Mob Violence and Kansas Mennonites in 1918

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A WARNING

Those inclined to tantalize a community by holding out against the Red Cross, refusing to buy Liberty bonds and declining to sign Loyalty Pledge cards are advised that they are placing themselves on dangerous ground. . . . [I]ndignation will develop to such an extent that “due process of law” will not be a feature in the punishment handed out to them.

R. B. QUINN, Chairman
Harvey County Council of Defense, 1918

IN ONE of his many perceptive essays on the American political and social tradition, Richard Hofstadter observed that we have “a history but not a tradition of domestic violence.” Events of extralegal violence are commonplace, often initiated by conservative defenders of the status quo. But the events are quickly forgotten; they lack the cohesion and consistency necessary to become a tradition.¹

A study of domestic violence in Kansas would tend to bear out Hofstadter’s thesis. Despite our celebration of the frontier violence in Kansas cow towns, for example, Kansas citizens and historians have not linked the frontier vigilantes to the outbreaks of mob violence in the spring of 1918 or to the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920’s. We lack a tradition of violence. The World War I epidemic of anti-German and antipacifist sentiment in Kansas, which was part of a broader national hysteria during the war against Germany, is an especially interesting case. For some reason, however, the 1918 mob violence has been largely blotted out of memory, both for the Kansas communities and for the historians.²

By the time the United States declared war on Germany in April, 1917, an irrational fear of internal subversion was begin-


ning to rear its head. The front page of the Newton Evening Kansan Republican which announced the war declaration on April 6, also carried a short article noting that “federal agents say they have evidence of a widespread movement on the part of agents of the imperial German government to incite Negroes to rise against the United States government.” Generalized anxieties found their focus in central Kansas not upon blacks but upon the Mennonite communities of Swiss, Dutch, and Prussian origin located in rural areas of Marion, McPherson, Harvey, Butler, and Reno counties. It was these Mennonites who bore the brunt of Kansas anti-German hostility during World War I.

The Kansas Mennonites were not a homogeneous group. They were divided into numerous splinter groups and congregations, each of which could be placed at a different point along the ladder of acculturation. The oldest Kansas Mennonite congregations had migrated from Eastern states and had given up the German language in church services before the great war, although they retained a strict doctrine of separation of church and state. The largest group had come from Russia in 1874-1876 and retained the German language in church and home. Members of the General Conference churches were typically more open to political involvements such as voting and local office holding.

Most Kansas Mennonites shared a common belief in nonresistance. They respected and obeyed the government as ordained by God, but when there was a conflict between the commandments of government and the scriptures, they were ready to disobey government. They were all relatively isolated from the national political debates over the approaching war and from the influences of organizations such as the National German-American Alliance. Mennonite newspaper editors, such as H. P. Krehbiel, who had served a term in the Kansas state legislature, were ahead of their constituency in political awareness. Abraham Schellenberg, editor of the Hillsboro Vorwaerts, kept up a con-

3. For general background to this topic, see H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, Opponents of War, 1917-1918 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1957); Donald Johnson, The Challenge to American Freedoms (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1963); Clifton J. Child, The German-Americans in Politics (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1939); and Frederick C. Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty (De Kalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).
6. Ibid., pp. 65-95.
consistent pro-German bias and served as a collecting agent for funds for the German Red Cross when the war began in Europe in 1914. But the Mennonites wanted to be good Americans as well as good Christians. They did not consider themselves slackers or disloyalists.

Potential violence against Mennonites early in the war was averted when the Mennonites agreed to have their young men accept registration procedures and go to military camps, after receiving a government promise that their convictions would be respected. That promise was only partially honored, but it did put the burden of drawing the line against military service upon the shoulders of young Mennonite draftees in military camps away from home. At home the Mennonites oriented themselves to community pressure to honor the flag, to buy liberty bonds, and to speak the English language.

