THE MOLOCHNA RIVER BASIN, 1783-1861: SETTLEMENT, ASSIMILATION, AND ALIENATION ON THE NEW RUSSIAN STEPPE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This dissertation was born of the desire to understand why the varied groups of settlers in the Molochna River Basin, faced with common environmental, economic, and administrative conditions, followed sharply divergent paths of development. Four interlocking themes form the foundations of my answer.

First is the human efforts that transformed the Molochna into a productive grain-growing region. Thus, this is a study of the processes of colonisation, concerned with the ways people transformed their environment, and the ways they were in turn transformed by it.

Second is the culturally distinct environmental perceptions of the Orthodox Christian Ukrainians, Sectarian Russians, German-speaking Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans, and Turkic-speaking Moslems who settled the Molochna. In its exploration of varying adaptive processes, this is a comparative study of the ways that differing ethno-cultural traditions affected adaptive strategies to common conditions.

Third is the extent to which the Molochna environment placed fixed limits on adaptation. Such limits, interacting with demographic growth and markets, pushed Molochna settlers toward both crop agriculture and industrialization, and in concert with economic changes came social upheavals. In its focus on the interaction of environment and society, this study constitutes a first attempt to apply the methods of environmental
history to the expansion of the Russian empire.

Fourth is the administrative inefficiencies created by the differing environmental perceptions of central policy-makers and settlers. My examination of specific instances of centre-periphery relations highlights the barriers that stood in the way of effective administration, and demonstrates that the ability of settlers to mould the state’s authority to their own needs was a vital factor in their economic success.

Based on this foundation, I argue that the allocation and use of land formed a central hub around which public life in the Molochna revolved. Environment and markets limited land use, population growth and administrative policy limited land allocation, and culturally specific perceptions of justice and equity mediated reactions to the first four factors. Some settlers prospered, while others sank into poverty and dependency, or left the region altogether. Yet, whether settlers were successful or unsuccessful, it is my central contention that in the Molochna it was the settlers, and not the state, who ultimately decided for themselves how they would adapt to the arid New Russian steppe.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Azov Uplands**

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- Konskaia River
- Tokmak River
- Kurushan River
- Iushansee River
- Molochna River
- Molochna Estuary
- Zone One
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Chapter One

Introduction

In 1848 an anonymous critic of the use of black fallow in New Russian steppe agriculture dismissed Mennonite success with this crop rotation on the grounds that "the land of the Mennonites is, as I understand it, not steppe, but ... an oasis on the steppe."1 Years later a Mennonite described a different scene, recalling his grandmother's stories about helping found the village of Gnadenfeld in 1835: "They came to a barren steppe. . . . No tree, no bush, only tall, dry, bitter grass and prickly camel fodder grew on the dry, cracked ground."2

This dissertation was born of the desire to understand why the varied groups of settlers in the Molochna River Basin, faced with common environmental, economic, and administrative conditions, followed sharply divergent paths of development. The starkly contrasting images captured in the descriptions above illuminate four interlocking themes that form the foundations of my answer. The first is the human efforts that transformed a near-desert into an "oasis." When the first Ukrainian peasants arrived in the Molochna in 1783, they were confronted by an isolated, uninhabited steppe. Within fifty years the river basin was filled to overflow, villages dotting the shore-line of the Molochna River and spreading up the banks of its tributaries, and horses, cattle, and countless sheep spreading

across the steppe in search of good grazing. Thirty years later, ploughed fields had begun to replace pastures, while, here and there, villages had become towns, with cloth-mills, forges and brick-works serving the needs of bustling communities. This dissertation is a study of these processes of colonisation, concerned with the ways people transformed their environment, and the ways they were in turn transformed by it.

Yet one person’s desert may already be another’s oasis, and so a second theme is the culturally distinct environmental perceptions of Orthodox Christian Ukrainian settlers, Sectarian Russian settlers, German-speaking Mennonite, Catholic and Lutheran settlers, and Turkic-speaking Moslem settlers, and the way these perceptions translated into agricultural and social practices. To the semi-nomadic, pastoralist Nogai Tatars, the “barren steppe” was not barren at all, for they were accustomed to eking out a living in an arid environment. For them, the transformation to “oasis” meant adapting to more intensive methods of husbandry, and the social and cultural adjustments demanded by such adaptation were an enormous obstacle to their prosperity. Meanwhile, most other settlers brought with them to the Molochna agricultural systems based largely on grain production, and they suffered through catastrophic crop failures and desperate shortages until they learned to adjust their methods to less intensive forms of agriculture. In its exploration of these varying adaptive processes, this dissertation is a comparative study of the ways that differing ethno-cultural traditions affected adaptive strategies to common conditions.

Of course, beyond perception lies reality, and thus a third theme is the question of the extent to which the realities of the Molochna environment placed fixed limits on adaptation. The Molochna’s low precipitation, indifferent soil composition, winter blizzards
and summer dust storms, all placed constraints on adaptation that would not yield to any tradition. Animal husbandry dominated the Molochna’s agricultural economy by the 1830s, but livestock herds soon overtaxed the natural carrying capacity of rangelands. Yet the Molochna’s human population was growing, and so the economy had to grow too, even if livestock herds could not. The fixed limitations of the environment, interacting with demographic growth and markets, pushed Molochna settlers toward crop agriculture on the one hand, and industrialization on the other. In concert with such economic changes came social upheavals, manifested in land repartition and economic stagnation in Ukrainian peasant communities, economic differentiation and a “landlessness crisis” in foreign Colonist communities, a decline into poverty and dependency in Nogai communities, and the forcible exile of the Russian Sectarian Dukhobors. In its focus on the interaction of environment and society, this study constitutes a first attempt to apply the methods of environmental history to the expansion of the Russian empire.

My fourth theme is the administrative inefficiencies created by the differing perceptions of central policy-makers, who thought they administered an oasis, and settlers who had to marry central policy to the regional reality of arid steppe conditions. For example, the state expected its peasants to grow grain, and based its assessment of their economic condition on crop yields. Thus the Molochna, while enjoying exceptional economic prosperity based on wool production, was for many years officially classified as a “grain deficit region,” eligible for tax reductions and grain subsidies. My examination of such specific instances of centre-periphery relations in the Russian empire offers refinements to existing literature by highlighting the barriers that stood in the way of effective
administration, and demonstrating that the ability of settlers to mould the state's authority to their own needs was a vital factor in their economic success.

Based on this four-part foundation, I will argue that the allocation and use of land formed a central hub around which public life in the Molochna revolved. Decisions about land were affected by a complex matrix of variables, which I will analyse in five broad categories: (1) the environment; (2) markets; (3) population growth; (4) administrative policy; and (5) culture and tradition. Environment and markets limited land use, population growth and administrative policy limited land allocation, and culturally specific perceptions of justice and equity mediated reactions to the first four factors. Thus the role of culture and tradition took first place in the decision-making processes of Molochna settlers, but it must be stressed that some decisions were bad ones, incongruent with one or another limiting factor, and consequently some settlers sank into poverty and dependency, or left the region altogether. Yet, whether settlers were successful or unsuccessful, it is my central contention that in the Molochna it was the settlers, and not the state, who ultimately decided for themselves how they would adapt to the arid New Russian steppe.

The Molochna River flows out of the Azov Uplands into the Azov Lowlands, terminating at the Molochna Estuary, a saltwater lake separated from the Sea of Azov by a narrow spit of land. The Azov Uplands constitute the southern edge of the Ukrainian

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3The most detailed record of the physical geography of the Molochna that I am aware of is B. G. Karpova, "Formy poverkhnosti i stroenie zemnoe kory v peredelakh Novorossii," in Rossiia. Polnoe Geograficheskoe Opisanie Nashego Otechestva, ed. V. P. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii (St. Petersburg: A.F. Devriena, 1910), [hereafter, Rossiia], 14: 1-48. The Encyclopedia of Ukraine, s.v. Azov Lowland, and Azov Upland, is also a valuable source, while
Crystalline Shield, and form the watershed between the Dnieper River and the Sea of Azov. They extend to approximately forty kilometres from the Sea of Azov, the transition point between Uplands and Lowlands lying roughly along the Iushmanlee River. The lower reaches of the Molochna River mark the western border of the Lowlands, which extend eastward along the shore of the Sea of Azov for 200 kilometres. A low ridge, rising some forty metres above the steppe, parallels the Molochna River on its west bank, separating the Azov Lowlands from the Black Sea Lowlands to the west.

The transition from Lowlands to Uplands is not obvious to the naked eye, for the increase in elevation is small and gradual, the slightly undulating ground, occasionally dissected by shallow ravines and gullies, rising to a maximum elevation of 307 metres above sea level eighty kilometres inland at the peak of the optimistically-named Siniaia Gora [Blue Mountain], near the headwaters of the Tokmak River. However, beneath the surface there are critical differences between the two areas. The Uplands have chernozem topsoils approximately thirty centimetres in depth, with 4-6 percent humus content. While they are not so rich as the soils of the central Ukrainian steppe, they are still highly fertile. The Lowlands have much less fertile chestnut topsoils, twenty centimetres in depth, with humus content ranging from 3 percent in the north to 0.5 percent in the highly alkaline areas immediately bordering the Sea of Azov. The floodplain of the Molochna River forms a narrow ribbon of chernozem soils cutting across the chestnut soils of the Lowlands.

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In the twentieth century the entire region has been intensively cultivated using chemical fertilizers, and this has left little contrast in vegetation between the two areas, but when the first settlers arrived in the Molochna, the difference must have been clearer. The Lowlands are wormwood steppe, characterised in their natural state by sparse growths of wormwood grass, and in places along the coast, salt-marsh grass. The Uplands, on the other hand, are feather-grass steppe, characterised in their natural state by a luxuriant growth of feather grass, intermixed with timothy, spear and broom grass, wild oats, wild rye and wild wheat. To the first settlers the difference was crucial, for all other factors being equal, the Uplands provided far higher agricultural productivity (see Map Two).

The Uplands also benefited from higher levels of precipitation, a critical factor in the arid Molochna region. On the coast of the Sea of Azov, average annual precipitation was only 320 millimetres, rising to 380 millimetres at the Iushanlee River, and as high as 500

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4On flora, see V. G. Karatygina, "Rastitelnii i zhivotnyi mir," in Rossiiia, 14: 72-125.
millimetres in the highest areas of the Uplands [see Map Three]. The difference is vital, for most types of grain require at least 400 millimetres of annual precipitation, and thus the aridity of the Lowlands made arable agriculture there highly risky. However, the question of precipitation is far more complex than simple averages reveal, for as important as total precipitation in the Molochna region was the great inconsistency of precipitation from year to year and month to month. As figure 1.1 shows, annual precipitation at Ohrlof, on the border between Lowlands and Uplands, could drop as low as 176 millimetres and climb as high as 512 millimetres. In the fifteen-year period for which records exist, total precipitation fell below the critical 400 millimetre mark eight times, resulting in serious harvest failures and fodder shortages. Even when precipitation was adequate, it often failed to come at the time when it was most needed. Ideally, crops need water when they first germinate -- in the Molochna, in March and April. However, rainfall in the region was heavily concentrated in the months of May, June and July (see figure 1.2).

The inconsistency of precipitation made ground water a particularly important issue. Ground water on the high steppe lay from thirty-five to fifty-five metres below the surface, making well-digging too costly to be practical, and thus sharply restricting viable settlement.
Meanwhile, well-water on the floodplain of the Molochna River and the lower reaches of its three major tributaries, the Iushanlee, Kurushan and Tokmak Rivers, was found at an average depth of 4.6 metres, while along the upper reaches of the tributaries it lay at an average depth of 8.3 metres. During years when precipitation was high, this difference had no bearing on crop production, but during dry years the significance was enormous, with crop yields on the lower floodplain averaging nearly twice those on the upper tributaries (see table 1.1). The value settlers themselves placed on floodplain land is vividly illustrated by the dispute between the Dukhobor village of Troitskoe and the Mennonite village of Altona about which channel of the Molochna River formed the dividing line between their lands. The original land survey simply defined the border as the Molochna River, but at the bend marking the border the river had carved two channels, and the villages engaged in a protracted dispute, beginning in 1805 and finally decided in favour of Altona in 1828, over which channel was the actual border. This dispute, over a mere five desiatinas of land, began at a time when there was significantly more unsettled than settled land in the region, and shows that the floodplain was of crucial importance even in the earliest years of settlement.

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6Raboty po snabzheniiu vodiiu pereselentsev, proizvedennyia v Tavricheskoii gubernii v 1862 godu," ZhMG1 83 (July 1863), 316.
7Vedomost' o glubine kolodtsev v kazhdoi kolonii Molochanskogo Menonistskogo okruga," 1842, PBROMA, file 841.
8Po predstavlenniiu glavnago popechitelia kolonistov iuzhnago kraia Rossii po sporu Menonistov s dukhobortsami o granitsakh ikh vladeniiia," 29 February 1828, RGL4, fond 383, opis 29, delo 480.
Table 1.1: Relationship of Crop Yields to Precipitation

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<td>1845</td>
<td>281 mm.</td>
<td>4.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>176 mm.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>392 mm.</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>493 mm.</td>
<td>5.65</td>
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Far kinder to agriculture than the precipitation pattern is the continental temperature pattern of the Molochna, with its moderate temperatures and long average growing season of 180 days (see figure 1.3). Even in the hottest months of June and July, temperatures seldom climbed above the low twenties, while the short, mild winters mean that most years livestock only required fodder from December to February, and some years it could graze on the steppe year-round. However, on occasion the prevailing winds, blowing out of the east, brought with them their own unique hardships for settlers. In winter, fierce blizzards with high winds and killing cold could sweep across the steppe, decimating livestock herds. Meanwhile summers could bring week-long wind storms, known to settlers as "black blizzards," with hot, dry winds that stirred huge dust storms and sucked the moisture from soil and plants, destroying unharvested crops and sapping the nutritive value from fodder grasses.

This often harsh and unforgiving environment was the one constant in the lives of all Molochna settlers, for although environments are subject to change, and indeed, human
habitation necessarily changes them, at any given time all settlers in the Molochna experienced a virtually identical environment. The environment placed limits on the range of possible agricultural adaptations, and the different ways that settlers solved these common problems provides an entry-point into the complexities of Molochna society.

In focusing on the reciprocal relationship of environment and society, I have been heavily influenced by the work of environmental historians.\(^9\) This relatively new field, sometimes called ecological history, has become increasingly influential in the past two decades. Donald Worster, one of its most respected practitioners, defines the role of the environmental historian as "the discovery of the structure and distribution of natural environments of the past," the study of "productive technology as it interacts with the

environment," and the study of "that more intangible, purely mental type of encounter in which perceptions, ideologies, ethics, laws, and myths have become part of an individual's or group's dialogue with nature."\(^{10}\) Notably, it is the environment itself that comes first in Worster's formula. For some environmental historians the environment alone is the historical subject, and for all of them the role of natural history, biology and ecological sciences is basic, although there is little agreement about where the balance between environment and society lies.\(^{11}\) Wherever the dividing point is, it must be made clear from the outset that I make no claim to share this bias toward the environment as subject. Rather, it is the people who occupied the Molochna who are my subject, and thus this is first and foremost a work of social history -- although one that is more-than-usually cognisant of the interaction of its subjects with their natural surroundings.

There is little historiographic tradition to draw on in telling the story of settlement and adaptation in the Molochna. Although there are many historical monographs dealing with various aspects of Mennonite history, including two histories of the Molochna Mennonite Colony, these are notoriously silent on the subject of the Mennonites' interaction with their neighbours\(^ {12}\) Studies by historian David G. Rempel, anthropologist

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James Urry, and others have made important strides toward refining Mennonite history, but it nevertheless remains a history of the Mennonites alone, paying little attention to their neighbours, and only passing attention to their environment. Meanwhile, other German-speaking Colonists in the Molochna, along with the sectarian Dukhobors, have also received attention in the historical literature, but here, too, the broader story of their interaction with their neighbours and environment remains untold. My debt to all of these specialised studies will be apparent throughout this dissertation, but I leave a closer analysis of their historiographic significance to those places where they enter the story.

The closest semblance to a regional history of the Molochna is E. I. Druzhinina's series of four monographs on the history of New Russia. The Molochna only occasionally creeps into Druzhinina's account, and her allegiance to a Soviet model of historical development, in which regional history serves to confirm the place of regions in the orderly

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14 The standard history of the Dukhobors is George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, The Doukhobors (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), while other important works on Dukhobors in the Molochna include Gary Dean Fry, "The Doukhobors, 1801-1855: The Origins of a Successful Dissident Sect," (Ph.D. diss.: The American University, 1976), and A. I. Klibanov, Istoriia religioznogo sektantstva v rossii (60-e gody XIX v.-1917 g.) (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 85-121. The best general source on German colonists in New Russia is Detlef Brandes, Von den Zaren adaptiert: Die deutschen Kolonisten und die Balkansiedler in Neurussland und Bessarabien 1751-1914 (München: Oldenbourg, 1993), which also contains an exhaustive bibliography on the subject.

development of the Empire, renders her work of little interpretative value. To cite but one example, she claims that Mennonite settlers in the Molochna "comparatively quickly found their feet and became typical landlords."\(^\text{16}\) As I will show, this grossly distorts reality, missing altogether the complexities of a Mennonite community that came to include landlords, tenants, factory owners, wage labourers, merchants, craftsmen, and so on. Still, Druzhinina provides a wealth of statistical data, which I have borrowed from liberally, while her footnotes have been invaluable aids for locating archival sources.

While the historiography of the Molochna itself is meagre, there is a significant body of work dealing with peasant history in general. It is important here to carefully define terms. All but a few hundred of the people in the Molochna were "state peasants" by soslovie, or legal estate. Fully 40 percent of Russia's rural population, and 37.5 percent of its total population, were state peasants in 1858, but the immense void in the historiography of Russia on the subject of the state peasantry means there are few convenient definitions available to delimit just what a state peasant was.\(^\text{17}\) Juridically, they were defined by the Code of Laws of 1832 as "free rural dwellers," and possessed far greater freedoms than serfs:

Unlike serfs, they had civil and political rights. In common with other free classes, they took the oath at the accession of a new Tsar. They were represented at consultative assemblies on the rare occasions when these assemblies met. . . . They had personal property rights and could undertake all manner of financial commitments. They could buy land, though not estates with serfs. Their children could enter universities. They could change their place of residence, become townsmen, and renounce their peasant status.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{16}\) Druzhinina, IZSNLIA UyRKNIA V 1800-1825 pp., 128.
\(^{18}\) Crisp, "The State Peasants," 76.
Despite these rights, there is a consensus among historians that, in their day-to-day life, state peasants were little more than the state's serfs, or, as Russian historian A. V. Aleksandrov phrases it, "the peasantry ... that lived under state feudalism." 19

The most important study of the state peasantry is N. M. Druzhinin's seminal Gosudarstvennye krest'iane i reforma P. D. Kiseleva, which provides an exhaustive account of the administrative structures governing the state peasantry and the reforms overseen by Kiselev and the Ministry of State Domains starting in 1838. 20 However, Druzhinin does not find -- or even look for -- any significant distinctions between state peasants and serfs, instead concentrating on their economic exploitation through unjust and corruptly administered fiscal programs. Records of administrative corruption, venality and incompetence are common, and Druzhinin provides ample evidence that such problems were ubiquitous. However, he never asks where it was the over-burdened state peasants found enough money to pay so many bribes, nor does he look beyond aggregated economic statistics to ask about regional variations. Druzhinin's conclusions remain unquestioned in Soviet and Russian historiography, with studies of regions as diverse as Lithuania and Bessarabia claiming to find no qualitative difference between state peasants and serfs. 21

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21T. A. Koniukhova, Gosudarstvennaia derevnia Lit'g i reforma P. D. Kiseleva 1840-1857 gg. (Vilenskaia i Kovenskaia gubernii), (Moscow: Moskovskogo universiteta, 1975); I. A. Antsupov, Gosudarstvennaia Derevnia Bessarabii v XIX veke (1812-1870 gg.) (Kishinev: Kartin Moldoveniaske, 1966).
extensive English-language examination of the state peasantry, George Bolotenko's
"Administration of the State Peasants," has most of the same faults. Although Bolotenko
blames malign political and administrative practices rather than economic forces, like
Druzhinin he treats the state peasantry as socially and regionally undifferentiated.

Druzhinin and Bolotenko provide essential background, and I draw heavily upon
their work to outline the administrative structures that applied to Molochna state peasants.
However, the undifferentiated peasantry they describe bears little resemblance to the state
peasants I will describe here, for Molochna settlers included industrialists, commercial
farmers, merchants, craftsmen, farm labourers and cowboys, all legally classified as state
peasants. Although the findings of a study such as this, of an isolated river basin on the
Russian Empire's southern frontier, can make no claim to be representative of the
experience of all state peasants, they do challenge the consensus that state peasants were
simply undifferentiated "state serfs."

While the subject of state peasants is under-represented in the historical literature,
there is a rich literature on peasants in general. Anthropologist Eric Wolf's widely-accepted
generic definition of peasants as "rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a
dominant group of rulers" provides a useful starting point for further discussion. It should
first be noted that this definition excludes pastoralists, and hence, at times, most Molochna
settlers. However, it also, at times, includes most Molochna settlers, and the process of
peasantisation and de-peasantisation is an important concern of this dissertation. The

22 George Bolotenko, "Administration of the State Peasants in Russia before the
Reforms of 1838" (Unpub. Ph.D. Diss.: University of Toronto, 1979).
second vital component in Wolf's definition is the transfer of surpluses to ruling elites. Surplus expropriation is an important factor in most definitions of peasants, for it is expropriation that is usually credited with keeping peasants at subsistence levels, preventing them from breaking out of their impoverished and economically stagnant condition.24

The most influential modern scholar of peasant studies is political scientist James C. Scott. Primarily concerned with the relationship between subordinate and superordinate classes, he is interested in defining the ways subordinates resist superordinates, and explaining how resistance mechanisms shape the larger societies shared by both groups. His research focuses on peasants because it is in the extreme type of subordination experienced by peasants that he finds the subtleties of resistance most clearly exposed.25

As a by-product of his research, Scott has found a particularly powerful tool for defining peasant perceptions of justice, showing that redistributive mechanisms in peasant communities should be understood, not as a product of an innately egalitarian ethic, but rather as a logical micro-economic system that has evolved to ensure subsistence under conditions of dearth. He calls the cultural embodiment of this peasant justice system a "moral economy."26 The static nature of peasant societies over time is not a central concern for Scott, and for the most part he takes for granted the role of states and landlords as

24For a thorough discussion of standard definitions of peasants, see Frank Ellis, Peasant economics: Farm households and agrarian development (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 4-13.
expropriators of peasant surpluses and thus as guarantors that the prerequisite condition of
dearth remains present.

