group of inexperienced, uncertain immigrants but of an entire generation which had grown up in America. Nevertheless, the trends established by their ancestors persisted. Dewey was again the Republican candidate in 1948, and he received 77.4 percent of the Mennonite vote. The Catholics returned to the Democratic fold voting 68.7 percent for Harry Truman, although this indicates some continued dissatisfaction with the Democrats. Dwight D. Eisenhower opposed Adlai Stevenson for the presidency in 1952 and 1956. The Mennonites voiced their strong support of the war hero in presenting Eisenhower with 81.2 and 87.2 percent of their votes in 1952 and 1956 respectively. One may be surprised to discover that the Catholics also gave Eisenhower a majority. Were they carried along with the tide of nationalism? This factor may have swayed some voters, but a study which polled many Catholics discovered a different motive. The conservative Catholics were alienated by Stevenson's divorce.²² The fact that the Catholics did not support the Republican gubernatorial candidates in 1952 and 1956 adds further weight to this argument.

The presidential election in 1960 found the Catholics and Mennonites again at opposite poles. The Catholics gave the Catholic candidate of the Democrat party, John F. Kennedy, 86.2 percent of their votes. Meanwhile, the Mennonite Democratic vote dropped to a low of 9.3 percent as they voted almost unanimously for Richard Nixon. Perhaps Nixon's role as vice-president in rooting out Communists (Russian spies) and his Quaker background attracted a few Mennonite voters. In 1964 the Catholic vote for the Democratic candidate, Pres. Lyndon Johnson, decreased slightly to 81.7 percent, but the Mennonite Republican vote dropped to its lowest point since 1936 as Barry Goldwater received a slight majority of 58.8 percent. Goldwater's blunt, sharp comments on Vietnam may have scared away some of the Mennonites. His hawkish, no appeasement attitude did not attract pacifist supporters, but the Republican vote dropped throughout Kansas so other factors may also have been involved. When Nixon ran again in 1968, he recovered the Republican popularity with 82.4 percent of the Mennonite vote. Nixon even received 33.8 percent of the Catholic vote. This, combined with the popularity of George Wallace among the Catholics (10.3 percent), reduced Hubert Humphrey's majority to 55.8 percent.

IN CONCLUSION, the German-Russian immigrants to Kansas and their descendants have formed distinct groupings, often expressing political opinions that differed from their neighboring Kansans' views. Moreover, a clear division between the Mennonites and Catholics has been discovered on several issues, particularly on general party affiliation and prohibition. However, their reactions to woman suffrage and two world wars were quite similar—their social and cultural background clearly dictated these responses. It has not been possible in this article to analyze the Mennonites' and Catholics' votes on various constitutional amendments and in gubernatorial races, but these votes confirm the trends discovered in the presidential elections. The evidence supports several conclusions about their politics. First, outsiders directed the earliest political involvements of the immigrants. Various groups of local politicians encouraged the Mennonites and Catholics to become citizens and vote. When other factors have not

22. Petersen, "German-Russian Settlement Pattern," pp. 61-62.

intervened, the Mennonites have remained true to their original Republican loyalty and the Catholics to their commitment to the Democrats.

Secondly, the Mennonites and Catholics did not remain blindly affiliated with a party when their interests were at stake. Both groups had a special concern for the woman suffrage and prohibition questions. World Wars I and II aroused deep feelings as the United States allied with Russia against the German homeland.

Finally, the Mennonites and Catholics also had their own special, personal heroes. Theodore Roosevelt had a strange attraction for the Mennonites as did Richard Nixon in more recent years. Alfred Smith and John F. Kennedy easily gathered in huge majorities from their fellow Catholics, but Adlai Stevenson's divorce received their displeasure. Although it is never easy to discover a clear correlation between the religious, social, or economic views of a group and its political position, the German-Russians in Kansas have followed a reasonably clear pattern of development. Their voting records have often been predictable, but there were also several surprises. A combination of cultural and religious background with local environment and leadership have shaped the Mennonite and Catholic political experiences in Kansas.

The 1976 presidential election saw the Catholics return to the Democratic fold after having been frightened by the radicalism of George McGovern. They presented 69.5 percent of their votes to Jimmy Carter while Pres. Gerald Ford could only manage 28.7 percent. Nevertheless, 1976 produced another rare move among the Mennonites toward the Democrats. Some Mennonites were attracted by Carter's promises to reduce military spending and work for world peace. In addition, Carter did not have the taint of radicalism which had prevented the conservative Mennonites of Kansas from endorsing McGovern's stand on

these issues. Moreover, Carter's avowed and sincere Christian faith probably attracted some Mennonites. Perhaps others were discouraged by Watergate and Nixon's demise. Thus Carter received 46.1 percent of the Mennonite vote, and President Ford garnered a slim majority of 51.1 percent.

In 1980 the Ronald Reagan landslide in Kansas carried along both the Mennonites and the Catholics. Reagan became the sixth Republican presidential candidate to receive a majority (55.7 percent) from the Catholics while Carter's support fell to 34.7 percent or half of his 1976 percentage. Reagan's divorce evidently influenced very few Catholic voters and was outweighed by dissatisfaction with Carter's performance. This does not necessarily reveal a decline in the appeal of the Democrat party or in the influence of religion upon the Catholic voters. Reagan's conservatism may have attracted many of the Catholics. However, in the Kansas presidential primary, Edward Kennedy, a Catholic liberal, received a substantial majority from the usually conservative Catholics, and Ellis county was one of four Kansas counties to give Kennedy a majority.

President Carter's popularity also dropped considerably among the Mennonites, who expressed disenchantment with Carter's failure to live up to their 1976 expectations. Carter polled 24.4 percent of the Mennonite vote, and Reagan received 60.0 percent. Perhaps the 13.3 percent of the vote which the Mennonites presented to John Anderson reveals a protest against both Reagan and Carter. Third-party candidates continue to attract support among the Mennonites, but only Theodore Roosevelt in 1912 and Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 have upset their traditional Republican preference. Thus, among the German-Russians in Kansas, the Catholics appear changeable in their political allegiances when compared with the Mennonites, who have developed unswerving Republican loyalties.



At the time of her death, Prudence Crandall (1803-1890) was noted nationally as a proponent of black liberation and human freedom, but in Elk county, Kansas, where she lived the last 13 years of her life, she was probably best remembered as a spiritualist. This portrait of her as a young woman was painted by Francis Alexander and is in the Uris undergraduate library, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. Photograph reproduced *courtesy* Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Olin Library, Cornell University.