One evening in the fall of 1917 a mob from Hesston, led by a local garage mechanic, put up an American flag on the Hesston College campus while the students and congregation were attending a revival meeting. When D. H. Bender, president of the college, had the flag removed, the local patriots called out the Harvey county sheriff from Newton to investigate the matter. The

sheriff out-Americanized the Hesston patriots by reprimanding them for not having flags flying at the post office and the public school, and for violating flag etiquette by putting up the flag at the Mennonite school at night. A committee of Hesston citizens and college officials subsequently worked out a plan for the college to fly the flag on days not connected with war, but to refrain from flying the flag on national holidays such as Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Washington’s birthday.8

The peaceful resolution of provocative incidents proved less and less possible as the war continued into the spring of 1918. The third Liberty loan drive, offered on April 6, provided the stimulus for a series of mob actions against Mennonites who were reluctant to buy bonds. The McPherson county patriots were the most zealous, that county having been the first in the state to publish their list of slackers in November, 1917.9 On April 19, less than two weeks after the third liberty bond drive started, McPherson proudly announced it had gone “over the top” and oversubscribed its quota.10 But McPherson wanted more than its quota.

On the night of April 22, a group of about 40 men drove from McPherson out to the Walter Cooprider farm in Groveland township, southwest of the county seat. They first cut the telephone wires. Then 20 donned masks and surrounded the house. Cooprider had refused to buy bonds. He was the son of a Civil War veteran who had been converted to the nonresistant faith after moving to Kansas and marrying a Mennonite widow in 1878.11 One of Cooprider’s sons had been drafted and was refusing military service at Camp Funston. Two other sons, George and Henry, were at home. They were members of the West Liberty (Old) Mennonite congregation. Germanism was not an issue, since the family spoke only English.

The mob called Cooprider out of the house and demanded that he buy war bonds or be tarred and feathered. The Mennonite farmer explained that it was against his religious convictions to

8. Notes on an interview dated “between 1936 and 1940” by Guy F. Hershberger with D. H. Bender.—Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., 1-3-5.8, peace problems committee, Box 44. Unlike most Kansas Mennonites who could claim no direct connection with Germany, D. H. Bender’s father had come from near Marburg, Germany, where he once supervised a reclamation project on one of the Kaiser’s farms. The son still had in his possession a pair of silver spurs given to his father by the Kaiser in appreciation.—See D. H. Bender, “Two Mementos Hold Interesting Place in Bender Family History,” Mennonite Weekly Review, Newton, August 10, 1944, p. 8.


10. McPherson Democrat-Opinion, April 19, 1918. The phrase “going over the top” was borrowed from the trench warfare on the western front. Its widespread use in war bond drives suggested the parallel between the war in Europe and the war at home.

buy war bonds, but before the mob could apply the punishment, George Cooprider stepped out and asked if he could substitute for his father who had not been in good health recently. The mob agreed to the substitution and applied a coat of warm roofing paint to George’s head, neck, and shoulders. They had him lie down in a sheet of feathers and rolled him around in it. Then they suddenly left.12

From the Cooprider mob drove 23 miles to the eastern edge of McPherson county to visit D. A. Diener, minister in the Spring Valley (Old) Mennonite congregation, and his married son Charles, who had been ordained to the ministry on November 29, 1917. Someone had been out earlier in the day (Monday, June 22, although by now it was 2:00 a.m. on the 23rd) to nail a flag to the Spring Valley church. The mob arrived first at the Charles Diener home, got him out of bed, and asked what had happened to the flag. The young pastor admitted he had taken it down. He said he thought the flag was not supposed to be left out overnight. Unimpressed with his argument, the mob proceeded to give him the tar and feather treatment. Then they went to the Spring Valley church and smeared tar on the door and steps. From the church they went to the D. A. Diener farm and called the Mennonite preacher out of bed. In Diener’s words,

Two men grabbed me and pulled me out. They demanded that I buy bonds and support the Red Cross and other war measures. I replied that I could not conscientiously do that but would give to war sufferers through channels not under military control. I was then tarred and feathered and left with threats of a repetition if I did not support war measures.13