With its twin focus on peasant resource allocation and peasant resistance, Scott’s “moral economy” thesis has obvious applications to two of the great questions of Russian peasant history, the nature of the peasant commune and the role of the peasantry in Russia’s revolutions, and thus it is widely employed in Russian peasant historiography, providing important insights into subjects as varied as serf estates in the early nineteenth century, migratory labour markets in the late nineteenth century, and collective farms in the mid-twentieth century. In the process, the paradigm has undergone a subtle transformation. Where, for Scott, the central subject, resistance mechanisms, provides a window into peasant society, in recent Russian peasant historiography, resistance itself has increasingly been seen as the dominant characteristic of that society. The danger here is that the circumstance prompting resistance -- surplus expropriation -- is taken for granted as a fixed value in a static model in which peasant culture is seen as less a culture of subsistence than a culture of resistance.

For my own purposes, the static assumption of the paradigm is problematic. The conditions of dearth that first shaped the moral economy of peasants in the Molochna were not a product of expropriation, but of geographic isolation and environmental constraints.

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As I will show, in the absence of state authority, ethnically and culturally distinct groups of Molochna settlers found broadly parallel solutions to dearth, and by the time the state was able to penetrate the isolation of the Molochna, local society as a whole seemed poised to break the constraints of peasant-hood under the centrifugal force of economic differentiation, and transform itself into a complex proto-industrial society of commercial farmers, manufacturers, craftsmen, and wage labourers.

To this point the Molochna case seems to support the paradigm, showing that in the absence of state expropriations, the redistributive mechanisms of the moral economy were eroding. However, when the state reasserted its authority, the distinct ethno-cultural groups that made up Molochna society suddenly diverged sharply from their previously common developmental path, some reverting to redistributive practices characteristic of the moral economy, and others continuing along the path of de-peasantisation. The moral economy paradigm, for all its value in explaining internal mechanisms of peasant society, seems to possess little utility in explaining such divergent reactions to a common experience of change in relationship to the state. I will argue that in the Molochna, peasants made self-conscious decisions about their relationship to the state, accepting or rejecting state directives as it suited their own perceptions of justice and equity. Hence it was not their relationship to the state that made them peasants, or determined their path of development. Instead, decisions settlers made in reaction to demographic growth and changing markets under restrictive environmental conditions brought about the characteristics of peasant-hood — and the erosion of those characteristics — independent of the subordination posited as necessary by Scott, Wolf, and others.
This study proceeds chronologically. Chapters two and three deal with the period from Russia's acquisition of the Molochna in 1783 to the famine of 1833. Chapter two reviews the Russian state's policies toward colonisation in New Russia, exploring the state's level of environmental knowledge of the region and describing the formal administrative structures it established. It shows that the state's goal for its peasants was the development of agriculturally self-sufficient nuclear villages, and that it established separate policies toward each of the ethno-cultural groups it permitted to settle in the Molochna based on its assessment of their level of development as judged by this standard. Chapter three describes agricultural adaptations in the period before 1833, showing that, in the absence of effective central administration, settlers created unofficial structures of self-administration, finding broadly parallel patterns of adaptation in response to common environmental and market conditions.

Chapters four, five, and six deal with the period from the famine of 1833 to the harvest failure and livestock epidemic of 1847 to 1848. Chapter four describes the famine, showing that it graphically demonstrated to settlers and the state that existing agricultural methods were inadequate to feed the growing Molochna population, and thus it became a crucial impetus to administrative and agricultural reforms. These reforms saw efficiency and standardisation replace wardship as the central goals of the state. The exile of the Dukhobors from the Molochna is detailed as a case study of how land shortages were perceived by the settlers themselves, and how the state's lack of control in the region lent itself to the abuse of authority.
Chapter five analyses Colonist economic adaptations between 1833 and 1848, arguing that the prominent Mennonite Johann Cornies constructed his own model of civil society, based in part on Mennonite norms of justice and equity, and in part on his sophisticated understanding of environmental and market conditions. This model, conceived by the early 1820s and refined by experimentation on Nogai Tatars in the late 1820s and early 1830s, was applied rigorously to Mennonites and, to a lesser degree, other foreign Colonists in the late 1830s and 1840s, resulting in economic growth that helped mitigate the social tensions that grew out of differentiation in Mennonite society.

Chapter six examines Orthodox state peasant solutions to the problems of overcrowding and land shortages. It shows how poor peasants used the state’s renewed interest in the Molochna to apply their own definitions of justice and equity in land distribution, forcing the introduction of land repartition. As a consequence, their path of economic development diverged sharply from that of foreign Colonists, as they sank into economic stagnation.

Chapter seven, an afterward, addresses the period 1848 to 1861, recounting the harvest failure and livestock epidemic of 1848, and showing how it marked the end of breeding native sheep in the Molochna and helped consolidate the transformation to arable husbandry that saw the amount of arable land pushed to its natural limits. It describes how interlocking economic developments in Mennonite and Nogai society pushed both groups to the brink of crisis, ultimately becoming a significant catalyst for the Nogai exodus to Turkey in 1861, and the Mennonite landlessness crisis of the 1860s.
In his seminal study of the serf village of Petrovskoe, Steven L. Hoch argues that, "while serfdom was imposed from above, it had to be maintained from below." In my eighth and concluding chapter I will argue that, for state peasants in the Molochna at least, contrary to conventional wisdom, expropriation, either by landlords or the state, played no necessary role in Russia's pre-reform peasant society. Rather, as the Molochna settlers showed, the state was ill-equipped to administer its periphery, leaving peasants to accept or reject central demands on their own terms. The results, whether peasantisation or de-peasantisation, were a product of native conceptions of justice that owed little if anything to the official world of St. Petersburg.

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Chapter Two

Colonisation and Administrative Policy

In 1822 the Ministry of Internal Affairs granted a group of state peasants from Chernigov guberniia permission to resettle in Tavrida guberniia. When the peasants arrived to inspect their newly allotted land, they reacted with dismay, angrily advising the civil governor of Tavrida that they

utterly refuse to settle at the assigned spot for the following reasons: . . . (1) [It] is on the very borders of Rubenovska and Serogozska [villages], and if they settle there, it will lead to disputes without end; (2) In all of the allotted lands . . . the only hay meadows are located [on the spot designated for the village], and if they use this area for the village, they will not have any hay; (3) There is insufficient well water at that spot.¹

There is much of interest in the words of these disgruntled peasants. First, they were part of a colonisation process controlled and administered by the state. They were assigned pre-selected land, and even the location of their village on that land was designated for them. On the other hand, they were not simply helpless subjects of the state. They were permitted to send an advance party to inspect the land, and when it proved unacceptable, they did not merely protest -- they refused to accept it. Moreover, they did so in terms that implied (correctly, as it would turn out) that they had a real say in the matter.

Secondly, there is an implication that these were litigious peasants, for they took it for granted that land located too close to other villages would be the subject of "disputes without end." This implied litigiousness is confirmed by the countless disputes that clogged

¹"Ukaz Tavricheskogo pravitel'stva . . . ob otvode zemli gosudarstvennym krest'ianam iz chernigovskoi gubernii," 18 February 1824, GAKbO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 7.
guberniia land survey offices in Simferopol and Kherson. These peasants operated within a system that gave them rights that they were aware of and busily -- altogether too busily, the land surveyors must have thought -- employing for their own benefit.

Yet there is a contradiction here, for had they truly been part of a fully integrated system, surely there would have been no cause for "disputes without end." The land had been surveyed, the borders defined, the maps drawn, and that should have been that. But it was not. From experience, peasants knew that the state could not be relied upon to come to their aid when drought, cold, locusts, etc., disrupted their lives. Thus, beyond the realm of state authority and administrative decrees, settlers were doing their own surveys, and defining their own borders.

This chapter details the state's policies for the colonisation of New Russia, and records demographic growth in the Molochna region. It also describes the official systems by which the Molochna was administered before 1838, arguing that the paternalistic state viewed Molochna settlers as wards, allotting them land and establishing administrative organs based on its assessment of their ability to feed themselves, their potential to contribute to the state's welfare, and their potential to enhance or threaten the state's security. This description of official policy will serve as a back-drop to the descriptions in chapter three of the unofficial, self-administered systems the settlers established for themselves in the Molochna.

The Russian Empire absorbed the Molochna River basin on 8 April 1783 when Catherine II proclaimed Russia's annexation of the Crimean Khanate. The Ottoman Empire
formalised the annexation by treaty on 9 January 1784, and in February 1784 Catherine incorporated the former Khanate into the Ekaterinoslav guberniia of the New Russian krai as Tavride oblast. It became Tavride guberniia in 1803.²

Settlement of the Russian steppe has been described as sequential, with Cossacks constituting the first wave, followed by the establishment of fortified military towns, which secured regions against Tatar raiders and permitted peasant agriculturists to settle. Such peasants came, sometimes with the approval of the state, sometimes at the command of their landlords, and sometimes illegally, as fugitives from either state or landlord.³ This sequence applies generally to Tavride guberniia, but important variations make the area a special case. To begin with, it was the final frontier in Russia’s push to the Black Sea, and with its occupation, there was no longer free land to the south to provide a continued outlet for excess population. Moreover, the Crimea, unlike much of the steppe, had a permanent, sedentary population with claims on land not easily ignored by newcomers. Finally, the territory was acquired by a state -- and an empress -- gripped by a passion for planning.

Catherine II’s policies were "populationist," based on physiocratic notions of population as the basis of national wealth.⁴ Colonisation proceeded in accordance with the March 1764 "Plan concerning the distribution of state lands in the New Russian province for their settlement," with settlement open to "people of any status," as long as they moved

This qualification had important implications, for no settlers were free to move without state permission, and consequently immigration was officially a controlled process.

New Russia experienced a flood of immigration in the last third of the eighteenth century, but the Molochna region was little affected. When P. S. Pallas, a German naturalist and explorer, passed through in 1794, he saw a vast rolling plain, occupied only by wandering tribes of nomadic Nogai Tatars, who had arrived in 1792. A 1797 map of the region shows only four Orthodox state peasant villages and ten Nogai villages. Large-scale settlement began in 1802 when Dukhobor Sectarians began arriving. They were followed in 1803 by the first foreign Colonists, while large-scale Orthodox state peasant immigration began in 1805.

Immigration to the Molochna was planned, but the planning left much to be desired. The Tsar's land survey department, based in Simferopol, allocated the land. It worked without accurate survey equipment, and subjected most of the region to only the most cursory inspection. It was instructed to allot Orthodox and Sectarian peasants fifteen desiatinas of "useful" [udobny] land per male soul. Mennonite Colonists were to receive sixty-five desiatinas per family, and other German-speaking Colonists sixty desiatinas per

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5 PPSZ, 1:12099. Regarding the implementation of the Plan, see Bartlett, Human Capital, 109-118.

6 On the general subject of immigration to the region, see Bartlett, Human Capital.

7 P. S. Pallas, Travels through the Southern Provinces of the Russian Empire, in the years 1793 and 1794, 2 vols. (London: A. Strahan, 1802), 1:531-535.

8 For the 1797 map, see RVIA, fond 846 opis 16, delo 23814. For short histories of villages and towns in the region, see V. I. Petrikin, et al., eds., Istoriia mist i sil ukrains'koj RSFSR: Zaporiz'ja oblast' (Kiev: Nauka URSR, 1970).

9 The lack of proper equipment during the original surveys is frequently referred to in the course of new surveys done in the 1830s and 1840s. See, e.g., RGLA, fond 383 opis 1, delo 190.
family. "Useful" land specifically included "farmsteads and commons, gardens and threshing areas," while excluding "rivers, streams, ravines, marshes, ponds, roadways, gullies and other places altogether unsuited to crop- and hay-raising."\(^{10}\) Notably lacking were specific instructions on soil quality, precipitation, or access to water. In effect, the Land Survey Department treated land as simple area, undifferentiated in its productive capacities, and easily adaptable to human needs.

Demographic growth in the region is difficult to trace, because the Molochna River basin did not conform to the borders of formal administrative districts, while even formal borders were poorly defined and were sometimes changed as a matter of administrative convenience. In 1842, the state redrew the boundaries of the uezds in Tavride guberniia in reaction to the growth of the region's population, and as a result, the Molochna River basin became part of two different uezds. The land to the east of the Molochna River, holding the majority of Mennonites, Sectarians, and Orthodox state peasants, became Berdiansk uezd, while the land to the west of the river, holding most of the German Colonists, became Melitopol uezd. This introduces serious statistical complications to the present study, particularly regarding Melitopol, because the change expanded the uezd's borders northward and westward to include a significant number of serfs and state peasants living on the Dnieper river, outside of the Molochna River basin. This hampers comparisons to earlier periods, and sometimes presents interpretive difficulties.

The most important published work on the demographic history of New Russia, V.

\(^{10}\text{PPSZ, 1:1265.}\)
M. Kabuzan's *Zaseleienie Novorossii*, does not cover Tavride gubernia. A number of works, most notably Kabuzan's *Narodonaselenie Rossii* and Druzhinina's four volumes on southern Ukraine, give gubernia-level population figures, but none give uezd-level figures. A variety of primary sources give partial uezd-level population figures, but none are wholly adequate. The uezd-level records of the 1835 *rezizja* do not survive in comprehensive and accessible form, but an 1842 document, apparently based on the 1835 *rezizja*, gives the male population of the uezd, and other sources give the population of specific groups for specific years. It is often unclear whether such sources overlap or duplicate one another, and consequently the figures provided in table 2.1 are tentative.

The data in table 2.1 points to the extremely rapid growth of the Molochna population between 1804 and 1861. Unfortunately it is impossible to differentiate natural growth from migration, and consequently little can be said about birth and death rates, with the signal exception of the Mennonites. Between 1806 and 1848, the Mennonite Colony achieved an astonishing average annual growth rate, excluding in-migration, of 2.93 percent. By comparison, Steven Hoch estimates the average growth rate of serfs in

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12 Kabuzan, *Narodonaselenie Rossii v XVIII-pervoi polovine XIX v. (po materialam rezizji)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1963), 159-163, Table 17; Druzhinina, *Inzhnaia Ukraina v 1800-1825*, 247, Table 19; Druzhinina, *Inzhnaia Ukraina v period krizisa feodalizma*, 13, Table 1.

13 At least, my attempts to find the 1835 *rezizja* records in RGLA, fond 571, turned up only partial records. A full-scale demographic study, such as that conducted on the remainder of New Russia by Kabuzan, would quite possibly permit a reconstruction of the *rezizja*. For sources, see Table 2.1.

Table 2.1:Po~ulotlonof Melitopol uezd. 1804-1861, and Melitwol and Berdlrnsk uezds. 18421861
Orlhodox and
Secterian Stale

Secbrians

Nogais

Germen

ûrlhodox and

Tolal

asli70

mIsn

49,671
8,324
60.444

30.881

1891
1032

66,768

30,721

1693

81,100 (lnciuchng Nqais)

%,676

aIw

7,187
7,600

7,050
7,268

7.062
8,212
8,344
8,639

7.492

7,898
7,921
8.1%

Seclarians

Nogais

Mmnoniîes

MW
10S0
94,7#
96.479
103,399

1858
18ôû

1861

258I462
261,726
239.054
235.34û
263.225

&man

Total

Cdonists

Sectarran Sîale

Cdontsts

1028
10ZO
l03D

iszi

Memoniles

35,143
105

20

1 7 ; ~
19,335
19,804
20.569

21,918

10,384
17,275
17,878
16.377
18,158

291,799
298,336
311,879
274.391
303,321

98,015

29, d 631; tl383, op. 29, d 632;1 383,op.20, d 633; t 3 3 , op.20,d 634; 1I 1281, op 4, d 73a.1843,f 1281, op 4, d 49a.1844; f 1281, op.4,d 49-1845, i 1281, op. 4, d 6%-1846; f. 1281, op. 4, d 50.1847; f. 1281,
op. 4, d. 35aW1848,
11 1281, op. 4, d 45%-1849,f. 1281, op, 6, d 52.1850; f: 1281, op. 5, d 30a.1851; f 1281, op. 5, d 48a01B52,f. 1281, op 5, d 73a.1853, t. 1281, op. 5, d 60e-1854, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97.1656; f. 1281,
op. 6, d 07.1857; f. 1281, op. 6,d 62.1859; 1 1281. op 6, d 20.1660, t. 1281, op. 6, d 48.1861; l 1281, op 6, d 47.1862; 1 1283,op 1. d 2481; PJMMA, file 1138; Rle 1402, GADO, f. 134, qp 1, d 138; f 134, op. 1, d
310; fl 134, op. 1, d W ,(. 134, op 1, d. 786,t 134, op. 1, d 837; GAKO, 1: 26, op l , d %9, 1.26,op. 1, d 994, f 2 6 . 0 ~1, d 2478, t 26, op 1, d 2503, f 26, op. 1. d. 3283, f. 26, op. 1, d 3308; t. 26, op 1, d 4137; f
26, op. 1, d, 5017; 11 26,op. 1, d 6369;L 26, op. 1, d. 6384, Brandes, Von Den Zacen Adopticwt, 340, Table 63;Goen,The Moklscbns Settlemenl, 45; Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, DEe nkierlendisch-nlederdeutschen
Hintergruende dermel~l~nilisohen
OshvendenrngenIB 1 6 , i û und 19JeMwndert (Karlsruhe. Heinrich Schneider. 1956), 304329, Utty, None But Saints, 287, Appendot II;Sergeev, 'Ukhod TavricheskikhNogailsev,' 201-

m.

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Petrovskoe in the same period at between 0.5 and 1.5 percent, a figure consistent with population growth rates among peasants throughout Europe.\textsuperscript{15} Meanwhile, between 1814 and 1859 the Nogais experienced an exceptionally low growth rate of just 0.22 percent.

Although the Russian state planned immigration to the Molochna, once the settlers had arrived it had little control over their actions. Imperial Russia's inability to effectively administer its periphery is legendary. As historians Walter Mckenzie Pinter and Don Karl Rowney explain it, "the most talented and best-trained men have served at the centre, but generally have had to depend on the least educated and least ambitious to execute their policies throughout the realm."\textsuperscript{16} The problem was magnified in regions like the Molochna, where settlers were almost exclusively state peasants. Regional administrators were normally drawn from the nobility, but because there were few resident nobles to fill offices in Tavride and other frontier guberniias, Civil Governors had no option but the "large-scale recruitment of nearly uneducated rural folk into the ranks of officialdom."\textsuperscript{17}

Even had local officials been competent, the complexities of the administrative system made effective administration impossible. The official system in the Molochna is portrayed schematically in figure 2.1. The bewildering web of overlapping jurisdictions and parallel, unintegrated channels of authority are expressed by arrows showing possible paths for the downward flow of orders. With authority so ill-defined, it is little wonder that

\textsuperscript{15}Hoch, Serfdom and Social Control, 73.
\textsuperscript{17}S. Frederick Starr, Decentralisation and Self-Government in Russia, 1830-1870 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 20.
Figure 2.1: Channels of Authority in the Molochna

[Diagram showing the channels of authority with various departments and officials connected by arrows.]
regional administration devolved into a gridlock of jurisdictional disputes and red tape.\textsuperscript{18} Although regional officials collected statistical data about settlers in the Molochna, there is little evidence the state even tried to directly administer Orthodox or Sectarian state peasants. The sole exception to this general rule was Colonist administration, which is dealt with in detail in chapter six. As for the Nogais, the state actively sought to change their agricultural practices, but its failure, detailed in chapters three and seven, is the clearest evidence of the state's inability to effectively administer the Molochna.

The lack of effective central control does not mean there were not significant, active local administrative organs in the Molochna. Starting at the bottom, peasant contact with officialdom was mediated through the peasant obshchina. This body, composed of elected peasant \textit{starosti} [elders], \textit{sotskie} [hundred-men], \textit{piatidesiatskie} [fifty-men], and \textit{desiatskie} [ten-men], is often inaccurately described as a "commune," owing to the redistributive function it sometimes filled.\textsuperscript{19} In the Molochna, where obshchina land redistribution was not introduced until the 1840s, the obshchina nevertheless existed and served as the official representative of Nogai, Orthodox and Sectarian peasants to higher authorities, as well as

\textsuperscript{18}A number of studies have addressed the Russian regional administrative system. On the State Peasant administration specifically, the most important are Druzhinin, \textit{Gosudarstvenye krest'ianine}, and Bolotenko, "Administration of the State Peasants." Important works on the broader administrative problem include Starr, \textit{Decentralisation and Self-Government}, and Yaney, \textit{The Systematization of Russian Government}. Marc Raef's voluminous writings are basic to an understanding of the ideological underpinnings of Russian administrative structures. See, e.g., \textit{The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia}, 1600-1800 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

\textsuperscript{19}Bolotenko claims that where land redistribution did not exist, neither did the obshchina. On this basis, he claims that it did not exist in Tavride guberniia prior to the 1820s or 1830s (Bolotenko, "Administration of the State Peasants," 31). However, peasants in non-redistributive state peasant villages in Tavride guberniia routinely identified themselves in their petitions as members of obshchinas.
the official conduit for disseminating to peasants orders issued from above. Foreign Colonists had a parallel institution, the Gemeinde, with Schultze and Zehnmaenner, serving similar functions. There is little evidence regarding the obshchina's role in day-to-day peasant life in the Molochna, but accounts of its function in other areas suggest it was a repository of "unwritten customary law" and the "ensurer of tranquillity" in the villages.

The second rung in the administrative ladder was the volost, or in the Colonies, the Gebietsamt. Created by Paul I in 1797, the volost was an administrative unit intended to contain approximately 3,000 male souls. In the Molochna, volosts were always ethnically homogeneous. The volost administration consisted of a volostnaia golova [head-man], a volostnoi pisar [scribe], a selskii vybornyi [village representative], and one desiatkskii for each ten households in the volost. The state charged these officials with publicising new laws, encouraging church attendance, taking measures against epidemics and fire, ensuring maintenance of roads and bridges, and arbitrating minor disputes. It also gave them authority over agricultural practices and grain reserves.

There was a large overlap between volost and obshchina authority, and the extent to which volost officials played an active role in local administration in the Molochna is unclear. Unlike with the obshchina, there is almost no record of volost-level administrative activity in the Molochna before the 1840s, although the Mennonite Gebietsamts were a signal exception. The only significant examples of volost-level activities are harvest reports, and it is not clear

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20 Urry, None But Saints, 71-72.
whether these were actually assembled by volost officials or simply recorded as cumulative volost-level totals in reports. Bolotenko writes that the volost was artificial and ineffectual, and nothing in the Molochna case refutes this.\(^25\) Certainly volost administrative organs did not act as representatives of the peasants in the same way obshchinas did, for peasant petitions were almost always addressed by the obshchina directly to the Tsar, the Senate, the Governor General of New Russia, or the Civil Governor of the gubernia. By the same token, decrees from higher authorities to peasants bypassed volost authorities and directly addressed obshchinas.