McPherson county newspaper accounts of the Cooprider-Diener incidents did not endorse the mob violence, but emphasized the orderliness and good intentions of the mob. I. K. Fretz of the Canton Pilot, who was captain of the Canton Home Guards, wrote that “this is the wrong way to reach an objective,” but he delicately reported the incident as a kind of “committee” action: “It is reported that the committee showed no disposition to destroy property or create disorder, but acted on the assumption that the course of the law was too slow. . . .”14 W. J. Krehbiel of the McPherson Daily Republican, himself of German Mennonite background, saw the mob as “vigilantes” who were

12. Letter from George Cooprider to D. H. Bender, February 15, 1938, Goshen archives I-3-5.8, peace problems committee, Box 47. Schwalter oral history interview with Henry Cooprider, October 1, 1969, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Interview no. 37.


using "strenuous methods to force some of these disloyalists to fall into line." These vigilantes were "orderly" citizens who were "from all sections of the county." 15

The McPherson county chairman of the third Liberty loan drive, Robert Sohlberg, took a more critical position. Sohlberg said that "mob violence is never justifiable and such escapades as that of last night only tend to make matters worse." Sohlberg believed that Cooprider and Diener might agree to buy bonds if they knew the demands came from "high officials." 16 Despite his disapproval of "mob law," Sohlberg did not suggest the mob leaders should be identified and charged with breaking the law. The impunity with which the mob was able to act provided encouragement for subsequent mob actions in which the level of violence was escalated.

Who were the members of the mob? The cloak of anonymity under which they traveled on their Monday night missions cannot be penetrated now over half a century after the event. The newspaper reports were contradictory. Fretz of the Canton Pilot reported that "the work was done by non-residents, and no local talent participated." 17 An article on the event which appeared widely in the state news section of numerous Kansas papers reported that a "well known banker" who met the mob near the Cooprider home had been "promptly invited to 'move on'." The banker allegedly did not recognize anyone "because of the darkness." 18 The Cooprider and Diener families reported that there was not much difficulty in recognizing the mob leaders despite their masks. The mob was made up of substantial and highly respected neighbors and community people. Charles Diener said they included "the auctioneer, the produce man, and different business men in Canton." 19 Henry Cooprider reported that nearby neighbors had participated, people whom they had assumed were their good friends. 20

Two days after the mob smeared his son, Walter Cooprider went to McPherson and invested in some Liberty bonds. 21 But the Dieners were more intransigent. They rejected the religious arguments of a Church of the Brethren minister who was brought

16. Ibid.
17. Canton Pilot, April 25, 1918.
19. Charles Diener interview.
20. Henry Cooprider interview.
quarter times their quota. The bond drive, stimulated by threats against members of the Emmaus Mennonite church (1½ miles north and 2½ miles east of Whitewater) and the placing of flags both inside and outside the church, culminated in a daytime mob visit to the homes of the church pastor, Bernhard W. Harder, and his uncle, Elder Gustav Harder.

The Emmaus Mennonite congregation, unlike the (Old) Mennonite congregations of Cooprider (West Liberty) and the Dieners (Spring Valley), was distinctively German in language and culture. The church originated in the arrival of West Prussian immigrants in 1876. It maintained a parochial school for its elementary school children. All worship services were in the German language in 1918; one Sunday school class continues discussions in the German language in 1975. The brilliant and outspoken pastor, Bernhard Harder, expressed his identification with German culture in the middle names of his two sons, John Schiller and Bernhard Goethe. He considered himself a loyal citizen whose people had come to America to escape Prussian militarism.

The Emmaus congregation was divided on the matter of war bonds. Both leaders, uncle and nephew, did buy some bonds. In the heat of the third Liberty loan drive, Bernhard Harder even counseled his church members to buy bonds. But some members, including Henry H. Wiebe and John Regier did not.

A patriotic rally in Whitewater, addressed by two men in uniform on furlough from Camp Funston, provided the trigger for mob action against the Emmaus Mennonite leaders. One of the furloughed soldiers, Frank Snorf, had stopped at the Bernhard Harder farm on his way to the rally and ascertained that the Mennonite leader neither displayed an American flag nor even owned one. Snorf apparently had had an earlier disagreement with Harder over an incident when Snorf had been hired on the Harder farm. Smelling trouble, Harder dispatched his oldest son, John Schiller, to town to purchase a flag.

Before John had returned, Harder and his second son, Bernhard Goethe, who were fixing the roof on the henhouse, noticed a row of cars coming out from Whitewater “like a funeral procession over the hill.” Snorf had told the rally about this pro-Ger-

25. Whitewater Independent, May 2, 1918.
During the third liberty bond drive members of the Emmaus Mennonite church, *above*, near Whitewater, received threats of violence. The pastor, Bernhard W. Harder, *below, left*, turned away a mob by singing four verses of "America." The pastor’s uncle, Gustav Harder, *below, right*, was also visited by the mob.
man who refused to fly the flag. The mob was now on its way out for a showdown.

Facing the mob in front of his farm house, Harder insisted that he never had anything against the American flag. The flag was nailed to the front porch entry without protest. Sensing that the mob’s anger was still not appeased, Harder seized the initiative and proposed that they join in singing “America.” With his loudest and most vigorous voice, he sang four full verses of the patriotic hymn. The abashed mob joined in on the first verse, but their voices trailed away and their feet shuffled as they didn’t know the words of the other verses. The embarrassed Whitewater patriots had been out-Americanized by a Mennonite German-American. They returned to their cars and drove to the Elder Gustav Harder’s farm home where they learned that he, too, had nothing against the American flag. And so the frustrated Whitewater mob dispersed, its cup of violence unfilled.  

The business community in Whitewater, deeply dependent upon the patronage of Mennonites, took measures to avoid a Mennonite boycott of their town. On April 27, 12 community notables, including two bankers, the Independent editor, the Methodist preacher, the butcher and others, signed a statement apologizing for the mob action, defending the loyalty of the Mennonites, and noting that “not infrequently the most disloyal persons make the most profuse display of flags.”  

They also planned another patriotic rally about a month later, with special invitations to the Mennonites, at which a speaker from Wichita explained about “who the true patriots were—those who were building up the country, and so on.”

If the Whitewater community successfully achieved a post-mob rapprochement with its beleaguered Mennonite citizens, the same cannot be said for the Burrton community in Harvey county. The Burrton patriotic campaign heated up after the fourth Liberty loan drive, which began in July, and climaxed at the armistice day celebration on November 11. The Burrton anger centered on a Schrag family who were from the Swiss-Volhynian Mennonite group who had settled near Moundridge and founded the Hoffnungsfeld church congregation four miles west of Moundridge. Joseph Schrag had built a grain mill on the bank of the Little Arkansas river in Harvey county and was living in retirement in Burrton. His son, John, had taken over the home

29. In addition to the eyewitness account of B. G. Harder, see the Schowalter oral history interview with Ernest Claassen, October 14, 1973, Interview no. 271.
30. Whitewater Independent, May 2, 1918.
31. Ernest Claassen interview.
John Schrag who, when he refused to salute the flag and buy liberty bonds, was beaten, doused with yellow paint, and threatened with hanging. Photo ca. 1951.

place and had earned the nickname “Krickehannes” because three creeks flowed together on his land. The Schrams were wealthy enterprising farmers who benefitted greatly from the war-induced agricultural boom.32

When Joseph Schrag resisted the war bond salesmen in late 1918, the chairman of the Harvey County Council of Defense wrote to Gov. Arthur Capper for help. Capper wrote directly to Schrag asking him to buy bonds and avoid being put on the slacker list. “I am writing you,” wrote Capper, “not in an official capacity, and with no intention of threatening or annoying you, but I address this letter as one friend writing to another.”33 Schrag, of course, knew when he was being annoyed and threatened, especially with the Cooprider, Diener, and Harder incidents to remind him of what happened to noncooperators. The retired Mennonite farmer invested $1,000 in liberty bonds.