At the uezd level there were for the first time sharp distinctions between the administration of Orthodox and Sectarian state peasants, Nogais, and Colonists. The zemskii ispravnik, or regional administrator, was the most important regional official for Orthodox and Sectarian state peasants. Nominated by the gubernia's Civil Governor and officially appointed by the Senate, he had enormous discretionary powers in matters ranging from taxation, to law enforcement, to approval of obshchina officials.\(^26\) Historian S. Frederick Starr describes zemskii ispravnice, with their four zasedatel's or assistants, as a "motley and ill-trained band," who were "often the only representatives of the autocracy with whom most rural folk had any direct contact."\(^27\)

The zemskii ispravnik's authority did not extend to the Nogais, who were instead administered by a nachalnik, or "Chief," appointed by the Governor General of New Russia,

\(^{25}\) Bolotenko, "Administration of the State Peasants," 209.  
\(^{26}\) Bolotenko, "Administration of the State Peasants," 160-161. Zemskii Ispravnik is often translated as "police chief," but "district administrator" more accurately expresses the broad administrative functions of the position.  
\(^{27}\) Starr, Decentralisation and Self-Government, 40.
but subject to the authority of the Civil Governor of Tavride. The Civil Governor arbitrated disputes, mainly pertaining to land, that arose periodically between the Melitopol *zemskii ispravnik* and the Nogai *nachalnik*.

Colonists, too, were outside of the *zemskii ispravnik*’s jurisdiction, answering instead to an Inspector of Colonies appointed by the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers in New Russia [hereafter the Guardianship Committee], which operated under the auspices of the Governor General of New Russia. When disputes arose between the Inspector of Colonies and either the *zemskii ispravnik* or the Nogai *nachalnik*, they were theoretically subject to resolution by the Governor General of New Russia, who was officially the superior of the Civil Governor of Tavride, but in practice the jurisdictions of the Governor General and the Civil Governor were distinct, and inter-jurisdictional disputes sometimes had to be settled by the Senate in St. Petersburg.

In addition to the obshchina, volost, and uezd administrative organs, a variety of other regional administrative bodies affected life in the Molochna. Uezd courts, uezd land survey offices, uezd treasury offices and uezd procuracies all played a part in running the region. However, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, the most important decisions in the Molochna were made by the settlers themselves.

The state’s policy toward the Molochna settlers was firstly one of paternal wardship, intended to ensure both their material and moral welfare. To this end it directed its most extensive administrative efforts at promoting agricultural self-sufficiency. The most

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28 Properly called the “Office of Guardianship of New Russian Settlers” until 1818.
29 On the ill-defined role of Governor-Generals, see Yaney, *The Systemisation of Russian Government*, 72.
substantial indication of state involvement in administration of the region comes from annual harvest reports collected at village level and amalgamated into guberniia-wide reports for the Ministry of Internal Affairs in St. Petersburg. These reveal that the state's principal yardstick for measuring the well-being of settlers was grain production. The state assumed the minimum annual consumption requirement per male soul was two chetverts of grain. Where harvests fell below this, settlers were eligible for loans, either of grain or of money to buy it. Where harvests rose above it, settlers had to contribute to grain reserves intended to alleviate shortages in future years.30

The state's first attempt to establish a systematic, empire-wide grain reserve had come in 1767, when Catherine ordered the construction in every village of a grain depot large enough to hold a one-year supply of grain for every member of the population.31 The decree said nothing of how this might be done, or indeed, of what constituted a one-year supply, and, not surprisingly, little came of the initiative. In 1794 there were still no grain depots in Tavride oblast. In that year, Catherine ordered the construction of five, in Simferopol, Karasubazar, Feodosiia, Evpatoriia and Perekop. At the same time, she clarified the system of collecting grain, ordering each household to contribute 1/8 of a chetvert per year to a total of 1-7/8 chetverts.32 In 1799, Paul I ordered the construction of a grain depot in every peasant village of more than fifty households, and the collection of 1/16 chetvert per male soul per year to a total of three chetverts of rye and 3/8 of a chetvert of wheat per male

30"O glavnykh osnovaniakh novago polozheniia o obezpechenii prodovol'stviia," 1840, RGLA, fond 1589 opis 1, delo 693.
31PPSZ, 1:13017.
32PPSZ, 1:17127.
This shaped the basic outline of the grain reserve system for the Empire until 1842, with the single exception that, by 1804, the reserve was decreased to two chetverts per male soul.\(^{34}\)

After a near-total harvest failure in Tavride in 1821, the Senate, observing that earlier decrees had been ignored, re-issued detailed instructions for the establishment of depots. They called for the establishment of food-supply commissions in every gubernia and the construction of depots in every village, or alternatively, in poor agricultural regions, the establishment of money reserves with which to buy grain when necessary. The Senate reiterated the requirement peasants contribute 1/16 of a chetvert of grain per male soul per year to a total of two chetverts per male soul, or alternatively make a cash payment of twenty-five kopecks per male soul per year to a figure to be determined by prices in individual regions.\(^{35}\) These decrees were fundamentally flawed. At the rate of 1/16 of a chetvert per year, the full reserve would have taken thirty-two years to accrue. Russia experienced significant harvest failures on eleven separate occasions between 1800 and 1850, an average of once every 4-1/2 years, and never went more than eleven consecutive years without a failure.\(^{36}\) Meanwhile, at least in Tavride gubernia, peasants never came close to constructing the required number of depots. As late as 1843 there were still only sixty-three grain depots in the entire gubernia, and most grain was still stored in pits in the ground. Grain reserves that

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\(^{33}\)PPSZ, 1:19203.

\(^{34}\)"Ob urozhai v nyneshnem god khleba i o merakh k obepecheniiu prodovolstvii zhitel'ei krymskago poluostrova," 1821, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5394.

\(^{35}\)"Po zapiske o predpisanii kolonistskim nachat'vam otnosit'no o obepecheniiu v prodovolstvii kolonistov v neurozhainye gody," May 1822, RGLA, fond 383, opis 29, delo 502.

year amounted to about a half chetvert per male soul, barely a quarter the amount required by the 1822 decree, despite the fact that the required contributions had been tripled in 1842.37

Because local grain reserves were never adequate, when harvest failures occurred the state was forced either to lend peasants money to buy grain, or else lend them grain from reserves in unaffected guberniias. In 1833 and 1834, when Russia experienced an empire-wide harvest failure, the state spent 8,475,172 paper rubles on grain for state peasants, 1,655,261 of this going to Tavride guberniia alone.38 Although such loans were supposed to be repaid, in practice they could go unpaid for a very long time indeed. In 1858 Tavride state peasants had still not fully repaid cash loans from 1833 and 1834, nor had they repaid loans of grain received in 1839.39

Still, in 1821, 1833, 1834, 1839 and 1848, the state showed an impressive ability to deal with crop failures, and although there were shortages and hardships, large-scale famines were avoided. But the cost of emergency efforts, and the failure of state peasants to adopt more efficient farming methods to improve yields and reduce the need for emergency measures, was a source of constant frustration to the state. In fact, there was real suspicion in St. Petersburg that the grain reserve program was a disincentive to increased peasant grain

37 For 1843 grain reserve figures, see "Ochetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov . . . za 1843," RGLA, fond 1281, opis 4, delo 49a. For the 1842 modification to the law see "Instruktsiia o privedenii v deistvie vysochaishie utverzhdennago 16-go marta 1842 goda polozheniia o obezpechenii prodovol'stvia gosudarstvennykh krest'ian chastnymi zapasami," 16 March 1842, RGLA, fond 1589 opis 1, delo 693.
38 "Vedomost' o summakh otpushchennykh iz gosudarstvennago kaznachestva na prodovol'stvie gosudarstvennykh krest'ian v 1833 i 1834 godakh, po sluchaiu neurozhaia," RGLA, fond 1589, opis 1, delo 693. The paper ruble, or assignant, traded at 3.65 to the silver ruble in 1834.
39 "Ob urozae khlebov i trav v Tavricheskoï gubernii v 1858 godu," RGLA, fond 1287, opis 3, delo 199.
production. "There is no doubt," an advisor reported to Kiselev in 1840, "that the ease with which the villages are issued loans, combined with the feebleness of supervision over the issuance of grain, is the main reason for the inadequacy of personal reserves and the significant increase in peasant arrears in paying grain [into the depots]."  

Such a claim must be taken with a grain of salt; state aid ensured subsistence, but hardly provided for ease, and it is doubtful whether the peasantry as a whole relied on subsidies so heavily that it consciously manipulated its grain production based on them. On the other hand, the claim may have some credence for the Molochna. It is striking that the state took no notice of either livestock or gardens when it assessed food reserves in the Molochna. To be sure, during the 1821 harvest failure the Molochna region did not receive aid because the uezd nachalnik took into account garden production, but this was the

"O glavnykh osnovaniakh novago polozhenia o obezpechenii prodovol'stviia," 1840, RGLA, fond 1589 opis 1, delo 693.
exception rather than the rule. In eight of the twenty-three years for which detailed grain production figures exist between 1803 and 1838, the state officially designated the Molochna a grain-deficit region and exempted it from contributions to grain depots. The problem with this evaluation is demonstrated in figure 2.2, which shows meat and grain prices during the 1821 harvest failure. Despite soaring grain prices, meat prices remained virtually unchanged, belying the existence of a subsistence crisis. The state's inability to recognise such regional peculiarities in its administrative policies meant there were large loopholes for Molochna peasants to exploit. After all, why produce grain surpluses for public reserves when meat and garden vegetables were untaxed?

Kiselev's advisors identified a second disincentive to state peasant grain production in the laws that hindered state peasants from exporting or selling grain outside of their own uezds. These laws, intended to ensure the state controlled how much grain remained in each uezd, aimed specifically at preventing state peasant food shortages.\(^1\) They are a clear example of the state's policy of wardship, promoting subsistence at the expense of commercial incentives. The transportation and sale of grain, like every commodity in the Empire, was the monopoly of members of merchant guilds. Although state peasants could sell grain at local markets, only guild members could legally sell it in towns, while only members of the first two guilds could transport it across uezd borders.\(^2\)

In 1812, Alexander I issued two decrees that opened a legal avenue for state

\(^1\)"Mnenie upravliauschago Ministerstva Politsii Generala ot Infantrii Grafa Viazmitinova, po predmetu zapreshchenii vypuska khleba iz odnoi Gubernii v druguiu pri sluchae ne urozhaia i nedostatka v prodovol'stvii," n.d. (probably 1819), RGLA fond 1287, opis 1, delo 1819.

\(^2\)PPSZ, 1:19943.
peasants to take part in trading activities by permitting them to purchase trading licenses. To all intents and purposes, the decrees granted state peasants equal status with guild members, although the legislation avoided the word "guild," referring instead to four different "rodi," or "groups" of peasant traders. The cost of such a license, which had to be renewed annually, was very high, ranging from 2,500 rubles for a license to trade beyond the borders of the Empire to 2 percent of the value of the peasant's capital for a license to trade within towns and uezds in goods valued at no less that 2,000 rubles. Members of the third and fourth merchant guilds could not trade across uezd borders, and guberniia administrators naturally assumed similar restrictions would apply to the lower two categories of peasant license-holders, but remarkably, the Senate disagreed, ruling that peasants were not actually guild members, but rather holders of temporary permits. As long as licensed peasant traders obtained travel passes from uezd administrators through normal channels, they could trade across uezd borders.

Theoretically, then, it was possible for state peasants to trade in their own grain, but for most state peasants the cost of licenses was prohibitive. This does not mean that state peasants did not trade in grain illegally. Laws, after all, are only as good as the state's ability to enforce them. Alexander himself acknowledged it was "well known that state peasants and serfs, sometimes in the name of merchants, and sometimes in the name of landlords, carry on various sorts of trade," and he specifically intended the 1812 decree to place controls on this practice. Still, for peasants in the Molochna, who were isolated from markets anyway,
such laws could only have been further incentive to concentrate on subsistence agriculture and avoid the expenses related to either expanding their grain production or switching to commercial sheep-raising.

Although the paternalistic Russian state ultimately saw all its peasants as wards, it had different policies toward different ethno-cultural groups of Molochna settlers, depending upon its perception of their ability to be self-sufficient, their potential to contribute to the state’s welfare, and the threat they posed to the state’s security. The state presumed that Orthodox state peasants required its wardship if they were to avoid starvation, and the taxes the peasants paid and the recruits they supplied to the tsar’s armies were explicitly recognised as payment for wardship. In contrast, the state expected Foreign Colonists to play a positivist role in improving the region, and consequently to assist the state in its wardship role. Thus it gave Colonists particularly generous land grants, tax exemptions, and immunity from military conscription. The state perceived Sectarians as a threat to its internal security, for they posed the danger of contaminating other settlers with their dissident religious beliefs, and it consequently subjected them to special scrutiny and discrimination. Finally, the state perceived Nogais as a threat to its external security, for it feared the one-time vassals of the Crimean Khanate might defect to the Ottoman empire, and so it also subjected Nogais to special attention.

Most Orthodox state peasant settlers came to the Molochna from interior guberniias officially classified as malоземельная, or land-poor. The state’s decision to relocate them to the Molochna was motivated from the outset by wardship policies, aimed at relieving demographic pressures in the guberniias the settlers were leaving and ensuring that
they were provided with sufficient land to feed themselves. The state had neither positive
expectations about the role such settlers would play in the Molochna, nor positive
intentions to alter their agricultural practices. Indeed, the nuclear, agricultural peasant
villages typical of the interior guberniias the settlers had come from were the state's model
for "civil" peasant society, and the state fully expected Orthodox settlers to recreate that
society in the Molochna.

The first Orthodox state peasant village in the Molochna was Bolshoi Tokmak,
established in 1784.46 In the following twenty years, three other villages sprang up, but the
first major wave of Orthodox state peasant settlement began only in 1805. The 1805
settlers, from Smolensk guberniia, were "economic peasants," tenants of churches and
monasteries prior to secularisation in 1764, when they came under the administration of the
College of the Economy.47 In 1785 they had an average of just 3.7 desiatinas of land per
male soul, and the state planned to move them to the Caucasus, but in 1788 tensions
between Russia and the Ottoman Empire interfered, and for the next fifteen years their
future remained in limbo. Then, in 1803, the state decided to relocate them to New Russia.48

In that year, New Russian Governor General Richelieu advised the Minister of
Internal Affairs on administrative requirements for the move. Orthodox state peasants,
Richelieu wrote, "must be treated by the government with precisely the same care as are

46 Petrikin, Istoriia mist i sil ukrains'koi RSR: Zaporiz'ka oblast'.
47"O pereselenii Smolenskikh kazennykh krest'ian v Novorossiiskie krai," 1803-1822,
RGIA, fond 1285, opis 1, delo 13a. Regarding the secularisation of church and monastery lands
and the creation of economic peasants, see V. I. Sernevskii, Krest'iane v tsarstvovanie Imperatritsy
48"O pereselenii Smolenskikh ... krest'ian," 1803-1822, RGIA, fond 1285, opis 1, delo
13a.
foreign immigrants." He recommended they receive: 1) assistance in relocating to their new land; 2) food supplies during the trip, and until the first crops were harvested from their new land; 3) undisputed tenure of their new land; 4) exemption from the soul tax, and all other exactions, for five years; 5) loans from the state treasury subject to repayment beginning after five years and extending over a period of a further fifteen years; and 6) a land allotment of fifteen desiatinas per male soul. Richelieu further recommended that those peasants who wished to relocate should send, in advance of the main party, representatives to select their land and choose a village site.50

In 1806, the state used Richelieu's program, initially formulated with specific reference to Smolensk peasants, as a guideline for a broader program for all Orthodox state peasant resettlement to New Russia. The 1806 proposal contained a report from Samuel Contenius, chairman of the Guardianship Committee, proposing a budget of approximately 370 rubles per family for moving expenses and food.51 The Ministry of Internal Affairs ultimately agreed to grant each Ukrainian state peasant family 100 rubles for relocation and construction expenses and for the purchase of agricultural implements, and to pay "rather more" for Russian families, which would have to travel further.52 As for supplying regular payments to settlers for food, the Ministry hesitated, fearing state peasants might become

\*49*"O pereselenii Smolenskikh . . . krest'ian," 1803-1822, RGLA, fond 1285, opis 1, delo 13a.

\*50*"O pereselenii Smolenskikh . . . krest'ian," 1803-1822, RGLA, fond 1285, opis 1, delo 13a.

\*51*Contenius to Ministry of Internal Affairs, 22 August 1806, RGLA, fond 1285, opis 1, delo 73.

\*52*"Po predmetu pereseleniiia kazennykh krest'ian v Novorossiiskii krai," September 1806, RGLA, fond 1285, opis 1, delo 73.
"lazy and indifferent," and chose instead to offer twenty to thirty rubles per family in cases of proven need.\textsuperscript{53}

The guidelines formulated by Richelieu were a distinct departure from the Plan of 1764, which had focused on foreign Colonists and military settlers.\textsuperscript{54} In 1801, Orthodox state peasants made up only 18 percent of New Russia's population, as compared to the 34 percent who were military settlers.\textsuperscript{55} The focus, in the case of military settlers and foreign Colonists, was on the positive development of the Empire's newest territory. However, it is apparent that the Smolensk peasants, and other Orthodox state peasants that followed them to New Russia from Poltava, Chernigov, and other, primarily Ukrainian guberniiias, were moved first and foremost as a matter of wardship, to alleviate over-crowding in the guberniiias they left, rather than to populate the guberniiias that were their destination.\textsuperscript{56} The change in attitude implicit in the new policy was spelled out explicitly in a 20 October 1805 decree, which required authorities in regions from whence state peasants wished to emigrate to ensure that such peasants were "truly in need" of relocation before granting them permission to leave.\textsuperscript{57}

The state granted Orthodox state peasants in the Molochna land allotments of

\textsuperscript{53}"Po predmetu pereseleniia kazennykh krest'ian v Novorossiiskii krai," September 1806, \textit{RGLA}, \textit{fond} 1285, \textit{opis} 1, \textit{deло} 73.
\textsuperscript{54}"Po pismam Khersonskago Voennago Gubernatora Duika Rishel'e," August 1806, \textit{RGLA}, \textit{fond} 1285, \textit{opis} 1, \textit{deло} 73.
\textsuperscript{56}On the origins of early colonists, see A. S. Kotsievskii, "Krest'ianskaja kolonizatsiia iuzhnogo ukrainy v pervoi treti XIX v.," \textit{Materialy po istorii sel'skogo khoziaistva i krest'ianstva SSSR}, 4 (1964), 130.
\textsuperscript{57}\textit{PPSZ}, 1:21941.
Table 2.2: Average Village Size in Melitopol Uezd, 1821

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox State Peasants</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41,483</td>
<td>2,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serfs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6,494</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sectarians</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2,514</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4,983</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Colonists</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5,028</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nogais</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5394.

fifteen desiatinas per male soul. In practice average landholdings most of the time would have been lower than this, because the peasants received the allotment upon arrival in the region, and it was then increased after each subsequent revizia to account for natural population growth. Consequently, between revizias population growth drove the population higher and the average landholding lower. Because the Molochna River floodplain was designated for Nogai, Colonist, and Sectarian settlement, Orthodox peasants settled on the upper reaches of the Molochna watershed on secondary streams. Such streams only supplied year-round water in a few places, placing a limit on possible settlement sites, and this led to the establishment of extraordinarily large villages at the tenable sites (see table 2.2).*

The profusion of khutors -- independent farmsteads -- in New Russia is sometimes offered as evidence that a significant proportion of the total population was unaccounted

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*SOn the influence of the climate on settlement sites, see Friesen, “Mennonites and their Peasant Neighbours in Ukraine Before 1900,” 58. Seasonal water flow in the rivers of the Molochna watershed are described in “Opisanie rechek protekaiushchim novorossiskoi gubernii v Mariupolskom uezde, pri kotorykh predpologiutsia selenii dla frantsuzskikh vykhodtsov,” 5 August 1797, RGVIA, fond 846, opis 16, delo 23814.
for in the resitiias, and indeed that most immigrants came to the region illegally. Bolotenko goes so far as to say that khutors were the "fundamental form of peasant landholding" in New Russia. However, this likely reverses the actual process of settlement. According to agronomist Wilhelm Bauman, who studied the village of Bolshoi Tokmak in 1844, khutors were in fact summer agricultural encampments of peasants who maintained permanent winter homes in Bolshoi Tokmak. The khutors were located on Bolshoi Tokmak's allotment land, fully within the regulated settlement system. Over time, they could become de facto villages, and the state acknowledged this organic process by reviewing the size of khutors following each resitiia and officially redesignating the largest as villages. The resulting satellite villages often remained part of the original parent village's obshchina, thus creating multi-village obshchinas. The existence of multi-village obshchinas has been used to argue that the obshchina institution was an arbitrary state imposition that undermined the traditional village as the natural first instance of peasant self-governance, but the Molochna case shows that such obshchinas could in fact arise from organic processes.