Joseph’s son, John, remained unintimidated out on his farm. He refused to buy. When the patriotic spirits of Burrrton citizens were lifted by the November 11 celebration of the end of the war, John Schrag was made to pay for his stubbornness. A group drove out 11 miles from Burrrton to the Schrag farm, ransacked the barn,


sheds, and house before discovering their victim hiding upstairs under the bed. They took him to town where he and a number of other slackers were given opportunity to salute the flag and buy liberty bonds. Only John Schrag refused to cooperate. When they thrust a flag into his hand, it fell to the ground and someone shouted, “He stepped on the American flag.” The crowd turned into an angry mob. They kicked and hit their victim, poured yellow paint on his hair and beard, and went for a rope to hang him. Tom Roberts, the head of the Burrton Anti-Horse Thief Association, intervened with drawn pistol to get Schrag into the Burrton jail where he was protected from the mob until the Harvey county sheriff could come from Newton and take him to the county jail. The mob satisfied its remaining lust for violence by burning some “buggies and things” belonging to the slackers.  

Schrag had offered no resistance to the mob. One repentant member of the mob later idealized his victim as a kind of Christ figure. “There was some kind of a glow come over his face and he just looked like Christ. . . . They’d slug him on the one side of the face and he’d turn his cheeks on the other. He exemplified the life of Christ more than any man I ever saw in my life.”  

But Schrag did hire a lawyer for his defense when the Burrton patriots attempted to prosecute him in Wichita district court for violation of the Espionage act. The case was heard on December 9 and a decision of “not guilty” handed down on December 24. The Newton Evening Kansan-Republican, frustrated by the acquittal of this “bull-headed” man, suggested that the case “should certainly make plain to any thinking person the viciousness that exists in the encouragement of the German language as a means of communication in America. . . . The melting pot cannot exercise its proper functions when such things are allowed.”

The Schrag incident took an economic as well as psychological toll on the town of Burrton in months and years following the war. The German-Americans in the vicinity took their money out of the banks and did their business elsewhere. Some establishments in town went out of business. Some businessmen moved out of state. The latent tension between Mennonites and non-Mennonites in the town is still observed by people in the 1970’s.

A complete accounting of the acts of violence against German-

34. This event is reconstructed substantially on the testimony of a non-Mennonite eyewitness member of the mob, Charles Gordon.—Schowalter oral history interview, June 5, 1968, Interview no. 93.
35. Ibid., transcript, p. 8.
American persons and property in central Kansas would need to go beyond the mob incidents related above from McPherson, Butler, and Harvey counties. The Herald Publishing Company in downtown Newton was broken into and smeared with yellow paint during the war. The First Church of Christian in Moundridge received a measure of yellow paint. Threats of violence led the Bethel College administration to post all-night guards when tension was high in 1918. In addition to acts of overt violence, there were innumerable ways in which informal pressure was brought to bear upon German-Americans in Kansas. At Aulne in Marion county the telephone company decreed that no German could be spoken over the telephones. Signs appeared in businesses in many towns: “We Are Americans, Speak the American Language in this Place.” The German Language Zoar Mennonite Academy at Inman was closed after patriotic citizens of that community remonstrated with school officials.

Some historians have termed the widespread outbreaks of violence across the country in 1918 “The American Reign of Terror.” Such a label seems unwarranted for Kansas, especially compared to the bloodletting of the French Revolution or the slaughter on the European front in 1918. No German-Americans were actually killed in central Kansas. The local patriots whose brothers and sons were killing and dying in France could hardly be expected to generate kindness toward German-speaking neighbors who balked at military service and war bonds while they raked in profits from the war economy.

But it must be said that violent Kansans who took the law into their own hands effectively terrorized the Mennonite community into unwilling participation in the war effort. The patterns of this extralegal violence deserve to be noted as fitting into the broader history of American violence.