Having brought the Orthodox state peasants to the Molochna, the state seemed to lose interest in them. From their arrival until the Great Drought of 1833 to 1834 (see

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chapter four), it left them to fend for themselves. In sharp contrast, the state directed its strongest administrative efforts at the Nogais, whom it actively sought to bring into conformity with other state peasants -- an objective bluntly described by Johann Cornies as "civilising" the Nogais.\footnote{See, eg, Johann Cornies, "Nothwendig zu beobachtende und in den Nogaier Dialeckt zu übersetzen nöthige Regeln, zur Civilisierung der nogaischen Bewohner der aus einem Nogaier Aule gegründeten Muster Kolonien Akkermann," \textit{PfBRMA}, file 364.} The state never precisely defined what it regarded as Nogai "uncivility," at least in positive terms, but official correspondence is full of allusions to what Nogais were understood to be -- nomads -- and what they ought, in the eyes of Russian officials, to have become -- sedentary, peasant agriculturists.\footnote{See, eg., an 18 November 1804 letter from Infantry General Rosenberg to Cavalry Colonel Trevogin, in which Rosenberg expresses his "disgust, most of all, at the disorder" of nomadism. \textit{GAKO, fond 27, op\textit{i}r 1, delo 543.}}

The Nogais splintered off the Golden Horde in the early fourteenth century. As the Russian state expanded south and east in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the Nogais broke into smaller groups, each technically a Horde in its own right, but collectively still identified in Russian records as the Nogai Tatar Horde. As Catherine II prepared to complete Russia's push to the Black Sea, these smaller Hordes were scattered across the steppe from the lower Trans-Volga to Bessarabia. The western-most Hordes, located in Bessarabia and to the north-east of the Sea of Azov, were vassals of the Crimean Khanate, and after Catherine captured their lands in the 1770s and 1780s, she forcibly resettled approximately 120,000 Nogais to areas between the Don and Kuban rivers and in the Caucasus.\footnote{B. B. Kochekaev, \textit{Nogaisko-Russkie Otnosheniiia v XV-XVIII vv.} (Alma-Ata: Nauk, 1988).} In 1790, during the second Russo-Turkish war, Prince Gregory Potemkin again
ordered the forcible resettlement of roughly 1,000 Nogai families from the Kizliar steppe in the Caucasus, where he feared they might defect to the Turks, to the north shore of the Sea of Azov. Even so, the group was eventually joined by three other groups: from the Caucasus in 1796; from the Budzhak region of Bessarabia in 1807; and again from the Caucasus in 1810. This brought the total Nogai population in Melitopol uezd to about 30,000 persons.

The land allotted to the Nogais was bounded by the Sea of Azov to the south, the Iushanlee River to the north, the Molochna River to the west, and the Berda River to the east, encompassing 352,776 desiatinas. The state officially classified 285,000 desiatinas of this as “useful” land, and 67,776 desiatinas as “not useful.” These vague terms reflected the Russian state’s vague understanding of the region, for the Nogai land grant was on the Azov Lowlands, and with the exception of the shorelines of the Molochna and Iushanlee Rivers and a few areas along the Obytchna River, the bulk of it was only suited as rangeland. This was not a serious drawback from the Nogai perspective, for they were nomadic pastoralists, accustomed to eking out a living on the arid steppe.

Still, with just nineteen desiatinas of land per male soul, and this of the lowest quality, in 1810 Nogai land holdings were probably already insufficient for their pastoral economy. For the time being this was not a serious problem, because much of the land to

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67 For the 1796 group, see Pallas to Tavride Governor Zubov, 19 March 1796, GAKO, fond 801, opis 1, delo 58. On the 1807 and 1810 groups, see K. B Khanatskii, ed., *Pamiatnaiia Knizhka Tavricheskoi gubernii* (Simferopol: Tipografia Tavricheskoi gubernskoi pravlenii, 1867), 210.
the north of their holdings, along the upper reaches of the Kurushan and Tokmak Rivers, remained unoccupied, so they could wander at will beyond the borders of their official allotment. However the situation posed serious problems for the future.

It should be noted that the state made no attempt to apportion the Nogai land, instead leaving its distribution and use up to the Nogais. This unusual exception to the normal practice of assigning fifteen desiatina per male soul allotments reflected the state's primary concern with security rather than wardship when the grant was first made, but it was also a tacit acknowledgment that the Nogais had a distinct culture, not amenable to conventional Russian peasant agricultural practices.

P. S. Pallas travelled through the Nogai lands in October 1794, and provides the earliest glimpse of the Melitopol Nogais. Travelling from east to west, Pallas met with three Nogai clans: the Yedichkul Horde, that ranged along the Berda river; the Dchambuiluk Horde, that ranged along the Kaisak river; and the Yedissan Horde, that ranged along the Molochna river. The first state-appointed nachalnik of all Nogais in the region, Baiazet Bey, was drawn from the latter.69 The Nogais Pallas met lived in yurts, round, wooden-framed, felt-covered nomadic tents typical of Central Asian nomads. Pallas describes how, "in the summer, these people, with their flocks, travel northward along the banks of the rivulets, where they sow wheat and millet in remote places, and neglect all further cultivation till the time of harvest. At the return of winter, they again approach the Sea of Azov."70 This is a good example of what anthropologist A. M. Khazanov calls "semi-nomadic pastoralism,

characterised by extensive pastoralism and the periodic changing of pastures during the course of the entire, or the greater part of the year; but although pastoralism is the predominant activity, there is also agriculture in a secondary, supplementary capacity."71 Khazanov describes how Central Asian semi-nomadic pastoralists follow a seasonal migratory pattern, moving north in summer to take advantage of richer pastures in less arid regions, then returning south in winter, where weather is warmer and snow cover not as deep or long-lasting.72

The Nogais Pallas saw had only recently arrived in the Molochna, and it is not surprising that they retained semi-nomadic practices. On the other hand, conditions in the Molochna were not identical to those in the Caucasus, for the range of Nogai migration was limited by state peasant settlements to the immediate north, on the Tokmak and Konskaia rivers. The first detailed map of the Molochna region, drawn in 1797 in the unrealised expectation of settling French peasants in the area, shows ten Nogai villages scattered along the banks of the Molochna and Iushanlee rivers.73 This map was drawn in August, when, according to Pallas, the nomadic Nogais ought to have been wandering to the north, so there are grounds for believing the villages were not simply temporary encampments. Indeed, five of them, located north of the Iushanlee River beyond the borders of the Nogai land grant, were still in place in 1803, when the state ordered their occupants off the land to make way for Mennonites, who had been ceded the area for colonisation. In a petition to

72 Khazanov, Nomads and the outside world, 51.
the Civil Governor of Tavride, Nogai nachalnik Baiazet Bey asked: "Who will pay for the houses they have built? . . . Who will pay for the . . . grain that stands in the fields of the places they have left?" This is clearly not a description of temporary encampments. At the same time, Baiazet Bey describes the villages as "winter homes" [zimovniki], suggesting that, while the Nogais had established permanent homes and fields, they still spent part of the year as migratory pastoralists.

In 1808, the state sharply changed its policy toward the Nogais, shifting its focus to wardship, and away from the concern with security that had originally prompted the Horde's relocation to the Molochna. It signalled the change by appointing the Graf Demaison as Nogai nachalnik. He was a French nobleman of indeterminate background who had entered Russian service in 1802 as a state factory inspector. After Baiazet Bey's death in 1805, the position of Nogai nachalnik was filled by temporary appointees until Demaison took over in 1808; he would hold the position until 1825. Johann Cornies, who lived in the village of Ohrloff, near the Nogai land grant, has left a glowing portrait of Demaison's tenure:

Under the rule of that wise and unselfish nachalnik, the Nogais made clear progress toward enlightenment and morality. Finding them dwelling in portable felt tents, which were highly deleterious to their health, he built them good izbas, ending their nomadic way of life, and arousing them to the work of agriculture with great zeal and profit. The philanthropic graf governed with fatherly patience and love, and only

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74Baiazet Bey to Civil Governor Borozdin, 1803, GAKO, fond 27, opis 1, delo 543.
75Demaison (ca. 1760 - 1826), who signed himself "le Comte de Maison," in his french-language correspondence, entered Russian service with the rank of College Assessor in 1802, when he became an inspector at the Aleksandrovske state factory in Ekaterinoslav. He was made Chief of the Nogai Horde on 21 April 1808, a post he would hold until one year before his death in 1826. His complete service record can be found in GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5509.
when all measures of indulgence proved ineffective did he turn to strong measures.\textsuperscript{76}

When the Duc de Richelieu, Governor General of New Russia, appointed Demaisen, he issued clear instructions to the graf to move the Nogais from their tents to permanent settlements without delay.\textsuperscript{77} A. I. Borozdin, Civil Governor of Tavride, in turn ordered land surveyor M. A. Mukhin to select sites for permanent villages. However, as Demaison soon reported, the Nogais had a "strong desire to settle their households in those buildings that they have already constructed for themselves," and at his recommendation, Mukhin just approved the location of already-established villages.\textsuperscript{78} Two years later, Alexander I rewarded Demaison for this feat of legerdemain by making him a Knight of the Order of the Apostle Prince Vladimir, fourth class.\textsuperscript{79} The permanent settlement of the Nogais, then, apparently involved nothing more than designating as villages the permanent structures they already occupied.

Cornies was effusive in his praise of Demaison, but the graf was less well liked by the Nogais themselves. In 1815 they seemed poised to flee the Molochna altogether and emigrate to Turkey. According to Cornies, the threatened exodus was prompted by "one Sultan Moratkeres," who arrived fleeing punishment for a crime committed in Constantinople. Claiming to have been sent by the Great Sultan, Moratkeres spread the story that the Molochna Nogais were to join their kinsmen in Turkey, and that the move only awaited orders from St. Petersburg. Things went so far that many sold or bartered away their

\textsuperscript{76}Johann Cornies, "Kratkii obzor polozheniia Nogaiskikh Tatar, vodvorennykh v Melitopol'skom uzde Tavricheskoi gubernii,"\textit{ Telekhop} 33 (1836): 7-8.

\textsuperscript{77}These instructions are described in Tavride Civil Governor Borozdin to Tavride Guberniia Land-Surveyor M. A. Mukhin, 7 June 1809, GAKO, fond 377, opis 1, delo 595.

\textsuperscript{78}Borodin to Mukhin, 7 June 1809, GAKO, fond 377, opis.1, delo 595.p

\textsuperscript{79}Service record of Demaison, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5509.
livestock and equipment. . . Everyone once again looked to obtain a yurt and a two-wheeled wagon, and they were ready to depart when at last the groundlessness of the rumour became known.80

The unrest did not abate quickly. It was only in February 1817 that Demaison could report to Richelieu that things in the Nogai villages had "returned to normal."81

Cornies credited the threatened exodus to "wicked rumours," but clearly, for the unrest to have had such an extreme effect there must have been widespread discontent among the Nogais. This discontent would rear its head again in 1820, when Nogai representatives petitioned the Governor of Tavride, accusing Demaison of illegally selling salt from Nogai salt flats.82 The terms of the Nogai land grant assigned proceeds of all salt trade to the Nogai public treasury, but according to the complaint, Demaison ignored the monopoly and sold salt rights to a Russian merchant, who in turn sold salt in coastal towns on the Sea of Azov, apparently at well below state-mandated monopoly prices. When a Nogai salt merchant named Sarsakaev protested, Demaison allegedly had him arrested, and tried to force him to recant. Sarsakaev refused and was released, but then, the complainants alleged, Demaison sent four Cossacks to intimidate him. The Cossacks went to his home and destroyed his salt supply, food, clothing, and whatever else they could find. Subsequent investigations proved that Nogai salt was indeed illegally exported, but Demaison pleaded ignorance and suffered no repercussions.83

81 Demaison to Richelieu, 15 Feb. 1817, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 2607.
82 "Po zhalobam nogaitsov na nachal'nika svoego Demezona," 1820, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 4906.
83 "Reshenie Khersonskago Voennago Gubernatora," 13 Aug. 1829, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 4906. It is hard to imagine that Demaison could have been entirely ignorant of the affair. According to the official decision, some 246,000 kg. of salt were illegally exported.
Before departing the Nogai lands for his retirement home in the Crimea, Demaison wrote a summary of his accomplishments as Nogai nachalnik. After recounting his successes in settling the Nogais and forcing them to grow grain, he acknowledged there was still much to do. The problem, he wrote, was that "Nogais have, in every village, extra land amounting to more than fifteen desiatinas per soul, and this is to be lamented, for if they continue to be allowed to herd livestock like steppe nomads, then their transition to a sedentary status will remain in doubt." In other words, they simply had too much land. The solution, implicitly, was to deprive them of the excess.

At the heart of Demaison's criticism was continued Nogai pastoralism. Nogai agricultural practices are examined more thoroughly in chapter three, but for the moment it must be noted that, while it is certainly true that arable husbandry played only a small role in the Nogai agricultural economy by 1825, it is also true that neighbouring Orthodox state peasants were no more inclined to produce crops than Nogais. Indeed, even setting aside the extraordinary (and questionable) harvests of 1816 to 1819, net Nogai harvests between 1808 and 1825 averaged 2.80 chetverts per male soul, marginally higher than the 2.78 chetverts per male soul in Orthodox state peasant villages (see chapter three). Meanwhile, for all the rhetoric about excess Nogai lands, by 1825 the amount of good land per Nogai male soul had fallen to 17.47 desiatinas, only slightly higher than the fifteen desiatina Orthodox state peasant norm. And yet, Orthodox state peasants did not attract the same criticism as Nogais. At the root of this double standard was the Russian state's understanding of what

and sold, and the original complaint alleged that the amount was roughly 980,000 kg.

Demaison to Todorov, 3 Sept. 1821, GAKO, fund 26, opis 1, delo 5579.

Based on the seven years for which comparable data is available. See table 3.4.
constituted civil society. Nogais, regardless of their economic practices, did not conform in their social arrangements to the regulated, orderly agricultural villages that the state deemed "civil."

Dukhobor and Molokan Sectarians were the flip side of the Nogai coin. While Nogais threatened Russia's external security and were moved away from an unstable border, the state perceived Sectarians, with their dissident religious beliefs, as a threat to internal security, and moved them to an unsettled frontier to quarantine them from Orthodox state peasants.

A pacifist Russian Christian sect, the Dukhobors are known mainly for their troubled history in Canada after leaving Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. Their vague early history suggests they probably came into existence in the mid-eighteenth century in the southern regions of the Russian empire. Various theories link their beliefs to the Bogomils, a tenth century Bulgarian heretical group, the Cathars, a thirteenth century French heretic group, and, more plausibly, the teachings of Ukrainian philosopher Georgii Skovoroda (1722-1794). The name Dukhobor -- Spirit Wrestler -- was first applied as a derogatory epithet by Archbishop Amvrosii Serebrennikov of Ekaterinoslav in 1785, implying that Dukhobors wrestled against the Holy Ghost, but soon they embraced the

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86 On the Dukhobors' final years in Russia and exodus to Canada, see Woodcock and Avakumovic, The Dukhobors, 84-151.

name, claiming to wrestle on behalf of the Holy Ghost. George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic describe the main tenets of Dukhobor faith in their standard history:

There is a central, constant element in Dukhobor Christianity from which the peculiar structure and behaviour pattern of the sect naturally follow. It is the belief in the immanence of God, in the presence within each man of the Christ spirit, which not only renders priesthood unnecessary, since each man is his own priest in direct contact with the divine, but also makes the Bible obsolete, since every man can be guided, if he will only listen to it, by the voice within. . . . Since the direction of their behaviour must come from within, they naturally deny the right of the state or other external authority to dictate their actions. And, since all men are vessels for the divine essence, they regard it as sinful to kill other men, even in war. Implicit in the Dukhobors’ rejection of the authority of the state, the Russian Orthodox church, and the Bible, was their rejection of the principal sources of education in Russia, and even, to all intents and purposes, literacy itself. Carrying this rejection a step further, they took Paul’s injunction to the Corinthians that “the letter kills, but the spirit gives life” as a religious tenet. Consequently, they have left few written documents. And, because their defiance of authority invited state persecution, they became a highly secretive group, deceiving the state about the size and beliefs of the sect, so their history is equally difficult to trace from official records. Finally, what records survive are often unreliable, because accounts of state and church officials were frequently coloured by religious prejudice.

It is nonetheless possible to reconstruct the outlines of Dukhobor immigration to the Molochna. They were permitted to immigrate by tsar Alexander I’s decree of January

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88 Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Dukhobors, 19.
90 II Corinthians, III, 6. On Dukhobor attitudes to the written word, see Fry, "The Doukhobors," 22.
1802, which Woodcock and Avakumovic characterise as a "Charter of the Dukhobors."\(^91\) Earlier, the Dukhobors, like all Russian sects, had been subject to official persecution, and over the last third of the eighteenth century, the state dispersed many of them to peripheral regions of the Empire.\(^92\) Then, on 17 March 1801, just one week after his ascension, Alexander decreed that such exiles could return to the South from places as far-flung as Finland and Siberia. In January 1802, reacting to reports of persecution of the newly returned sectarians, Alexander granted a request from New Russian Dukhobors that they be allowed to settle in the Molochna.\(^93\) Eventually, approximately one quarter of all Dukhobors settled there.\(^94\) This decree was a turn for the better in Dukhobor-state relations, demonstrating Alexander's religious tolerance, and holding out the hope that the wardship policies the tsar extended to his other peasants might be applied to the Dukhobors too. Still, the decree must also be recognised as a cautious, security conscious measure of an autocratic, Orthodox ruler. Although the Dukhobors were permitted to group together as a community, Alexander isolated them on the unsettled southern borderlands, far from Orthodox peasants whom he feared they might contaminate with their sectarian beliefs.\(^95\)

The first Dukhobors arrived in the Molochna in 1802. By 1811, 2,273 Dukhobor men, women and children had settled in nine villages along the lower west bank of the river and the west bank of the Estuary, a number that would grow to an estimated 4,100 by 1824.

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\(^93\)Fry, "The Doukhobors," 103.
\(^94\)Fry, "The Doukhobors," 218-220.
\(^95\)The intention to quarantine the Dukhobors was clearly understood at the time. See Robert Pinkerton, *Russia: or Miscellaneous Observations on the Past and Present State of that Country and its Inhabitants* (London: Seeley & Sons, 1833), 168.
With Alexander’s death and Nicholas I’s ascension in 1825, increasing restrictions on Dukhobor migration slowed the influx, and a decree of October 1830 ended it. On the eve of the Dukhobor exodus to the Caucasus in 1841 their population was about 5,000.

Land issues were central to the Dukhobors’ experiences in the Molochna. Alexander originally chose the region for Dukhobor settlement because it was unsettled frontier, while, as will be shown in chapter four, Nicholas exiled the Dukhobors in part to confiscate their disproportionately large land holdings. The Dukhobors’ economic success owed much to the exceptionally generous land grants they received from the state. In the apparent expectation of far more Dukhobor immigrants than actually arrived, between 1802 and 1816 the state granted them 48,673 desiatinas of land, roughly thirty-four desiatinas per male soul based on the 1817 census. It was a particularly rich land grant, encompassing an extensive stretch of the fertile Molochna River floodplain.

In 1818, the size of Dukhobor land grants came under scrutiny when the state permitted the establishment of three new German colonies on the west bank of the Molochna. There was still unoccupied land in the region, but east-bank land was largely reserved for Mennonite colonies, and because the west bank lacked the feeder streams that extended eastward from the Molochna and provided vital direct access to water, new

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96 VPSZ, 5:4010.
97 For the population in 1811, see GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 994. In 1824 there were 2,055 males (GAKhO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 70), while the total number of Dukhobors exiled to the Caucasus between 1841 and 1845 was 4,992 (GAOO, fond 1, opis 166, delo 32).
98 "Ukaz Tavricheskogo gubernskogo pravleniia o razmezhevanii Dukhoborcheskikh zemel," 17 February 1825, GAKhO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 70.
99 "Delo ob otmezhevanii zemli v obrochnoe soderzhanie dukhoborcheskimi seleniiam v Melitopol'skom uezde," 4 August 1821, GAKhO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 70.
settlements on the west bank could only be situated along the banks of the Molochna River itself. The Dukhobors controlled a disproportionately large share of this vital land. Between 1817 and 1820 a series of contradictory reports between provincial officials and their counterparts in St. Petersburg argued that the Dukhobors needed more land for new immigration, or, alternatively, were over-endowed as a result of errors in assessments. In 1820 Alexander approved a Council of Ministers decision that the land grant was justified, but in 1821 the land survey department reopened the question, saying there was "no justification for granting [the Dukhobors] such a large amount," and proposing a reduction of the allotment to the standard fifteen desiatinas per male soul. The Dukhobors protested that their community had grown dramatically, their own count revealing an increase to 2,055 male souls. Even if this figure had been accepted, the Dukhobors still faced a reduction of 17,848 desiatinas, and this was a best-case scenario.

In a remarkable 1824 petition, the Dukhobors threatened to gather their belongings and flee if the state followed through with the land reduction. Such defiance reflects a new-found unity among Dukhobors. Before coming to the Molochna, they had never constituted a single, united community. Although sharing common religious beliefs, they had dwelt in small communities across southern Russia and Ukraine, but once gathered in

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100 For a detailed description of these exchanges, see Fry, "The Doukhobors," 186-190.
101 Fry, "The Doukhobors," 189.
102 "Ukaz Tavricheskogo gubernskago pravleniia o razmezhevanii Dukhoborcheskikh zemel," 17 February 1825, GAKbO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 70.
103 Vedomost' o chisle sostoiashchikh Melitopol'skogo Uezda dukhoborcheskikh seleniaakh," March 1824, GAKbO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 70.
104 Dukhobor elders to Ministry of Internal Affairs, 18 March 1824, GAKhO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 70.
the unfamiliar environment of the Molochna, surrounded by turkic-speaking Nogai Tatars and German-speaking colonists, the Dukhobors saw "otherness" on all sides. Small wonder, then, that by 1824 they identified themselves as one, common community, committed to defending their beliefs even at the expense of defying the Russian state. The assembly of the Dukhobor faithful in the Molochna had led to the growth of a "Dukhobor Commonwealth," much like the assembly of the Mennonites in the same region had engendered a "Mennonite Commonwealth."\(^{105}\)

Dukhobor protests against the threatened land reduction were not wholly unsuccessful. In 1824 a compromise with the state was reached that reduced Dukhobor land to the 21,795 desiatinas indicated by the 1817 census, but permitted them to lease the remaining 26,878 desiatinas "in perpetuity" for twenty kopecks per desiatina per year.\(^{106}\) At first this price was well above market rates -- Cornies leased land for one kopeck per desiatina in the same period\(^{107}\) -- yet much of it was prime, river-front land, and by the time the Dukhobors left the region twenty years later, the fixed lease payments were a real bargain, prime land in the Molochna leasing for as much as a ruble per desiatina in 1837.\(^{108}\) The "perpetual" designation of the lease was figurative, for while the lease payment of twenty kopecks per desiatina was fixed, the arrangement called for new Dukhobor


\(^{106}\) "Ukaz Ego imperatorskago velichestva," 17 February 1825, *GAKhO, fond 14, opis 2, delo 70.*

\(^{107}\) O. Köppen, "O polevodstve v Tavricheskoii gubernii," 104.

\(^{108}\) P. I. Köppen, "O raskoli'nikakh, prozhivaushchikh v Tavricheskoii gubernii" (hereafter "O raskoli'nikakh"), 1837, *GAOO, fond 1, opis 200, delo 52.*
immigrants to be granted allotments from the leased area, so it would be gradually converted from leased to allotment land. The model for this arrangement was the Colonist land grant system, which gave Colonists reserve lands designated for settlement by future immigrants (see below). The extension of the system to the Dukhobors is an important example of Alexander's continued liberal treatment of sectarians, even late in his reign. Unfortunately for the Dukhobors, when Nicholas I cut off Dukhobor immigration to the Molochna in 1830, the justification for the surplus land was removed, and the land became the focus of controversy (see chapter four).