The Kansas mob violence in 1918 had a conservative bias. It was initiated, for the most part, by respectable citizens who were out to preserve the status quo. Irresponsible rabblerousers were undoubtedly involved in the mob actions, but the testimony from Mennonite mob victims uniformly records that substantial community citizens either led or accompanied the mobs.

The central Kansas communities also exhibited some mecha-
nisms for control of mob violence. The law and order forces quickly asserted themselves after the Harder incident in Whittewater. The long arm of the Anti-Horse Thief Association prevented the lynching of John Schrag in Burrton. Some voices of genuine protest against mob violence were heard. E. D. Verink, chairman of the Red Cross fund in McPherson, announced that he would not accept money “secured by these night riders,” and John H. Simonson of the Moundridge Journal wrote, “A mob does not think of justice. Its chief aim is revenge.” 42 But newspaper commentary in McPherson, Canton, Newton, and Burrton treated the mob actions with a minimum of outrage, protesting the violence superficially but in reality praising with faint damns. The Marquette Tribune professed to oppose tar and feather punishment, but instead suggested that men like Cooprider and Diener should be “reported to the proper officers, taken to detention camps, their property confiscated, and then at the end of the war they and their families be banished forever from living under the flag they have denounced in war time.” 43 In the face of such counsel, it is small wonder that the mechanisms of orderly democratic procedure were often ignored.

The Mennonite memory of war experiences interestingly records a number of cases where threatened anti-Mennonite violence was turned aside by threats of counter-violence. D. H. Bender of Hesston reported that a McPherson county mob approached one Robert McFarlane to join a gang to “get Bender.” McFarlane not only refused to join in, but “he got out his gun and told them if they go to get Bender they will have to do it over his dead body.” 44 Peter Schrag, son of John Schrag, said that when “the Rupp brothers in Moundridge” were informed that the mob was coming, they in turn leaked information that the mob would be met with bullets. “The mob never came.” 45 Joseph N. Weaver of Harper told of a non-Mennonite named Harry Hershberger who allegedly countered threats of a tar and feather party by saying that the mob would “have to take my shotgun bullets first.” Hershberger was said to have stayed up in the barnyard all night to defend Mennonites against a mob which didn’t show up. 46 Weaver acclaimed this as “a wonderful example of power.”

There are also hints of vicarious participation in violence by

43. Marquette Tribune, May 2, 1918.
44. Archives of the Mennonite Church, I-3-5-8, Box 44.
45. Interview with Peter Schrag, October 23, 1966.
nonresistant Mennonites in their stories of evil which befell their persecutors. One Mennonite report observed that a member of the Whitewater mob died of a heart attack not long after the showdowns at the Harder homesteads. “Maybe he got a little too excited at the rally.” 47 Charles Diener noted that on one occasion the mobbers had brought their wives along to observe what they could from the cars by the road. A number of these women later died in the influenza epidemic of 1918. In remembering such events, Mennonites do not go so far as to claim direct evidence of divine retribution. But the echoes of scripture are unmistakable, “Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord.” Such stories belong in a broader class of “triumph tales” which enliven the Mennonite oral tradition of World War I, in which the Mennonites tell how they achieved moral victory in their time of persecution. 48

The role of national, state, and community leaders surely had some influence on the course of mob violence in 1918. Pres. Woodrow Wilson’s attacks on German domestic influence in America, and his prolonged silence in the face of widespread mob violence, contributed to the climate of opinion. 49 Governor Capper of Kansas professed the same high-minded altruism which characterized the benevolent war crusade against Germany, but his personal intervention in cases of conscientious objection to bond purchases and his vigorous opposition to the I. W. W. set a standard of high hostility toward war critics. Less than 10 days after Daniel and Charles Diener were smeared by the April night riders, they could read in the Canton Pilot of Capper’s attitude toward disloyalists: “He said he had advised one man to either invest in Liberty bonds or leave the state, and that he would insist upon thorough loyalty or removal from Kansas.” 50 Capper never attacked Mennonites as a disloyal organization, but the Dieners knew that the signals from established authority indicated that local mobs would be able to wreak violence with impunity.