If the early history of the Dukhobors is vague, that of the Molokans is all but nonexistent. They seem to have originated in the eighteenth century in Tambov province, probably as an off-shoot of the Dukhobors. They were labelled Molokans, or "milk drinkers," because they drank milk during lent in defiance of Orthodox practice. In most official Russian correspondence they were closely associated with the Dukhobors, and indeed in 1837 P. I. Köppen found that a small splinter group of Molokans in the Molochna called themselves "Dukhobor Molokans." Although they shared the Dukhobors' pacifism and their rejection of worldly authority, they broke sharply from the Dukhobors in their acceptance of the authority of the Bible.

By the time the Molokans arrived in the Molochna, the period of capricious land

109 The reserve land system in the Colonies is described in Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," MQR 48: 7.
110 Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History, s.v. "Molokane." There is no good modern history of the Molokans. A useful, though doctrinaire summary can be found in Klibanov, Istoriia religioznogo sektantstva, 122-183.
111 Köppen, "O raskol'nikakh," 42.
112 Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Dukhobors, 30.
grants that had seen the Dukhobors acquire such huge tracts was over. They received allotments of fifteen desiatinas per male soul, standard for all state peasants, on the east bank of the Molochna, shoe-horned in among other settlers, and with no provision for future expansion. Between 1822 and 1830 the state allotted the Molokans 12,705 desiatinas of land, a figure calculated using the 1817 census population of 847 male souls, but by 1835 their number had grown to 1,352 male souls, reducing allotments to less than ten desiatinas each.\textsuperscript{113} Much of it was of very poor quality, described by the Tavride office of the Ministry of State Domains as "wild, dry and stony."\textsuperscript{114}

The settlement of Molokans in the Molochna points to the state's continued perception of the region as frontier. It provided a place for Alexander to quarantine the Molokans, just as he had the Dukhobors. However, if the destination was chosen for its supposed isolation, the reason for the departure of the Molokans from their previous homes was quite different from that of the Dukhobors. Like most Orthodox state peasant immigrants to the Molochna, the Molokans were from land-poor interior gubernias where they had no longer held enough land to support themselves.\textsuperscript{115} The state relocated them as a matter of wardship, as much for economic as religious reasons, and they avoided much of the persecution the Dukhobors experienced. Administratively, they were treated much like

\textsuperscript{113}Summarised in a report of the Tavride office of the Ministry of State Domains to the First Department of the Ministry of State Domains in St. Petersburg, 1838, RGLA, fond 383, opis 1, delo 234.

\textsuperscript{114}Tavride office of the Ministry of State Domains to the First Department of the Ministry of State Domains in St. Petersburg, 1838, RGLA, fond 383, opis 1, delo 234.

\textsuperscript{115}O pereselenii Malakanov i drugikh podobnykh im raskol'nikov iz Vladimirskoi v Tavricheskuiu guberniiu na otvedenniuu dla vodvoreniiu im tam zemliiu v chisle 30,000 desiatin," 15 February 1828, RGLA, fond 1284, opis 195, delo 165.
Orthodox state peasants.

Turning finally to foreign Colonists, the state brought them to the Molochna to play a positive role in economic development. This expectation was rooted in Catherine II's populationist policies, and in the state's belief that the Colonists were innately superior agriculturists to Orthodox state peasants and would serve as a model to neighbouring settlers.\textsuperscript{116} Their immigration to the Molochna was governed by the 1764 "Plan concerning the distribution of state lands in the New Russian province for their settlement," although Mennonites were subject to a special Charter of Privileges, granted in 1800, that modified the Plan.\textsuperscript{117} This Charter specifically enjoined Mennonites to act as models to their Colonist neighbours in New Russia, emphasising the state's positive expectations. Russia actively recruited immigrants from Western Europe, offering inducements that included a ten year tax exemption, freedom from military conscription, and financial subsidies to pay for the construction of homes and farm buildings and the purchase of livestock and agricultural implements.\textsuperscript{118}

Foreign Colonists are conventionally divided into two groups, German Colonists -- roughly one-quarter Lutherans and three-quarters Catholics -- and Mennonites. Mennonites came to the Molochna from the Vistula-Nogat Delta, primarily from the regions of Danzig and Elbing. About 38 percent had experience as craftsmen, while nearly all came from rural

\textsuperscript{117}The Mennonite Charter of Privileges is reproduced in Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 282-284.
\textsuperscript{118}On Russian recruitment policies, see Bartlett, \textit{Human Capital}, 23-30; Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 51-56.
areas where they had traditionally practised mixed farming with emphasis on dairying.\textsuperscript{119} German Colonists came from no single area, an 1836 account listing immigrants from places as diverse as Württemburg, Nassau, Pomorania, Prussia, and Mecklenburg.\textsuperscript{130} Only 10 percent came from cities, while about 65 percent had experience as craftsmen.\textsuperscript{121}

Mennonites settled on the east bank of the Molochna and its tributaries in villages of between sixteen and twenty-two families, receiving sixty-five desiatina land allotments per family. German Colonist villages were larger, some containing as many as fifty families, each with a sixty desiatina allotment. Most German Colonist villages were on the west bank, but a group of immigrants from Württemburg, arriving in 1819, settled in four villages to the east on the Berda River, not really in the Molochna River basin at all, although they are grouped with the other German Colonists in state records. Included in the 65 desiatina allotment were 1.5 desiatina home plots, and a proportional share of the village's pasture, hay and arable land. Families not intending to farm received only home plots, with one-sixth of the village area set aside for such settlement.\textsuperscript{122}

Villages owned their land collectively, and individual allotments could not be subdivided, mortgaged, or sold outside the settlement. German Colonists, abiding by the 1764 Plan, practised ultimogeniture, the indivisible allotment passing to a single heir.

\textsuperscript{119}Villages of origin are given in Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, \textit{Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonisten Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19 Jahrhundert} (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1955), 304-329.
\textsuperscript{130}“Historische Uebersicht! Der am rechten Ufer des Molotschna Flusses angesiedelten deutschen Kolonisten und dessen Zustand,” 1836, \textit{PJBRLMA}, file 375.
\textsuperscript{121}Lev Malinowski, “Passage to Russia: Who were the Emigrants?,” trans. Emil Toews, \textit{Journal of the American Society of Germans from Russia} 2 (1979), 27.
\textsuperscript{122}Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 55.
Mennonite allotments, too, were indivisible, but their Charter permitted Mennonites to follow their own inheritance customs, the heir who received the allotment buying it from the deceased's estate, the assets of which were liquidated and distributed equally to all heirs. If a man died without heirs, or his heirs did not want to farm, the allotment could be sold to another settlement member, subject to approval by the village assembly and the state.\(^\text{123}\)

Allowing for natural population growth, the state gave each village surplus land equal to one-sixth its allotment land for future distribution.\(^\text{124}\) This gave Colonist village and district institutions an important area of autonomous authority, allowing them to respond to population growth by assigning new allotments, and letting them lease the unassigned portion of the surplus to village members. Orthodox peasants, by comparison, had to wait for the state to grant more land after the next resïcia. This made voting rights in Colonist villages, which were limited to the owners of farms, vitally important, and lent far more prestige to office-holders in such villages than in Orthodox state peasant villages.

Colonists also had a large area of reserve land set aside for future settlement by new immigrants. As new Colonists arrived, new villages were carved out of this reserve.\(^\text{125}\) The state originally designated 123,240 desiatinas for Mennonite settlement, and 73,433 desiatinas for German Colonist settlement.\(^\text{126}\) German Colonist data is not available, but the initial allocation of Mennonite land was as follows:

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\(^{123}\) Urry, *None But Saints*, 61.


\(^{126}\) Kameral Liste, 1834, *GADO*, fond 134, opis 1, delo 981.
Villages (1808) 18
Households (1808) 351
Allotment Land (65 desiatinas per household) 22,815
Surplus Land (1/6 of allotment land) 3,802.5
Total Allocated Land 26,618.5
Total Mennonite Land Grant 123,240
Reserve Land 96,621.5

Mennonite communities were traditionally coterminous with church congregations, with all members of a congregation subject to its ethical rules, enforced by an elected Ältester (Elder), assisted by Lehrer (Ministers) and Deacons.\textsuperscript{127} In Russia, the state required Mennonites to conform to the system introduced in state peasant villages in 1797. Because the structure of the civil system closely resembled the traditional Mennonite congregational system, in the early years it provoked little controversy, some later settlers even thinking it had been imported from Prussia by Mennonites.\textsuperscript{128} The German Colonists likewise were expected to conform to the Russian system.

The most important difference between the administration of foreign Colonists and other Molochna settlers was the Guardianship Committee, a division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs until 1838, when it passed to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of State Domains. The Guardianship Committee provided a remarkably progressive and efficient administrative organ that encouraged and financially supported agricultural innovation. Its activities are described in more detail in chapters three and five, but the person most important in its early administration, Samuel Contenius, deserves special mention. Not only was Contenius an energetic proponent of agricultural innovation, but his wide contacts with

\textsuperscript{127}Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 38-40.
\textsuperscript{128}Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 71.
senior officials in St. Petersburg allowed him to bypass much of the bureaucratic red tape that hindered administration on the Russian periphery. His assistant, Alexander Fadeev, who supervised the Ekaterinoslav office of the Guardianship Committee from Contenius’ retirement in 1818 until 1836, was an equally gifted administrator. As a result of the activities of the Guardianship Committee, state-Colonist relations were a rare exception to the general experience of other Molochna settlers.

Because the state expected foreign Colonists to play a positive role in the development of New Russia, it placed many demands on them during their early years in the Molochna. However, as often as not, it was the Colonists themselves, and not the state, who seized the reins and guided innovations in the Molochna. Thus a detailed examination of the interplay between state and Colonists will be left for chapter three.

The Russian state’s official administrative system determined who could immigrate to the Molochna, provided the infrastructure that permitted them to come, and determined where in the river basin they would settle. To that point, the state had fulfilled its self-assigned wardship duties admirably. However, the expectations it had about how the settlers would use the land they had been assigned were based on a belief that environmental conditions were malleable, and would accommodate themselves to the wishes of the state. In reality, the environment demanded adaptation, and if the state was not prepared to adapt, or provide realistic guidance in this regard, settlers would have no choice but to do so for themselves. The paths of adaptation they would find, and the ways these affected Molochna society as a whole, are the subject of chapter three.
Chapter Three

Adaptation on the Mnozozemel'naia Steppe, 1783-1833

The principal adaptation by all settlers in the early years in the Molochna consisted of variations on the single theme of animal husbandry. The variations grew out of the experiences of settlers before arriving in the Molochna, and in particular their attitudes toward markets and commercial agriculture, and toward the ways the environment could be shaped to fit human needs. Nogais and Orthodox state peasants were inclined to understand the environment to have fixed, unalterable characteristics to which humans must adapt. They followed the path of least resistance, quickly adopting agricultural practices that met their subsistence needs, and they were relatively unresponsive to inter-regional and international markets, which often sought goods that were not easily produced in the Molochna. Foreign Colonists and Sectarians understood the environment to have distinctive, but alterable characteristics, that could be adapted to human needs. They adapted slowly to the Molochna, because they expended efforts on forcing the environment to meet commercial and cultural needs, and in the long term, the adaptations they found laid the groundwork for their future prosperity.

These differing attitudes toward markets and the environment found expression in wider realms of self-administrative practices in the Molochna. Just as Nogais and Orthodox state peasants did not try to manage their environment, they showed little inclination to manage their public lives. The functional role of their traditional administrative systems was to manage scarce resources, but in the first decades of settlement, land was plentiful, and
this undermined the legitimacy of such systems. By comparison, for foreign Colonists and Sectarians, the isolation they found in the Molochna gave their traditional, religiously-based self-administrative systems, which had previously been limited or suppressed by powerful central states, an opportunity to blossom, helping to create vibrant ethno-cultural “Commonwealths.”

Because of its low labour demands, animal husbandry is a common agricultural adaptation to conditions of labour scarcity such as those in the Molochna in the early nineteenth century.¹ Sheep breeding in particular was important because of the region’s isolation from markets. The nearest ports were Mariupol, 170 kilometres east, and Feodosia, 250 kilometres south-west. Transportation costs to ship agricultural goods over such distances were an important strategic consideration for settlers. Wool, which had a high value-to-weight ratio and was relatively impervious to the rigours of slow travel over poor roads, was a natural choice for commercially conscious Molochna settlers.² Cattle also played an important role in the Molochna; oxen were the draft animal of choice for Orthodox and Sectarian state peasants, while for Nogais, ownership of cattle played a cultural role in defining social status. Horses, too, were important both as draft animals and as status symbols, and Nogais in particular kept large horse herds.

The carrying capacity of range lands would become a vital determinant of socio-economic development in the Molochna, and consequently, that capacity must be clearly

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²On the economic logic of wool production in isolated areas, see Bruce R. Davidson, "The Development of the Pastoral Industry in Australia During the Nineteenth Century," in Koster & Chang, *Pastoralists*, 79-102.
defined. Some sources report that New Russian pastoralists kept as many as ten sheep per desiatina, an enormously high ratio of livestock to pastureland. Others suggest that even the richest, irrigated floodplain haylands, which constituted just a tiny proportion of the total pasture and hayland, only produced enough hay to feed about five sheep per desiatina per year. On the less arid range lands of Dneprovsk uezd, north and northwest of the Molochna, owners of large private herds seldom achieved a ratio of more than two sheep per desiatina, while, in the Molochna, Mennonite Colonists kept no more than 1.2 sheep per desiatina on their communal pastures, and the figure temporarily dropped to 0.48 sheep per desiatina after the severe winter of 1825.

The inconsistency of such accounts makes it necessary to look elsewhere for guidance. Modern agronomists conventionally measure carrying capacity in Animal Unit Months (AUMs), the number of months a given unit of land will support one 450 kilogram cow or horse, or six sheep, based on an average daily consumption of twelve kilograms of dry matter. Cattle and horses were small in New Russia, averaging just 200 kilograms each, while sheep approximated the modern weight norm of about eighty kilograms. Hence, for the Molochna one nominal 450 kilogram Animal Unit (AU) equated to 2.25 cows or horses.

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4fu. Witte, "O sel'skom khoziaistve v Khersonskoi, Tavricheskoii i Ekaterinoslavskoi guberniakh," ZbMVD, no. 3 (1834), 110. Witte says the haylands produced the equivalent of from 1,960 and 2,450 kilograms of hay per desiatina. Consumption was approximately 1.22 kilograms per sheep per day.
5See "Kameral List," 1825, GADO fond 134, opis 1, delo 786; "Kameral List," 1829, GADO fond 134, opis 1, delo 893; "Kameral List," 1834, GADO fond 134, opis 1, delo 981. In the 1870s E. I. Falts-Fein kept 170,000 sheep on 82,046 desiatinas -- 2.07 sheep per desiatina -- in Dneprovsk (Friesen, "New Russia," 142).
7"Statisticheskii ocherk torgovli skotom v s. Petrburge," ZhMGI 31 (1848), 20.
or six sheep.

At best, arid natural pasturelands like those in the Molochna produce about 1,226 kilograms of dry matter per desiatina. This could be improved substantially by irrigating, or growing specialised high-yield fodder crops, but by 1835 only 1,385 desiatinas of hay land were irrigated in the Molochna region, while specialised fodder crops were first experimented with only in the 1840s. Based on the 1,226 kilogram figure, the AUM for one desiatina in the Molochna was 3.35. In other words, one desiatina could support one AU for 3.35 months, and about 3-1/2 desiatinas were required per AU per year. Translating into common English, in the Molochna each desiatina of range land could support .64 of the small local cows or horses, or 1.71 sheep.

It is important to note that livestock populations sometimes temporarily surpass the carrying capacity of their pasturelands. Herds expand beyond the limit of carrying capacity, then die off from starvation and disease during droughts and epidemics, the latter more frequent among undernourished livestock. Eventually livestock populations stabilize at a lower level, determined in part by degeneration of pastureland caused by over-grazing, in part by adaptation of humans to less livestock-dependent agricultural systems. This process of animal population growth, decline, and levelling is known as an ungulate irruption. It often repeats itself in an irruptive oscillation, a cycle of livestock population growth and decline, with a reciprocal decline and recovery of the pasture lands, albeit at a lower carrying capacity each time. Over time, the severity of irruptive oscillations lessens as a balance is reached.

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9Semple, *Grassland Improvement*, 58.
achieved. The entire process takes place, typically, over a period of thirty-five to forty years.\textsuperscript{11}

Table 3.1 shows total livestock in the Molochna region between 1805 and 1861 in real terms and in animal units. At their highest, in 1846 the roughly 1.1 million head of livestock in Melitopol and Berdiansk uezds would have required an estimated 1.33 million desiatinas of grazing land. According to the Land Survey Department’s calculations, there was a total of just 1.49 million desiatinas of useful land in the entire region, including arable, village sites, etc., so total livestock must have been pushing close to the limits of the region’s carrying capacity. As will be shown below, for some Molochna settlers, the limit had already been exceeded. The fluctuations in total livestock holdings after 1843 (the period for which there are adequate data) are portrayed graphically in figure 3.1. This pattern is typical of an irruptive oscillation, and tends to confirm that by the 1840s the pasturelands of the Molochna were used up, and were probably experiencing ecological degradation from overgrazing.

\textsuperscript{11}Melville, \textit{A Plague of Sheep}, 7.
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Sources: GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 138; f. 134, op. 1, d. 310; f. 134, op. 1, d. 332; f. 134, op. 1, d. 356; f. 134, op. 1, d. 402; f. 134, op. 1, d. 981; f. 134, op. 1, d. 251; f. 134, op. 1, d. 343; f. 134, op. 1, d. 431; f. 134, op. 1, d. 692; f. 134, op. 1, d. 701; f. 134, op. 1, d. 711; f. 134, op. 1, d. 712; f. 134, op. 1, d. 753; f. 134, op. 1, d. 786; f. 134, op. 1, d. 893; f. 134, op. 1, d. 936; GAOO, f. 6, op. 1, d. 197; f. 6, op. 1, d. 5284; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 994; f. 26, op. 1, d. 2503; f. 26, op. 1, d. 3308; f. 26, op. 1, d. 4137; f. 26, op. 1, d. 5017; f. 26, op. 1, d. 5394; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 11, d. 131; f. 1281, op. 11, d. 132; f. 1281, op. 11, d. 133 part 1; f. 1281, op. 11, d. 133 part 2; f. 1281, op. 4, d. 49a-1844; f. 1281, op. 4, d. 49-1845; f. 1281, op. 4, d. 50a-1847; f. 1281, op. 4, d. 35a-1848; f. 1281, op. 4, d. 45a-1849; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 52-1850; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 30a-1851; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 48a-1852; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 73a-1853; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 50a-1854; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60a-1855; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60-1856; f. 1281, op. 5, d. 97-1857; f. 1281, op. 6, d. 20-1860; f. 1281, op. 6, d. 48-1861; f. 1281, op. 6, d. 47-1862; A. A. Sergeev, "Nogalsy na Molochnykh vodakh (1790-1832). Istoricheskoi ocherk," Izvestia Tavricheskoi Uchenoi Arkhivnoi Komissii 48 (1912; Comies, "Landwirtschaftliche Notizen," 1837, PJBRMA, File 992; Brandes, Von den Zaren Adoptiert, 201, Table 24; Unruh, Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergruende, 304-329.
Adapting to the Land: Nogais and Orthodox State Peasants

Nogais and Orthodox state peasants came to the Molochna from utterly dissimilar environments, and the adaptations required of them were likewise dissimilar. Orthodox peasants arrived from overcrowded interior gubernias where arable husbandry predominated. They found a landscape vastly different from the one they had left behind, arid, treeless, and isolated from markets, demanding a change to less intensive forms of agriculture than they had previously known. Nogais came to the Molochna as semi-nomadic steppe pastoralists, fully accustomed to the environmental demands they faced. For them, adaptation meant a transformation to more intensive agricultural practices as the Molochna became more and more densely populated. Both groups found a common solution to their needs in the transition to sheep breeding, but as they adapted, the functional roles of their traditional administrative systems were undermined. The success of their adaptations would ultimately rest upon their ability to develop new structures to replace the old.

There is little direct evidence about internal administration in the Nogai community in its first years in the Molochna, but studies of other Central Asian steppe nomads provide guidance. Nomadism placed limits on political authority, for nomads spent much of the year in small groups beyond the direct influence of political leaders.\textsuperscript{12} Central Asian nomads lived in \textit{amts}, mobile villages composed of as few as two and seldom more than ten households.\textsuperscript{13}


Individual households were nuclear, consisting of a man, his wife, and their unmarried children. An aul was typically made up of households headed by close relatives, forming a primary kin group. It was led by the eldest male, advised and supported by the heads of other households. Groups of auls often formed confederations, known as Hordes, with common territorial rights. All members of a Horde traced their descent through the male line to one common ancestor, often Chingis Khan, and such descent myths provided "a theoretical foundation for social integration." The Nogai descent myth included Chingis Khan, but extended back to the biblical figure Ismail, son of Abraham and Hagar.

The leader of a Horde was the bey. His sons and close male relatives formed a hereditary nobility, known as murgas, who led their own auls, which were often larger than the norm, containing as many as fifty households. Their control of the Horde was based on their senior genealogical position, and in practice it was "frequently the aristocracy . . . which [cultivated] knowledge of genealogies and [manipulated] them so as to give an ideological basis to their ruling positions." Beyes and murgas were responsible for the allocation of key resources, establishment and regulation of migration routes, defence of the Horde's territory, and other common interests.

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14 Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World, 127.
15 Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World, 127.
17 Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World, 132.
19 Philip Carl Salzman, "Synthetic and Multicausal Approaches to the Study of Nomadic Peoples." Nomadic Peoples 16 (1984), 315. See also Krader, Social Organization, 337.
20 Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World, 140.
21 Khazanov, Nomads and the Outside World, 147.
Beys, murzas, and leaders of auls gained economic advantages from their positions. For example, they could arrogate to themselves the best grazing territory, and exact labour services, particularly livestock supervision, from other clan members. However, nomadism placed limits on economic differentiation just as on political authority. Most basically, the means of production, the pasturage, was held communally. Meanwhile, nomadic households required a minimum of livestock to subsist and this placed a lower limit on the size of a viable household's herds, while the need for mobility and the environmental limitations of pasturelands placed maximum limits on herd sizes. At the same time, many of the trappings of wealth in sedentary society were simply impractical for nomads, who were limited in their personal belongings to what they could carry or herd with them. The stability of nomadic societies was ensured in part by the safety-valve of surrounding sedentary societies, which provided an outlet for those whose herds, whether through misfortune or mismanagement, grew too small to be viable, and for those who found the attraction of greater wealth irresistible.

As detailed in chapter two, the state's first administrative objective with the Nogais was to end their nomadism and force them to abandon pastoralism in favour of arable husbandry. In 1825, when Cornies credited Demaison with arousing the Nogais "to the work of agriculture with great zeal and profit," it was Demaison's success in forcing the Nogais to grow grain that he was referring to. As table 3.2 shows, Nogai grain production

### Table 3.2: Nogai Grain Production, 1804-1831

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Sown</th>
<th>Harvested</th>
<th>Output/Seed Ratio</th>
<th>Harvested Per Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(chertsi)</td>
<td>(chertsi)</td>
<td>(chertsi)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(chertsi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>16,003</td>
<td>16,468</td>
<td>68,700</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>17,122</td>
<td>8692</td>
<td>39,895</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1807</td>
<td>17,088</td>
<td>17,427</td>
<td>75,053</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1808</td>
<td>16,468</td>
<td>8485</td>
<td>68,700</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>16,975</td>
<td>8692</td>
<td>39,895</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>17,088</td>
<td>33,405</td>
<td>203,695</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>15,024</td>
<td>17,296</td>
<td>69,067</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>23,405</td>
<td>63,920</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1814</td>
<td>31,778</td>
<td>8604</td>
<td>31,882</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>31,394</td>
<td>10,946</td>
<td>45,458</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>29,780</td>
<td>28,509</td>
<td>263,710</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>8.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>32,712</td>
<td>39,270</td>
<td>217,839</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>32,677</td>
<td>42,860</td>
<td>282,099</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>8.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>32,924</td>
<td>48,100</td>
<td>203,695</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>33,710</td>
<td>22,470</td>
<td>77,023</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>2.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>23,031</td>
<td>69,930</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>32,685</td>
<td>15,645</td>
<td>86,460</td>
<td>5.53</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>32,016</td>
<td>19,702</td>
<td>15,774</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>30,919</td>
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<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>30,721</td>
<td>11,791</td>
<td>27,123</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>30,395</td>
<td>7497</td>
<td>61,448</td>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>30,623</td>
<td>10,943</td>
<td>38,005</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>13,210</td>
<td>51,330</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>30,676</td>
<td>21,723</td>
<td>108,131</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>30,881</td>
<td>22,782</td>
<td>47,524</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>30,721</td>
<td>18,506</td>
<td>102,566</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: "Otchetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov," RGLA, f. 1281, op. 11, d. 131 (1808-1810); f. 1281, op. 11, d. 132 (1811-1815); f. 1281, op. 11, d. 133 part 1 (1816, 1822); f. 1281, op. 11, d. 133 part 2 (1823-1827); Annual reports of Demaison to the Governor of Tavride: f. 26, op. 1, d. 994 (1814); f. 26, op. 1, d. 2503 (1817); f. 26, op. 1, d. 3308 (1818); f. 26, op. 1, d. 4137 (1819); f. 26, op. 1, d. 5017 (1820); f. 26, op. 1, d. 5394 (1821); Sergeyev, "Nogaisky na Molochnykh vodakh," 61 (1829-1831); Comies, "Landwirtschaftliche Notizen," 1837, PJBRMA, file 992.

Increased sharply in 1816 and continued to show high yields for the following three years.

Demaison achieved this by denying travel passes to Nogai men who did not first sow at
least two chetverts of grain. This restriction, implemented in 1816, was effective because many young Nogai men travelled to the Crimea each summer, where they worked as herdsmen [tabunshchiki]. Wages in the Crimea averaged twice those in Melitopol uezd, and a lead hand could earn as much as 600 rubles a year, so travel passes were highly valued.

Despite the apparent success of Demaison’s grain-for-passes scheme, there are several reasons to treat the results with caution. To begin with, the accuracy of harvest reports is questionable. Between 1816 and 1819, when Nogai output/seed ratios reportedly averaged 6.09:1, Mennonite yields averaged just 5.89:1, and Orthodox state peasant yields just 4.6:1. It is curious, to say the least, that Nogai pastoralists suddenly outstripped their more experienced neighbours in grain production. In fact, harvest reports from at least one of the six Nogai voistots show clear evidence of falsification. Voistot-level reports for 1817 and 1818 show that the Nogai voistot of Ialanzachskia reported yields of over 10:1, about twice that of any other voistot in the entire region! Such extraordinary success more likely reflected creative record-keeping than efficient farming. Even without Ialanzachskia voistot, Nogai yields in this period were better than they had been in earlier years, or would be in later years, but the extent of the improvement is probably much exaggerated.

More significant is the fact that when Demaison retired from active participation in administration of the Nogais in 1821 -- he retained his title while an assistant did the work

\[25^{\text{Cornies, "Kratkii obzor polozhenii Nogaiskikh Tatar, vodvorennykh v Melitopol'skom uezde Tavricheskoj gubernii," Teleskop 33 (1836), 8.}}\]

\[26^{\text{Cornies, "Kratkii obzor," 294.}}\]

\[27^{\text{Mennonite and state peasant yields are based on data from "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov . . . za 1816," RGLA, fond 1281, opis 11, delo 133, chast 1; "Ob urozhai khlebov . . . v 1817 g.," GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 2503; "Ob urozhai khlebov . . . v 1818 g.," GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 3308; "Ob urozhai khlebov . . . v 1819 g.," GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 4137.}}\]
until he was officially replaced in 1825 -- grain production immediately returned to its earlier low levels. In 1825, Cornies lamented that, after Demaison's departure, "the economic and moral improvement of these people appears to almost be at a standstill. Worsened by last year's poor weather, their economic condition has deteriorated, and their laziness, quarrelsomeness, and thievery are on the increase." Apparently, the grain-for-passes scheme had produced no lasting effect.

The clearest evidence that Demaison brought no fundamental change to the Nogais was their continued pastoralism. As table 3.1 (above pp. 72-74) shows, Nogai herds expanded enormously during his tenure. Pastoralism was a logical choice for Nogais from both an economic and environmental point of view, for as already noted, most Nogai land was unsuited to arable husbandry. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that Nogai pastoralism was based on either economic or environmental considerations, for as in most pastoral societies, livestock also played an important cultural role for the Nogais. The Swiss missionary Daniel Schlatter, who made two lengthy visits to the Molochna in the 1820s, even suggested that Nogai men valued their horses above their wives. If economics had decided the matter, presumably they would have concentrated on raising sheep for wool. As table 3.3 shows, over the course of Demaison's tenure, the percentage of sheep in Nogai herds, expressed as AUs, almost tripled, and this suggests that commercial concerns had

29 Demaison's assistant, a Major Baraktarev, filled in until 1825. He was succeeded by a series of appointees, none of whom held the post long.
30 Cornies, "Kracht obzor." This unpublished essay, while in most essentials identical to Cornies' 1836 Teleskop article, is much more pessimistic about the future of the Nogais.
31 There is an extensive literature on the cultural role of livestock in pastoral societies. A useful introduction is John G. Galaty, "Cultural Perspectives on Nomadic Pastoral Societies," Nomadic Peoples 16 (October 1984), 15-30.
32 Daniel Schlatter, Bruchstücke aus einigen Reisen nach dem südlichen Russland, in den Jahren 1822 bis 1828 (St. Gallen: Huber und Comp., 1830), 188.
Table 3.3: Sheep AUs as a Percent of All AUs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sheep AUs as a Percent</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sheep AUs as a Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1808</td>
<td>8.45%</td>
<td>1816</td>
<td>17.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>9.83%</td>
<td>1817</td>
<td>19.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>9.31%</td>
<td>1818</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>9.98%</td>
<td>1819</td>
<td>19.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>11.99%</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>20.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>14.37%</td>
<td>1825</td>
<td>23.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov," RGLA, f. 1281, op. 11, d. 131 (1808-1810); f. 1281, op. 11, d. 132 (1811-1815); f. 1281, op. 11, d. 133 part 1 (1816, 1822); f. 1281, op. 11, d. 133 part 2 (1823, 1825); Annual reports of Demaison to the Governor of Tavride: f. 26, op. 1, d. 2503 (1817); f. 26, op. 1, d. 3308 (1818); f. 26, op. 1, d. 4137 (1819).

begun to affect Nogai herding strategies, but still, in 1825 sheep made up less than a quarter of Nogai livestock. At the end of Demaison's term the Nogais still concentrated primarily on cattle and horses.

From an environmental perspective, while the region was suited to pastoralism, the enormous growth of Nogai herds during Demaison's tenure was hardly desirable. In 1825 Comies expressed concern that Nogais were grazing too many head of cattle on their land, and he was probably right.\(^ {35}\) In 1819, when total livestock numbers peaked, Nogais were grazing 221,284 cattle and horses and 132,392 sheep. This is an enormous amount of livestock for such arid land. Based on carrying capacity estimates outlined above, in 1819 Nogai herds would have needed some 387,000 desiatinas of grazing land. The Nogai land grant, which contained just 285,000 desiatinas of good land, was strained to its limits. Little wonder the harsh winter of 1825 saw over 45,000 Nogai cattle and horses die, and, expressed in AUs, a total loss of over 20 percent of Nogai livestock. Figure 3.2 shows the

total land requirements of Nogai livestock from 1807 to 1837. The pattern of expansion and contraction is highly characteristic of an ungulate irruption. By implication, the growth of Nogai herds had reached its upper limit by 1819, and probably by the mid-1820s overstocking was leading to land degradation.

A critical element of the land problem facing Nogais by 1819 was the shrinking size of rangelands available to them outside of their allotment. As noted in chapter two, by 1810 per capita Nogai landholdings were already too low to support a traditional pastoral economy, so the Nogais were dependent on grazing livestock on unoccupied range lands north of the Iushanlee River. Between 1819 and 1824, the Mennonites established eighteen new villages on the upper reaches of the Iushanlee and Kurushan Rivers, sharply reducing Nogai access to rangeland even as their herds expanded. The consequences would soon be felt in Nogai society.

While Demaison did not successfully transform Nogais from pastoralists into

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agriculturists, the remarkable growth of their herds suggests they were undergoing a dramatic transformation all the same, and this requires explanation. For Nogais, livestock were the most important symbol of wealth and social status. Schlatter found that wealthy Nogai men could not be distinguished by the clothes they wore or the houses they lived in. The only true index of their wealth was their herds of cattle and horses. The rapid growth of herds evidenced an enormous growth in wealth, but to what can it be attributed? In large part, no doubt, to the proximity of a growing population of peasant agriculturists. On the one hand, these agriculturists provided wages to Nogais, particularly during peak agricultural seasons. On the other, they provided a market for horses and cattle, tallow, hides, and meat. The Nogais were converting their income from these sources into livestock.

Economic differentiation went hand-in-hand with this growth in wealth. In the 1820s Schlatter saw poor Nogais begging for grain door-to-door, and he frequently mentioned distinctions between the poor and rich. Still, he was impressed by the equal access to land enjoyed by all Nogais, and thought that all but the poorest had adequate incomes. Schlatter temporarily lived in a Nogai household, and said his host, Ali, was "not rich, but all the same had thirty head of cattle and five horses." In 1824, the average Nogai household in the Molochna had nine horses, twenty-six head of cattle, and twenty-two sheep, so Ali was indeed marginally below the norm. It should be noted, too, that Ali owned no sheep. Nogais were traditionally cattle herders, and the transition to sheep-raising

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35 Schlatter, Bruchstücke, 279-280.
36 Schlatter, Bruchstücke, 108.
37 Schlatter, Bruchstücke, 285.
38 Schlatter, Bruchstücke, 87.
39 Schlatter, Bruchstücke, 60.
40 "Vedomost. O skotovodstve v Tavricheskoï gubernii za 1824 g.," 1825, RGLA, f. 1281, op. 11, d. 133, part II.
by a small minority of Nogais was a sign of economic assimilation, a subject that will be examined more fully below.

Schlatter also described the local Nogai administrative system, which differed sharply from the traditional nomadic model detailed above. He found the Nogais divided into typical Russian peasant villages, with ten-, fifty- and hundred-men, village elders, _obshchina_, and _volost_, under the direction of the state-appointed _nachalnik_. The extent to which this formal substitution of Russian for Nogai institutions was reflected in practical administrative practices is unclear. Obviously Demaison, as an outsider, could not exercise his authority on the basis of lineage like traditional Nogai leaders. Indeed, when necessary, he employed Cossack troops to enforce his orders, as the 1820 salt scandal, described in chapter two, shows. The Nogai threat of exodus in 1815 suggests that in that year traditional leadership structures still existed and were capable of opposing the new official structures. However, the extreme growth of Nogai herds shows that important regulatory functions of traditional leaders were eroding. With migration no longer a way of life, decisions about pasture allocation could no longer be made in traditional ways, while traditional checks on herd growth were being eliminated and the balance that nomads must achieve with the productive potentials of their environment was being lost. Yet the failure of the grain-for-passes scheme shows that the Russian system was not successfully replacing the failing traditional one. Instead, an administrative vacuum was being created.

In 1825, administration of the Nogais underwent an important change when Cornies began to take an active role. His first contact with Nogais had come in his father's home, where Johann Sr.'s reputation as a healer brought a wide range of people, including

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40 Schlatter, _Bruchstücke_, 60.
Nogais, to his door. Perhaps motivated by this early contact, Cornies became a student of Nogai history and keen observer of contemporary Nogai life. In 1825 he first outlined his own program for their improvement:

Can not at least the principal town of Nogaisk itself be improved and enlarged and provided with a high school? Can not a model colony be established in the region, for poor but industrious and willing Nogais, which could serve as a model for other Nogai villages? Can not a flock of improved sheep be bought through the community treasury, to be paid for from the profits of the improved wool in the future?

Although the Russian state never officially charged Cornies with improving the condition of the Nogais, programs he began to implement in 1825 and continued to supervise until his death in 1848 would gain the state's full support.

His first major initiative was a project to improve the quality of Nogai sheep. This was a departure from Demaison's projects, for emphasis had shifted from arable to animal husbandry, but the conditions Cornies incorporated in the project involved fundamental changes in the way Nogais supervised their herds. In effect, he was trying to transform Nogai animal husbandry from pastoralist traditions emphasising the cultural value of livestock to an organised, regulated, market-oriented system.

Starting in 1825, Cornies began lending merino sheep to individual Nogai householders, while encouraging other Mennonites to follow suit. At first glance this seems at odds with his concern about over-grazing on Nogai land, but if, as Cornies intended, the Nogais reduced the size of their cattle herds and concentrated on raising smaller quantities of the more-valuable merinos, pressure on their grazing land would have

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43Cornies, "Einiges über die Nogai-Tataren," 49.
44Cornies to P. I. Köppen, 28 Dec. 1837, PJBRMA, file 236.
been reduced at the same time as the value of their livestock was increased.

The terms of the loans were eventually formalised into a standardised contract, and the earliest extant example, dating from 1834, reveals the workings of the program. Cornies agreed to supply a Nogai named Kulman with forty-five ewes and five female lambs, and to pay half the cost of buying rams to breed with the flock. Kulman agreed to look after the herd for four years, meeting all expenses during this time, to pay half the cost of the rams, and to provide the sheep with fodder during the winter months. The inclusion of this last requirement, which logically should have fallen under the condition that Kulman pay all costs of maintenance, implies that supplying winter fodder was not standard in Nogai husbandry. Kulman further agreed to allow the sheep to drink only well-water, to prevent them from mixing with any other sheep for fear they would contract diseases, and not to slaughter healthy sheep under any circumstances. In a concession to Nogai religious customs, which regarded allowing an animal to die of disease as sinful, Kulman was permitted to slaughter diseased sheep, but only in the presence of two Nogai elders, who would ensure that the slaughtered sheep were truly ill. Cornies and Kulman were to split equally annual wool production from the herd, and at the end of the four year contract, after Kulman returned to Cornies forty-five ewes and five female lambs to match the original investment, the two would divide equally whatever offspring remained. However, if the size of the herd shrank during the four years, Kulman was to pay Cornies the full market value of lost sheep, except those for which he could produce a hide and prove the sheep had died of disease.

45"Zakliuchennye mezhdu I. Kornisom i Nogaitsami," 1 November 1834, PJBRA, file 307.
In essence this was a metayage contract, albeit a very unusual one. In most metayage contracts, one party, the landlord, provides capital in the form of land and seed, and the other, the metayer, provides only labour. The central oddity here is that Cornies did not supply Kulman with land. Indeed Kulman’s capital investment of land in effect made him a partner to Cornies. Metayage is usually described as exploitive, particularly by Marxian analysts for whom the concentration of the means of production in the hands of landowners is by definition exploitive. Regardless of whether the Marxian definition is accepted, there are few historical examples of metayage that have not been bad deals for the metayers. However, the contract between Cornies and Kulman was not exploitive. The clause which released Kulman from responsibility for sheep lost to disease protected him from the most serious risk in the agreement, and the contract was clearly structured with the intention of leaving Kulman with his own flock of merino sheep at its conclusion, thereby freeing the Nogai householder from dependence rather than imposing it. Such merino sheep were worth as much as twenty-five rubles for a ewe with one lamb, by comparison to just four or five rubles per head for the local *kurdisch* sheep traditionally kept by Nogais. This arrangement contrasts sharply with the lot of most metayers, who receive only the temporary use of land, and never gain ownership of it at the end of the contract.

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46 In fact the *metayer* sometimes provides draft animals and even agricultural implements, but these form a small part of the total capital input. For a useful summary of sharecropping and its economic analysis, see Frank Ellis, *Peasant economics: Farm Households and Agrarian Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 141-159.
48 For a useful summary, see Byres, “Historical Perspectives on Sharecropping,” in *Sharecropping and Sharecroppers*, 7-40.
While Cornies' metayage contracts were generous, it is important to note that they focused on a small Nogai economic elite. Metayers normally took charge of the sheep in late October or November, at the end of the grazing season but well before spring shearing. As a result they had to feed the sheep fodder through the winter months before receiving any income from wool. The contracts also obliged metayers to closely supervise the merino sheep, keeping them away from other sheep, and watering them only at wells. This last condition was particularly significant. Merino sheep were ill-adapted to conditions in the Molochna, and drinking the brackish local water threatened their health.\textsuperscript{50} However, digging wells posed a serious problem for Nogais, for in many places in the region, wells had to be dug from thirty to fifty-five metres deep, an expensive endeavour that required specialised equipment and knowledge.\textsuperscript{51} In 1840, the Ministry of State Domains estimated the cost of digging wells on the high steppe at between 200 and 400 silver rubles per well, depending on the depth.\textsuperscript{52} Even after they were dug, such wells demanded constant maintenance. All this required an investment that would only be fully repaid over a period of several years, and it is unlikely that poor Nogais could have afforded it. Consequently, most Nogais rejected the transition from cattle- to sheep-rearing, and the administrative strictures that went with it, and continued to practice traditional forms of husbandry.

Metayage contracts had important implications for traditional Nogai land tenure

\textsuperscript{50}The small-bodied, short-legged merinos were susceptible to cuts from sharp grass and bushes on the rangelands, less resistant to cold than native sheep, and had not developed immunities to many of the deseases carried by native sheep. On the relative merits of merinos and other sheep, see Friesen, "New Russia," 110-112, 127.

\textsuperscript{51}"Raboty po snabzheniiu vodiiu pereselentsev, proizvedennyia v Tavricheskoj gubernii v 1862 godu," ZhMGI, no. 83 (1863), 316.

\textsuperscript{52}"Po tsirkuliarnomu predpisaniu nekotorym Palatami Gosudarstvenykh Imushchestv ob ustroistve kolodtev na bezvodnam obrochnykh uchastkah," 1840, RGLA, fond 383, epis 3, delo 2530.
practices. Nogai land had always been held communally, but the contracts, which required that merino sheep be held apart from other livestock on Nogai commons, were made with individuals, not with the Horde as a whole. When the contracts were initiated, following the winter of 1825, Nogai livestock numbers were very small, so the claims of Nogai metayers to communal land did not conflict with the customary claims of other Nogais, but as will be shown in chapter five, they would lead to conflict in the future. The contracts also bypassed the role of the Nogai aristocracy in administering the allocation of pasturelands. Traditional administration of the pasturelands had its functional roots in a nomadic economy, but the overgrazing of Nogai pasturelands in the Molochna and subsequent decimation of herds had already shown by 1825 that the traditional system was not effective under new, sedentary conditions. However, metayage, while contributing to undermining the old system, did not offer any replacement for it, because it benefited only a few individuals. Moreover, it placed the reins of administrative control in the hands of Cornies and other outsiders, and not the Nogais. Such a system, with its lack of provisions for the poor, was unlikely to provide a basis for legitimising wealth, and this lack of cultural sanctions for economic differentiation did not bode well for future Nogai development.

Between 1808 and 1833 the Russian state invested much well-intentioned effort into "civilising" the Nogais, but it had little to show for it. The state's policies were based on a limited understanding of the Horde as uncivilised nomads and an equally limited belief that if the outward manifestations of civilisation -- nuclear villages and commercial husbandry -- could be imposed, civility would be achieved. The benefits of such civility were never explicitly spelled out. It was taken for granted that sedentarism and peasant-hood were intrinsically superior to nomadism and pastoralism. To be sure, Cornies had an economic
rationale for his sheep program -- merinos were more valuable than the livestock
traditionally raised by Nogais -- but Cornies inevitably linked economic prosperity to moral
improvement, and morality was defined by orderly Mennonite practices. The state's efforts
to inculcate arable husbandry among Nogais met with little success, beyond a temporary
increase in grain production during Demaison's grain-for-passes scheme, and the majority of
Nogais also ignored the transition from cattle-rearing to sheep-rearing that economic
rationality demanded. Most Nogais continued to cling to their traditional pastoralist
customs. Yet with the end of the economic viability of nomadism, the functional role of
traditional Nogai administrative structures was also ended, so that while failing to impose
new economic and administrative structures, the state had successfully undermined the old,
leaving only a vacuum.

In contrast to the Nogais, Orthodox state peasants who came to the Molochna were
from land-poor regions where livestock holdings were extremely limited, and arable
agriculture dominated. Their understanding of the requirements of a viable agricultural
village were clearly expressed by the advanced parties that came to New Russia to survey
proposed village sites. They wanted good wells, hay meadows, forests, and fields for
planting grain, and as the peasants from Chernigov, quoted in chapter two (p. 22), made
clear in 1822, where the necessary environmental factors were not present, they assumed
that it would be impossible to establish successful villages.