The notable fact that Marion county did not experience any incidents of mob violence in 1918, despite the large concentration of Mennonites in the western part of the county, may be attributable to more liberal and tolerant leadership in the Marion county seat. Early in the war, Homer Hoch, editor of the Marion Record, 47. Claassen interview, no. 271.
49. Luebke, Bonds of Loyalty, pp. 13-14, 234-235.
50. Canton Pilot, May 2, 1918.
complained about “self-heralded patriots who are clamoring for the brand of disloyalty to be placed upon every man who presumes to think for himself.” When Hoch was offended by an antigovernment letter from J. G. Ewert, a Mennonite editor from Hillsboro, his tactic was to isolate Ewert as exceptional and affirm the German-Americans as “patriotic, law abiding citizens.” 51 Later when several state papers picked up and published a rumor that German-American schools in Marion county were teaching “Kaiserism,” the county superintendent of schools, James A. Ray, published a spirited defense of the German schools and the people who operated them. It was important, he said, for these children to learn German because their worship services were in German. Besides, the Mennonites had left Germany and Russia to escape a militaristic system. They obviously “have no use whatever for the Kaiser.” 52 An equivalent sympathetic word for the Mennonites by Americans in the county courthouses at McPherson and Newton could have been helpful in averting mob violence in those counties.

The Mennonites were noted for their strong family and communal ties, a reputation apparently borne out in the evidence that the four leading cases of mob action involved responses from fathers and sons (or nephew). But the Mennonites were sadly lacking in solidarity on the war bond question. Splintered into many groups, they had no common policy and some congregations shifted policy during the war. They would have preferred to have the government finance the war through taxation, because the biblical directive allowed them to pay taxes without question. But the government’s decision to use the “voluntary” war bond drives as a means for mobilizing national energies in support of the war, meant that Mennonites either had to rationalize bond purchases as a kind of tax, to buy under protest and give the bonds away, or refuse and pay the consequences. 53

Some Kansas Mennonites took the time-honored route of migration by escaping to Canada during the war. 54 But others apparently compensated for their unacceptability as German-Americans by an excessive display of patriotism, either through zealous participation in bond drives or through honoring the flag.

51. Marion Record, June 7, 21, 1917.
52. Ibid., September 13, 1917.
53. See Entz, “Free to Buy,” pp. 2-4. Entz concludes that two kinds of Mennonites got into trouble on the war bond issue: church leaders who resisted purchasing bonds, and others who were unnecessarily vocal in their opposition to bonds. Average farmers who kept quiet were sometimes able to get by without buying bonds.
The heavily Mennonite community of Moundridge made a patriotic name for itself in the tense days of June, 1918, at a Red Cross benefit auction where a little silk flag, two inches long, was bid up to $1,200. The top bid was submitted by “a group of farmers headed by John J. Goering.” For a replay of the auction in the evening, the Wedel Drug Store donated a large beautiful flag to accompany the small one. Newspapers throughout the state acclaimed the patriotism of this small German-American town.\textsuperscript{55} The need for Mennonites to prove that they were bona fide American citizens was never as great as in the spring of 1918. Was the outbreak of domestic violence in Kansas an aberration or is it best understood as one event in a persistent tradition? Do the Butler county patriots of 1918 have anything in common with Butler County Vigilante Committee of 1870-1871, who allegedly had 798 members and killed eight men?\textsuperscript{56} Additional studies of the varieties of Kansas violence are needed before such questions can be answered. The persistence of domestic turmoil in American history has been ignored too often. The experience of Kansas Mennonites in 1918, long repressed by both Mennonites and non-Mennonites in Kansas, is a reminder that the American mixture of democratic freedom and democratic tyranny is complex indeed.

55. Moundridge \textit{Journal}, June 20, 1918; McPherson \textit{Freeman}, June 21, 1918.