The Chernigov peasants had a tradition of communal administration of land, for the
advanced party represented the wishes of the community as a whole. It is impossible to
know whether they had previously practiced communal land repartition, but clearly they
were familiar with the practice. Orthodox state peasant land in the Molochna was officially
allocated collectively to peasant *obschinas* and not individuals, but in practice *obschinas*
alotted arable and garden land to families in permanent hereditary tenure, so after the initial
allocation the *obschina* retained no communal control. As for the commons, they were held
communally, but the *obschinas* placed no conditions on their use. Given the abundance of
land in the Molochna during the early years of settlement, this arrangement is not
surprising, but it is notable that as a result Orthodox state peasants were the only group in
the Molochna without any administrative control over land allocation.

With the *obschina* having so little influence over the most important element in the
economy, there could be little attraction or benefit to participating in *obschina*
administration, and this helps account for the failure of Orthodox peasants to follow the
path of Sectarians and foreign Colonists and develop a strong sense of corporate identity in
the Molochna. Indeed, after the advanced parties approved the land grants, the *obschina* as a
representative of peasant interests disappeared from official records until the 1830s. It
should also be noted that, given the *obschina's* role as the first instance of state control over
peasants, the *obschina's* lack of status in the Molochna was potentially a problem for the
state, too.

Despite their preconceptions about what constituted a viable environment for
settlement, Orthodox peasants showed a remarkable ability to adapt to a region where there
was little good water, no forests, and no market for the products of arable husbandry,
converting almost immediately to animal husbandry as their primary agricultural activity.
One of the most distinctive features of Orthodox state peasant settlement in the Molochna
was the disregard settlers showed for crop production. Travellers to the region were
inevitably dismayed by the poor condition of Orthodox state peasant fields. Manuring was
almost unheard of, the manure instead being dried and burned as fuel, and an anonymous observer wrote that many peasants didn't even bother to re-plough their spring fields before sowing them with winter crops: "Some find it sufficient to throw the seed on the un-reploughed field, and drive over it with oxen or a plough, and that concludes the working of the winter fields."53 As late as 1842, Baron von Haxthausen observed that some did not even return to tend their fields between sowing and harvest.54

Orthodox state peasant land allotments were not atomised into the small interstripped holdings typical of state peasant villages in central gubernias. In 1834, Iu. Witte observed that field rotations were "very distinctive" because they were "not subject to common regulation, but absolutely [depended] on the arbitrary decision of each householder."55 It would have been impossible to maintain such an unregulated system where interstripping prevailed. The peasants employed a long fallow system, sowing one area of the arable for several consecutive years, then allowing it to lie fallow for several more. Based on Zemstvo data collected in the 1880s, V. E. Postnikov describes peasants using fields for six to nine years, then leaving them fallow for two to three years.56 However, according to A. Schmidt, in the early years of settlement in Kherson guberniia, west of the

53"Putevye zamenki pri ob'ezde Dneprorskago i Melitopol'skago uezdov Tavricheskoi gubernii, v 1835 godu," Listki izdavaemye obschestvom sel'skogo khoziaistva iuzhnoi Rossi (1838), 289-290.
55Iu. Witte, "O sel'skom khoziaistve v Khersonskoi, Tavricheskoj i Ekaterinoslavskoi guberniakh," ZbMVD, no. 3 (1834), 22.
56V. E. Postnikov, IUznoe-russkoe krest'ianskoe khoziaistvo (Moscow: Kushnerev, 1891), 193.
Molochna, fields were sown for four or five years, then left fallow for ten, a pattern that also can be inferred from Witte's description of the Molochna.\textsuperscript{57} The shorter cropping period and longer fallow was possible due to the abundance of land in the early period.

As explained in chapter two, the state regarded two chetverts of grain per male soul per year as a subsistence minimum, and as table 3.4 shows, on average Orthodox peasants in the Molochna produced very little more.\textsuperscript{58} Annual per capita grain production averaged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chetverts Per Soul</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chetverts Per Soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1808</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1821</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1822</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>2.04</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1811</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>1824</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>1825</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1814</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>1827</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>4.72</td>
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<td>1817</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: RGLA, f. 1281, op. 11, d. 131; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 11, d. 132; RGLA, 1281, op. 11, d. 133, chast 1; RGLA, 1281, op. 11, d. 133, chast 2; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 994; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 2503; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 3308; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 4137; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 501; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 5394; GAOO, f. 1, op. 190, d. 12; GAOO, f. 1, op. 190, d. 15; GAOO, f. 1, op. 190, d. 29; GAOO, f. 1, op. 190, d. 62; PJBOKMA, file 610.


\textsuperscript{58}O glavnykh osnovaniakh novago polozhenia o obezpechenii prodovol'stvia," 1840, RGLA, fond 1589 opis 1, delo 693.
about 1.2 chetverts, or roughly 140 kilograms, enough to meet about two-thirds of the
minimum subsistence needs of the average person.\(^9\) Peasants typically consume all food
production up to 350 kilograms in grain equivalents per capita, while it is only when
production exceeds 500 kilograms per capita per year that the use of draft animals in
agriculture becomes worthwhile.\(^6\) The Molochna average was far below this, and in poor
years could not have left anything for the market. This low level of production was
obviously intentional. Whenever net harvests exceeded four chetverts per male soul -- about
232 kilograms per capita -- Orthodox peasants reacted by planting less grain in the following
year, a clear indication they saw little purpose in producing grain surpluses. On average,
between 1808 and 1833 Orthodox state peasants planted just 1.05 chetverts of grain per male
soul per year, an amount that would have required just 1.05 desiatinas of land following
existing sowing conventions in the region.\(^61\)

This disregard for arable husbandry was not solely a reaction to the lack of markets
in the region. Figure 3.3 shows the relationship between prices for wheat and rye in
Melitopol compared to the rest of the gubernia. Prices were markedly lower in Melitopol
uezd, reflecting isolation and the cost of transporting grain to major markets. Still, the
figures imply a linkage between prices in the uezd and the gubernia. Of course, given shared

\(^9\) Colin Clark and Margaret Haswell, *The Economics of Subsistence Agriculture*, 4 ed
(London: MacMillan, 1970), 59. Clark and Haswell calculate the minimum at 210 kg. of
grain/person/year.

\(^6\) Clark and Haswell, *The Economics of Subsistence Agriculture*, 64-65. "Grain equivalents"
refers to the conversion of calories obtained from other sources into units of grain in order
to provide a standard unit of calculation.

\(^61\) E. I. Druzhinina, *IUzhnaia Ukraina v period krizisa feudalizma 1825-1860 gg.* (Moscow:
Nauka, 1981),41. Druzhinina obtains this figure from an 1849 report in RGLA, fond 1281,
apir 5, delo 60. For an earlier (1840), similar account, see "O glavnijklh osnovaniakh novago
polozheniia o obezpechenii prodovol' stviia," 1840, RGLA, fond 1589 apis 1, delo 693.
climatic conditions, some similarity in price fluctuations must be expected regardless of whether there were shared markets. However, table 3.5 shows that the similarity had to do with more than the weather. It records the results of a regression analysis of fluctuations in the price of rye and wheat, with the price in the guberniia as independent variable and the price in Melitopol uezd as dependent variable. The result for rye prices (r-squared = 0.37) indicates there was no significant correlation between changes in rye prices in Melitopol uezd and the rest of Tavride guberniia. Thus the similarities reflected in figure 3.3 may well be nothing more than a reflection of common climatic conditions. However, the relationship between wheat price fluctuations in the guberniia and the uezd (r-squared = 0.87) is strong evidence that changes in wheat prices in Melitopol were closely linked to prices in the rest of the guberniia, suggesting that there was a larger regional market that wheat producers in Melitopol were reacting to. The result for wheat is all the more
Table 3.5: Regression analysis of monthly changes in the price of rye flour and wheat meal in Tavride guberniia (independent variable) and Melitopol uezd, 1817-1822.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rye</th>
<th>Wheat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>-3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err of Y Est</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Squared</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Observations</td>
<td>72.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of Freedom</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>70.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X Coefficient(s)</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err of Coef.</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: GAKO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1675-1682; GAKO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1769-1799; GAKO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1837-1847; GAKO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1989-1999; GAKO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2127-2138; GAKO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2266-2276.

convincing in light of the result for rye, because the difference between the two belies a simple climatic explanation, which would have affected rye and wheat identically.

Wheat surpluses were probably viewed as a windfall in the Molochna. Peasants planted enough to meet their subsistence needs, and in good years, they sold their excess. Good years could be very good indeed, for their land was on the fertile Azov Uplands, and this accounts for the region's interaction with the larger guberniia market. Bad years, on the other hand, could be disastrous, and settlers necessarily had to concern themselves with worst-case scenarios. The worst case came, in various forms, in 1812, 1815, 1821, 1825, and 1833, when drought, cold, locusts, or hail, obliterated grain crops and reduced harvests to dangerously low levels.

Roughly speaking, peasants in Melitopol uezd could anticipate at least a partial crop failure one out of every five years. This could halt the transportation of grain altogether, because the oxen that pulled carts across the steppe consumed grass and water, two things
in desperately short supply during a drought, making it nearly impossible to transport grain. As a result, peasants could not base agricultural strategies on potential profits from exporting wheat, for they knew that in the years when crops failed, they would be left without food from their own fields, and at the same time it would be impossible for the state to import food to where they lived. Without a local port to permit the import of grain in harvest failure years, the peasants' first priority had to be self-sufficiency.

Gardening, the second major element of Orthodox state peasant arable husbandry in the Molochna, is the clearest evidence of this subsistence priority. While the peasants devoted relatively little, ill-tended land to growing grain, they devoted extraordinarily large areas of prime, river floodplain to gardens. No detailed records survive from the pre-1833 period, but figures for 1848 from Orekhov volost, the northern-most volost of Melitopol uezd, provide an indication of how much land was involved. Villages there devoted an average of a full desiatina per household to gardens. Garden sizes may have been shrinking by 1848 as total land holdings per capita shrank, but the amount of garden per male soul was still impressive.

If peasants worked their arable poorly, they gardened well. In 1847 the Civil Governor of Tavride even described state peasants in the villages of Bolshaia and Malaia Znamenka in Dneprovsk uezd as "exceptional gardeners," and in good years, as the Governor reported in 1837, state peasants living near towns or Colonist villages throughout

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63"Umen'shennyi plan kazennykh dach, sel i dereven Orekhovskoi volost' Berdiaskago uezda, Tavricheskago gubernii," 1848, *GAZO, fond 263, opis 1, delo 50.*
the guberniia sold "significant quantities" of their produce. The contribution of these gardens to village food production is impossible to define. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Russian peasants obtained about 12 percent of consumption needs from gardens, but this has little application to the first half of the century, before the demands of the growing state and pressures exerted by the international grain market shrank the amount of land peasants could afford to reserve for their own use. There are clear indications that gardens in the Molochna played an essential role in the early years of settlement. The most explicit appear in reports from the nachalniki of Melitopol and Dneprovsk uezds. When torrential rains and locusts combined in 1821 to destroy crops and lead to near-famine conditions, the state scrambled to find grain to feed peasants in the Crimea. However, Melitopol and Dneprovsk peasants, who experienced an equally poor harvest, did not receive grain from the state, because, as the Melitopol nachalnik reported, they would "be able to fare for themselves adequately from their household plots . . . and from their own livestock." The Dneprovsk nachalnik reported that peasants in Aleshka volost on the Dnieper river had devoted such large areas of land to cabbage and watermelon, that "one cannot doubt that their food reserves will be adequate." Gardening was labour intensive.

64Po otchetam grazhdanskikh gubernatorov o sostoianii gosudarstvennykh krest'ian i o merakh uluchshenii ikh byta," 10 June 1847, RGLA, fond 1589, opis 1, delo 729; "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov . . . za 1837," RGLA, fond 1281, opis 3, delo 47.

65R. E. F. Smith and David Christian, Bread and salt: A social and economic history of food and drink in Russia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). They obtained a further 29% from potatoes, but these were principally grown as a field crop.

66The weather conditions leading to the harvest failure are described in RGLA, fond 1281, opis 11, delo 133, chast' 1.

67"Ob urozhai v nyneshnem god khleba i o merakh k obezpecheniiu prodovolstviu zhitel'ei krymskogo poluostra," 1821, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5394.

68"Ob urozhai v nyneshnem god khleba i o merakh k obezpecheniiu prodovolstviu zhitel'ei krymskogo poluostra," 1821, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5394.
and would have detracted from time in the fields, but unlike grain fields, gardens, as long as they were located close to rivers, could be watered and would yield up their crops even in drought years.

Turning to animal husbandry, as table 3.1 (above pp. 72-74) shows, between 1808 and 1827 (the period for which records exist), Orthodox peasant livestock holdings grew rapidly. By 1827 the average Orthodox family had six cows and thirteen sheep, while there were two horses for every three families. Herds were slowly filling available pasturelands, but by 1827 had not overflowed them. In that year, pastureland requirements were about eight desiatinas per male soul, just over half of the allotment norm. With both livestock and human populations continuing to grow, the potential for future problems was looming, but the lack of post-1827 livestock figures makes it impossible to say exactly when the critical point was reached.

Although holdings of all types of livestock grew between 1814 and 1827, sheep holdings grew at a faster rate, and following the harsh winter of 1825, horse and cattle

![Figure 3.4: Livestock holdings, 1814-1827](image-url)
holdings declined, while sheep holdings continued to grow (see figure 3.4). By implication, Orthodox state peasants, unlike Nogais, were concerned with the commercial potential of sheep relative to other livestock. On the other hand, there is no indication Orthodox state peasants shifted from raising *kordiuch* sheep to the more-valuable merinos. The Nogai transition to merinos came during the decimation of their herds that began in 1825 and continued into the 1830s, when Nogai herds had already exceeded the carrying capacity of their land grant. Merinos gave more value per unit of land at the expense of greater labour, a substitution of more labour-intensive, higher yielding husbandry for an existing system under which income per land unit had already been maximised. Orthodox state peasants had not reached this point in 1827, and as long as they experienced economic growth under the existing system, there was little motivation to take on the increased labour and capital costs of the transition to merinos. This was particularly true considering that Orthodox state peasants were not offered the same generous metayage contracts Nogais received from Cornies, which subsidised the transition. A second, equally important consideration was the relative durability of *kordiuch* sheep, which were hardy and well adapted to the steppe, requiring little care, less water than merinos, were less susceptible to disease, and bred more rapidly.69 Isolated from export and import markets, the first priority of Molochna peasants was the food, tallow, clothing, shoes, and manure they obtained from the sheep, while the market value of wool came a distant second. Hence, from a subsistence perspective, *kordiuch* sheep made more sense than merinos.

Map four summarises graphically the agricultural adaptations described above. Based on an 1848 map, it retains the characteristic features of Orthodox Molochna villages in the

69Friesen, "New Russia," 106-144.
early years of settlement. The village proper (as opposed to commons and arable) was extraordinarily long and narrow, stretching along the banks of the river and up the two creeks that fed it, ensuring each household had its piece of the invaluable floodplain. One Molochna village, Bolshoi Tokmak, was over six kilometres long by the mid-1840s, showing just how large such villages could become. The most unusual characteristic of Orthodox villages was the arrangement of commons and arable, which reversed the typical land allocation pattern in Russia and Western Europe. As Witte described it in 1834, "the fields lie far from the villages, and sometimes several dozen *verti*. Immediately beside the villages, where in other countries the very best, or, so-to-say, primary fields . . . are located, the pasture is located in [New Russia]. The standard practice of placing arable close to the village and pasture further away derives from the fact that cattle and sheep can be tended by relatively few people and quickly transport themselves to and from distant pastures, while agricultural implements and crops are heavy and cumbersome, and large numbers of people travel to and from grain fields during peak seasons. The reversal of the normal arrangement in the Molochna vividly illustrates the low priority grain production was given by Orthodox peasants.

The arrangement also emphasises how, in the Molochna, grain competed unsuccessfully with livestock and kitchen gardens for water. Grain fields were relegated to

the high steppe, where ground water lay at unreachable depths of thirty or more metres, while the rich floodplains were reserved for gardens. Grain production from such fields was utterly dependent on the Molochna's unreliable precipitation. In this light, it may be useful to reconceptualize state peasant "kitchen gardens" as infields in an in-field/out-field agricultural system, making the point that state peasants were really not living far from their land allotments at all. 73 In fact, the most valuable part of their land was right at their doorsteps.

Yet the state assessed the self-sufficiency of its peasants in terms of grain production, and by this standard, Orthodox settlers in the Molochna were notable failures. In 1837, when Köppen surveyed the Molochna, he expressed the state's frustration with its intractable wards:

What has been done in the Colonies can be done by the state peasants also. It is well known in what comfort, and even prosperity, the Colonists live, but their Russian and Little Russian neighbours adopt nothing from them. [The Orthodox state peasants] know very well and recount at great length how the Germans conduct their farming, but to the question, why do they themselves not imitate these practices, each and every one gives the same reply: "Our fathers didn't do it like that." 74

But surely the most important lesson to be learned from studying the Orthodox state peasants in the Molochna is that this was not true. These peasants, who came from land-poor guberniias, arrived on the virtually unpopulated steppe and immediately and successfully adapted to their new conditions, settling into a way of life diametrically opposed to the one their fathers had known. Within just a few short years they abandoned the ______________________

74Köppen to Kiselev, 12 December 1838, RGLA, fond 1589, opis 1, delo 362.
intensive, three-field agriculture they had known in interior guberniias, turning instead, primarily, to pastoralism, and secondarily, to long-fallow agriculture. What defined Orthodox peasants in the Molochna was not their inability to adapt, but their stubborn insistence on a subsistence adaptation.

In a sense, this was all the state really expected of them. After all, it structured its administration of the Orthodox state peasants around a policy of ensuring them a subsistence food ration. The state's exasperation with Melitopol peasants was the result of policies based on peasant agricultural practices and subsistence requirements in interior guberniias. Land survey departments conducted thousands of surveys and drew thousands of maps in New Russia, but the state never learned -- at least before 1833 -- that all land is not equal. It never considered access to water, or access to markets, and it assessed peasant conditions using grain harvest figures based on the consumption patterns of peasants from interior guberniias. These figures had no relation to consumption patterns of peasants on the steppe, with their large livestock holdings and, in the Molochna at least, bountiful gardens.

Underpinning the state's frustration with Orthodox peasants was an implicit acknowledgment that it had little control over their actions. Orthodox peasants held their land in permanent hereditary tenure, and the state had no effective administrative organs at the regional level to force them to accept central guidance. Indeed, it seems clear that there were not even local, self-administrative organs guiding peasant agricultural activities.

Probably the peasants understood the state could not be relied on to treat them as anything other than an undifferentiated part of the state peasant whole, and they knew better than to abandon agricultural practices that left their chances of survival in their own
hands, instead of in the hands of a state that plainly did not understand how or where they lived. But it must also be remembered that the peasants were, in their own fashion, doing okay, as the growing size of their herds attests. By 1827 there was no sign in Orthodox society of the problems of poverty and economic differentiation that were already apparent in Nogai society. Of course, the situation that had created problems for Nogais was looming for Orthodox peasants too. Their extensive land allocation practices were based on the assumption that there were no limits on the availability of land, that as their population grew, the state would just grant them more. But as long as land remained available, they did not have to face the problem of how to deal with the poor, and consequently, there was also no need to justify the wealth that some peasants were accumulating. Moreover, the state's failure to understand the unique conditions presented by the steppe could also work to the peasants' benefit. They must have known that the state assessed their condition by the size of their grain harvests, and not by the livestock in their fields and the cabbage in their gardens. It is altogether possible that, while the Akaky Akakieviches of St. Petersburg shuffled hungrily home to their wretched rooms, the peasants in the Molochna were smugly slurping their cabbage soup, and most assuredly with meat.

Changing the Land: Sectarians and Foreign Colonists

If immigration to the Molochna undermined the traditional corporate structures of Nogai and Orthodox societies, for both Mennonites and Dukhobors it permitted the blossoming of corporate identities rooted in religious belief and practice. As regards the

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75 This attitude is best evidenced in peasant reactions when land-shortages arose—see chapter six.
other German Colonists and Molokans, the evidence is too scarce to permit a close reading, but it is fair to conjecture that the processes were similar. As small ethno-religious minorities, faced with the alien physical and ethno-cultural landscape of the Molochna, the ethno-religious minorities turned inward, to their fellow believers, and developed strongly united communities that helped them deal with the challenges they faced by adjusting to markets and bending the environment to their needs.

Like Orthodox state peasants, Sectarians received little input from the state regarding agricultural practices. However, unlike Orthodox peasants, Sectarians proved to be highly conscious of market demands. Indeed, observers singled out Sectarians, along with foreign Colonists, as extraordinarily prosperous settlers. The Molokan case is particularly interesting, because while Dukhobors and foreign Colonists had particularly generous land allotments, Molokans had the poorest land grant in the region, and prospered anyway. Arguably, then, the success of all three groups had less to do with generous land grants than it did with social organisation, and particularly the maintenance of a degree of public control over land. The ability to meet the challenges of the frontier as large, cohesive groups, rather than as individuals, gave them significant advantages over their Orthodox and Nogai neighbours.

When Savelii Kapustin, leader of the Dukhobors from 1790 to 1820, arrived in the Molochna in 1805, he established a system of communal tenure.66 Visiting the Dukhobors in 1816, however, Englishman Robert Pinkerton reported that "every family has its own private property, cattle, fields, etc." Yet he noted that Dukhobors also had "fields of corn, corn, corn, corn."

66George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, The Doukhobors (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), 44.
gardens and flocks which belong to the whole community, and the revenues of which are applied for the common benefit of the society." Showing that an element of communalism survived into the 1830s, Melitopol Zemskii Ispravnik [District Administrator] Kolosov described in 1837 how

Kapustin, seeing the inconvenience of the communal system that was already provoking grumbling, ordered the division of everything that had been held collectively into two parts, half of which was divided up equally among the villagers, and half of which remained in common and was administered under Kapustin's authority by his adherents, the so-called Apostles, as well as other privileged persons.  

Because the Dukhobors were officially state peasants, the state kept no separate records on them, making knowledge of their agricultural practices as distinct from those of surrounding Orthodox state peasants difficult to obtain. Anecdotal evidence suggests they were superior farmers, sober (in both a literal and figurative sense) and industrious. In 1832 a report by M. S. Vorontsov, Governor General of New Russia, described them as "among the best of the Government's colonies," and in 1838, as consensus was building to evict them, Russian regional historian A. A. Skal'kovskii described them as "a rather useful people who have established many orderly villages."  

There is no record of how Dukhobors managed their arable husbandry, but it is clear that, like everyone else in the region, they concentrated their agricultural efforts on

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78Kolosov, "Sekretnaia zapiska Melitopol'skago zemskago ispravnika" (hereafter "Sekretnaia zapiska"), 1837, *GAOOG, fond 1, opis 200, delo 52*.  
animal husbandry. Vorontsov wrote in 1832 that the Dukhobors were involved in an "enormous cattle-raising enterprise and improved sheep breeding," and other eyewitnesses also mention the impressively large Dukhobor herds, while some Dukhobors even followed the Mennonite lead and leased merino sheep to neighbouring Nogais for a half share of the resulting wool and lambs. At first, like the Nogais, Dukhobors concentrated on raising cattle, but by the 1820s they increasingly turned to raising the commercially lucrative merino sheep.

Disputes in the Canadian Dukhobor community in the twentieth century have often centred around the issue of communalism, so Kolosov's description of Dukhobor "grumbling" over the same issue in the early nineteenth century is not surprising. Reports of serious disputes in the Dukhobor community in the 1830s are usually ascribed to the unfair privileges Kapustin granted to his Apostles. These disputes will be considered in detail in chapter four, but for the moment their economic significance must be noted. One of the curiosities of the Dukhobor faith is that, in spite of their implicitly egalitarian belief in the in-dwelling spirit of God in every person, the Dukhobors credited their leaders with a

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81Woodcock and Avakumovic write that in 1822 the Dukhobors cultivated an average of 100 acres per male soul, but this is almost certainly a reference to their total land holdings, rather than the amount actually cultivated. Data from the period 1817-1821 suggest they cultivated only about ½ desiatina per male soul (Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Doukhobours, 40; "O poseve i urozhae khlebov," 1817, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 2503; 1818, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 3308; 1819, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 4137; 1820, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5017; 1821, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 5594).

82Quoted in Fry, "The Doukhobors," 271. For other accounts, see, e.g., Pinkerton, Russia, 167-168. The leasing of 902 merino sheep by Dukhobors to Nogai Tatars between 1832 and 1836 is recorded in "Spisok Akkermanskim nogaitsam, vziavshim u dukhobortsev po usloviam shpanskie ovtsy," 18 March 1839, PBRMA, file 691.


84Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Doukhobours, 45.
larger-than-normal share of God's spirit, entitling them to lead by divine right.85 Savelii Kapustin and his heirs ruled all aspects of Dukhobor life, issuing orders and resolving disputes from a building known as the Orphans' Home in the village of Terpenie. They exercised their authority with the help of the Apostles, who in 1816 numbered twenty-five.86 The Apostles in turn benefited from their positions by receiving particularly large land allotments, which permitted some of them to own as many as 1,000 head of livestock.87

If this arrangement provoked "grumbling," it was not apparent before 1830. Indeed the unity expressed by the Dukhobors in 1824 during their land dispute with the state (see chapter two, pp. 57-59) suggests they were a strongly united community. Arguably, the existence of an internal, unofficial administrative system based on religious principles played an important role in the economic prosperity of that united community. The expense of the transition to merino sheep has already been discussed in reference to Orthodox peasants and Nogais. Orthodox peasants faced the larger world as individuals, or at best as members of village obschestva that possessed little independent authority, and so they were unlikely to have sufficient personal wealth to invest in the transition to merino sheep. Some wealthy Nogais made the transition, but they accomplished it only through subsidies from Cornies and other Mennonites, and the majority of Nogais were left out of the process. Dukhobors, with a system that provided for community-wide economic cooperation and investment, managed the transition on their own.

The Apostles represented a community-sanctioned form of economic

85Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Doukhobours, 45.
86"Glavnyi uchitel' Dukhobortsev," 9 December 1816, GAOO, fond 1, opis 219, delo 3.
87Orest Novitskii, Dukhobory. Ikib istorii i veruchenie, 2 ed (Kiev: Universitetsakaia tipografia, 1882), 85.
differentiation, which provided an engine to drive Dukhobor economic progress within a system that also protected the welfare of the broader community through communally held and distributed property. The legitimacy of the Dukhobor leader and his appointed Apostles was formally based on religious doctrine, but the ability of the system to achieve economic success must be considered an important element in its strength. In the administrative vacuum of the Molochna, the Dukhobors were building for themselves a Commonwealth based on economic success as well as faith.

Unfortunately there is no record of how the Molokans administered their land, and little record of their agricultural practices. However, their status as late-comers to the Molochna, and their resultant lack of good land, set them sharply apart from other settlers, and two isolated accounts from 1847 suggest they found distinctive solutions to the problems this created for them. The first came from the Civil Governor of Tavride, who noted that Molokans were the best gardeners in the region, and grew so much garden produce they sold the excess in neighbouring communities.88 The concept of gardening as intensive agriculture has already been discussed above. For Molokans, with their small, poor land holdings, it was a way of getting the most from what little good land they had. The second account came from the agronomist Wilhelm Bauman, who wrote that Molokans bred the best horses in the Molochna, and Colonists had an expressed preference for such horses, paying as much as 300 rubles per head.89 Apparently the Molokans, who had insufficient land to raise large quantities of livestock, had elected to concentrate instead on raising smaller numbers of high quality livestock, serving a niche market in the Molochna.

88"Po otchetam Grazhdanskikh Gubernatorov o sostoiании государственной крестьян и о мерках улучшения их быта," 10 June 1847, RGLA, fond 1589, opis 1, дело 729.
The success of both Dukhobors and Molokans in adapting to conditions in the Molochna deserves particular attention. Dukhobors, of course, were unusually well-endowed with land, and this gave them an advantage over Orthodox state peasants, but Nogais, too, had a large land grant, and they did not enjoy comparable success. As suggested above, it was arguably the internal administrative arrangements in the Dukhobor community, based on their religious organisation, that made it possible for Dukhobors to react as a community to challenges posed by the frontier. The success of the Molokans is particularly interesting in this light, because they received the poorest land allotment of all settlers in the region, and could not base their success on sheep breeding like most others. There is little evidence about internal organisation in the Molokan villages, but if they shared the well-developed internal religious administrative structures of the Dukhobors, this may go far to explaining their successful, unique adaptation, based on market gardening and horse breeding.

Turning to foreign Colonists, the success they enjoyed in New Russia is commonly attributed to the large size of their land allotments, and land tenure regulations that prevented subdivision of allotments, ensuring they remained of economically viable size. The benefit of these provisions to Colonists is undeniable, but they also had the potential to be divisive, as developments in Mennonite society would show.

In 1806, Governor General Richelieu said “the Mennonites are astonishing, the Bulgarians incomparable, and the Germans intolerable,” and this is often repeated as a general indictment of German Colonists, but if the 1813 account of Inspector of Colonies

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Zieber is accepted, German Colonists in the Molochna were far from "intolerable." He found that 315 of 417 German Colonist families ran excellent farms, seventy-four had problems due to deaths or illnesses, and just twenty-four were failing, due to "insufficient love of work." While there is much less data on German Colonists than Mennonites, there are no obvious reasons for treating the economic development of the two groups in the Molochna separately.

Data on foreign Colonist agricultural production shows that on average Mennonites were the most prosperous Colonists, but German Colonists followed a similar pattern of development, and were prosperous in their own right. The first generation of Colonists produced grain, but quantities were small, and probably only intended to satisfy consumption needs (see table 3.6). As with Orthodox state peasants, commercial grain production in the Colonies was likely an incidental result of years with particularly good weather conditions. Like other Molochna settlers, the most important innovation for Colonists was the transition to sheep breeding. As table 3.1 (above pp. 72-72) shows, the number of sheep in the Colonies rose dramatically beginning in the 1820s.

This transition was initiated and supported by the state. Samuel Contenius, head of the Guardianship Committee, began distributing fine-wooled merino sheep to Mennonites in the Khortitsa Settlement in 1803, and Governor General Richelieu extended the practice

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92Zieber's report is described in a letter from the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Department of Agriculture to the Minister of State Domains, 26 July 1813, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 343.
Table 3.6: Net Grain Harvests Per Capita in Colonist Villages, 1805-1832

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mennonites</th>
<th>German Colonists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1805</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1819</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>7.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 310; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 2503; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 3308; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 4137; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 5017; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 5394; GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 2503; GADO, fond 6, op. 1, d. 1236; PJBIMA, file 1138; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 246; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 786; RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 627; RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 628; RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 629; RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 630; RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 631.

to the Molochna in 1808.\(^{93}\) The focus of Contenius' effort was interbreeding merino sheep with the local kurdisch breed to engender the hardiness of native sheep, but the fine wool of the imports. In 1828, wool from resultant mixed breeds sold for twenty-seven rubles per pud, about 80 percent of the value of pure-bred merino wool (thirty-four rubles per pud), and seven times the value of coarse kurdisch wool (three to four rubles per pud).\(^{94}\) Contenius had his Inspectors keep close track of sheep-breeding in the Colonies, compiling detailed

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\(^{93}\) James Urry, None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889 (Winnipeg: Windflower Communications, 1989), 88. For an early report on the success of the program, see “Donesenia glavnogo sud’i kontoru v MVD o razvitii ovtsvodstva v koloniiakh,” 29 January 1809, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 225.

\(^{94}\) For merino and mixed-breed wool, see “Auszug über den Ertrag der Schafe auf dem Vorwerke Iushanlee von 1825 bis 1845,” 1845, PJBIMA, file 71. For kurdisch wool, see Schlatter, Bruchstücke, 185.
monthly reports. At his suggestion, in 1824 General I. N. Inzov, who in 1818 had succeeded him as head of the Guardianship Committee, created the "Organisation for the Improvement of Sheep Breeding," headed by Cornies. Although it had no authority to dictate sheep breeding practices, its correspondence implied it expected cooperation from Colonists, while the rapid growth of merino flocks implies it received it.

Beside sheep breeding, the state placed heavy emphasis on growing trees. Managed forestry was an increasing concern throughout Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, and, inspired by the German development of "forest mathematics," Alexander I appointed Forstmeisters in every Russian gubernia. The basic assumption of forestry policies was that, where the environment did not conform to human needs, it could be transformed, and this was an assumption the Colonists shared. Mennonites in particular were familiar with western forestry practices, for they were renowned for their use of trees to stabilise the banks of rivers in swampy regions of the Vistula-Nogat Delta. Encouraged by the state, they quickly established tree plantations in the Molochna. In 1815 there were 9,400 mature mulberry trees -- grown for an ill-fated attempt to establish a silk industry -- 2,268 mature fruit trees, 608 mature forest trees, and 71,235 saplings in the Colonies.

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95 For a typical report on sheep-rearing, see "Vedomosti Molochanskikh kolonii smotritel'ia ob ovtevovodstva," 1815, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 402. On the creation of the "Organization for the Improvement of Sheep Breeding," see Urry, None But Saints, 111.

96 See, e.g., Contenius to Guardianship Committee, 19 January 1823, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 741.

97 On the German role in developing scientific forestry, see Robert Pogue Harrison, Forests: The Shadow of Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 122. The general development of Russian forestry is recorded in the records of the forestry department of the Ministry of Agriculture (RGLA, fond 432), while forestry in Tavrida Gubernia is recorded in the records of the Tavrida Forstmeisters (GAKO, fonds 82, 94, and 798).

98 Guardianship Committee to Contenius, 15 January 1815, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 225. On the failed attempt to establish a silk industry in the Molochna, see , 51.
1825 there were over 233,000 mature trees and by 1834, the Mennonites alone had 254,058 trees and the German Colonists 121,021.99

Following the pattern established with sheep, in 1830, on Contenius' advice, the Guardianship Committee created a "Society for the effective propagation of afforestation, horticulture, sericulture, and viticulture," [hereafter the Forestry Society], with Cornies its Chairman-for-Life.100 It was the forerunner of the controversial "Society for the improvement of agriculture and trade" [hereafter the Agricultural Society], established in 1836, but it is vital to emphasise that the Forestry Society did not have the broad authority and jurisdiction of the Agricultural Society, concerning itself instead almost exclusively with planting and care for trees.101 Like the "Society for the Improvement of Sheep Breeding," its function was intended to be advisory rather than regulatory.

Controversies in the Molochna Mennonite settlement have traditionally been divided into religious disputes, born of conflicts between religious and civil authorities in the 1830s and 1840s, and economic disputes, born of landlessness in the 1850s and 1860s. However, arguably the two shared a common origin in land allocation practices established at the foundation of the settlement. Turmoil in the 1840s centred on secular infringements on the traditional jurisdiction of Mennonite religious institutions. This is described in chapter five, but the relationship between secular and religious authority in earlier decades demands close attention, for many future disputes grew out of land allocation practices


100Urry, None But Saints, 112.
101The "Instruction" describing the Society's original responsibilities and authority is located in PJBRMA, file 166.
established in the first years of settlement.

As described in chapter two, the Russian state established a secular administrative system to parallel the traditional congregational one in Mennonite communities. It was only when secular Mennonite agencies gained the authority to overturn the decisions of congregational agencies in the 1840s that significant conflicts arose between the two systems. Cornies, by the 1840s the foremost representative of secular authority in the Mennonite Colony, was the focal point of unrest (see chapter five), but to a significant degree the problems of the 1840s were a natural consequence of geographic isolation and an administrative system that put Mennonites in control of community land.

The Russian state encouraged foreigners to immigrate because it expected them to positively influence New Russian agriculture, and it provided plenty of land to ensure that every Colonist that wished could farm. Yet, surprisingly, in Mennonite villages, where an egalitarian ethic of mutual support might have been expected to prevailed, economic differentiation arose at an early date. Mennonites were not an economically homogeneous group when they arrived in the Molochna. Of the first 293 immigrant families, 178 declared assets of 269,923 rubles when they entered Russia, while the remaining 115 declared assets of just 35,253 rubles. As figure 3.5 shows, by 1808 livestock holdings of the wealthiest fifth of the population were three times greater than those of the poorest fifth. In itself this is not surprising, for it was not wealth, but poverty that Mennonites opposed, and as long as an individual was prepared to employ his wealth to allay the poverty of other

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104 Data compiled from Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe*, 304-329.
members of his congregation when necessary, wealth in itself was not discouraged.\(^5\) What Mennonites did oppose was social differentiation. It was to prevent the social manifestation of economic differentiation -- the sin of pride -- that Mennonite congregations imposed on their members conformity in dwellings, clothing, and other areas that carried the potential for the outward expression of wealth.\(^6\) However, there is suggestive evidence that individual wealth expressed itself in social arrangements even in the earliest years of the Molochna Mennonite Colony. In establishing the first Molochna villages, the wealthiest households grouped together, forming wealthy villages, while the poorest households grouped together into poor villages. To cite the most extreme cases, fully 53 percent of the

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\(^6\)Urry, *None But Saints*, 36-37.
Table 3.7: Distribution of Families in Mennonite Villages by Wealth in 1808

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Rich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blumstein</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoenau</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lichtenau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiegenhagen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blumenort</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenort</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fueschau</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muensterberg</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altona</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladekopp</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halbstadt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohrloff</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindenau</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiege</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>Schoensee</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuerstenau</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muntau</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petershagen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde*, 304-329

Households in Altona came from the wealthiest fifth of the population, while just 12 percent came from the poorest fifth. Meanwhile, 33 percent of the households in Muntau came from the poorest fifth of the population, while none came from the wealthiest. The relevant numbers for all eighteen original villages are provided in table 3.7.

There are possible non-economic explanations for such groupings. In 1804 Russia changed its immigration policy, limiting immigration to those who showed clear ability to support themselves, and it is often claimed that those granted entry after 1804 were

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107 Based on Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde*, 304-329.
Table 3.8: Wealth by Year-of-Arrival in Molochna Mennonite Colony, 1808

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1804</th>
<th>1805</th>
<th>1806</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses per Household</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle per Household</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep per Household</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagons and Agricultural Implements per Household</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unruh, Die niederländisch- niederdeutschen Hintergründe, 304-329

wealthier than those granted entry before.\textsuperscript{108} However, as table 3.8 shows, this was not the case with the 351 families that had arrived by 1808, for the later arrivals were actually marginally poorer than the earlier ones. A second possible explanation is that people grouped together based on the villages and regions in Prussia they originated from. However, evidence does not support this, either. Mennonite Colonists came from 107 different towns and villages in fourteen different regions, almost all in the Vistula-Nogat Delta. To use Altona, the wealthiest Molochna village, as an example, its residents came from five different districts -- Tiegenhoff supplying seven of the seventeen households, and Marienburg six -- and eleven different towns and villages. Meanwhile the residents of

Table 3.9: Wealth by Occupation before Immigration in Molochna Mennonite Colony, 1808

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Craftsmen</th>
<th>Farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses per Family</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle per Family</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>9.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep per Family</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagons and Agricultural Implements per Family</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Unruh, Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde, 304-329

Muntau, one of the poorest villages, were drawn from four different districts -- Elbing providing ten of the twenty-one households, and Tiegenhoff seven -- and sixteen different villages.109 This pattern of distribution is typical of all the villages, and suggest that village-of-origin had little or nothing to do with where immigrants settled. A third possible explanation is that some villages attracted tradesmen while others attracted farmers, but this too fails to bear up under closer examination. As table 3.9 shows, craftsmen were marginally wealthier than farmers, but, the distribution of tradesmen and farmers within villages shows

109 Based on Unruh, Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergrunde, 304-329.
this did not lead to significant groupings in the Molochna.\footnote{This result challenges conventional assumptions that wealthier Mennonites were more likely to be farmers (see, e.g., Urry, “The Social Background of the Emergence of the Mennonite Brethren in Nineteenth Century Russia,” Journal of Mennonite Studies 6 (1988), 12), but it should be noted that the census only indicates which family heads claimed to be craftsmen. It is possible, and indeed likely, that many of these family heads were principally farmers who practised a trade for supplementary income.} Wealthy Altona had twelve farmers and five tradesmen, while poor Muntau had fourteen farmers and seven tradesmen. Indeed, the striking thing is rich farmers settled with rich tradesmen, while poor farmers settled with poor tradesmen. The most obvious explanation is wealth.

Extant records of landlessness in Mennonite villages are recorded in table 3.10. The earliest record is from 1813, when, just a decade after the establishment of the Colony, 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Landless Families</th>
<th>Landless Population</th>
<th>Other Colonists:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Landless Families</td>
<td>As % of All Families</td>
<td>Landless Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>17.16%</td>
<td>11.89%</td>
<td>8.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>19.74%</td>
<td>14.84%</td>
<td>15.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>22.57%</td>
<td>16.31%</td>
<td>19.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>24.70%</td>
<td>19.39%</td>
<td>19.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>32.86%</td>
<td>29.20%</td>
<td>20.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>44.19%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>32.92%</td>
<td>25.37%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>41.14%</td>
<td>32.25%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>47.27%</td>
<td>36.42%</td>
<td>18.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>56.99%</td>
<td>46.83%</td>
<td>21.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: GAOO, f. 6, op. 1, d. 773; GAOO, f. 6, op. 1, d. 973; GAOO, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1024; GAOO, f. 6, op. 1, d. 1236; GAOO, f. 6, op. 1, d. 5099; P/JBRMA, file 17; P/JBRMA, file 19; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 786; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 893; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 981.
percent of the Mennonite population was landless. By 1839, the figure had climbed to 47 percent. In theory, surplus land should have forestalled such landlessness, but in practice, it did not. The problem was that, although the surplus land was supposed to constitute one-sixth of all types of land, including pastureland, arable, meadows, etc., the original settlers could ill-afford to leave any part of their village's best land -- the river floodplain -- unused in the first years of settlement. In those years, the Molochna was far from the "oasis" that later observers would see. The treeless, arid steppe was unlike the land of the Vistula-Nogat Delta the Mennonite settlers had left behind, and the virgin steppe, with its thickly matted sod, was enormously difficult to plough. As late as 1813, the Inspector of Colonies reported that many settlers had still not ploughed any land on the high steppe, instead concentrating on planting the floodplain. Unlike Orthodox peasants, Colonists did not focus all their attention on animal husbandry in the first years of settlement, but instead devoted extensive amounts of labour and resources to arable husbandry and tree planting, trying to change the environment to more closely resemble the one they had left behind, rather than following the Orthodox State Peasant and Nogai example and adapting their practices to the new environment. While this would have benefits in the future, in the short term it meant that they frequently faced shortages, and had to turn to the state for subsidies. Under such circumstances, the first Colonists naturally allotted to themselves all

111 Vedomst' o blagosostoianii Molochanskikh kolonistov za istenii fevral' mesiat 1813 goda," GAOO, fond 6, opis 1, delo 773.
112 Vedomst' o blagosostoianii kolonii Molochanskago Menonistskago okruga za genvar' mesiat 1839 goda," 1 January 1839, GAOO, fond 6, opis 1, delo 5099.
114 "Department of Agriculture of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Minister of Internal, 26 July 1813, GADO, fond 134, op. 1, d. 343.
of the best land. While this helped them to survive those first, hard years, it left them with little good land to allot to future generations. All that was left of the surplus was the high steppe, suitable only as pastureland. Yet, unlike Orthodox peasants, who received new land after each reizjia, Colonists could not turn to the state for new land as their population grew, because from the state's point of view, the surplus land already provided the Colonists with more than enough.

Despite the increase in families in the Colony from 351 in 1808 to 569 in 1818, just thirty-one new land allotments were awarded, including sixteen to newly arrived colonists when the village of Rueckenau was founded in 1811. In the early 1820s, landlessness momentarily declined as new villages were founded for new immigrants on reserve land, but the trend reversed and landlessness again grew sharply in the 1830s. Although a degree of landlessness was anticipated at the Colony's foundation -- some people were expected to opt for crafts or commerce in preference to agriculture -- clearly the failure of so many families to acquire allotments reflects the growth of a poor segment in Mennonite society.

An important factor mitigating the impoverishment of the landless was the Mennonite inheritance system. On the death of a landowner, all of his or her property was liquidated and the proceeds distributed equally among the surviving sons and daughters, so the system provided for redistribution of wealth to landless families. In turn, this promoted capital investment by the landless, contributing to the economic growth and diversification of the Mennonite community.116 Yet, land was the key source of wealth in the predominantly agricultural Molochna, and the best most of the landless could hope for was to lease land from the crown or from neighbouring estates. This practice was widespread,

but because leased land was more expensive than allotment land within the village, and because it was often of lower quality, differentiation still grew.

In Prussia, congregations governed public life, but Mennonites there did not hold property communally, its acquisition and use lying outside the authority of the congregation. Allotment holders in the Molochna, too, controlled their own land, but they also controlled their village’s surplus land, giving them influence over economic opportunities of fellow Mennonites quite unlike anything they had known in Prussia. They employed their authority to impose strict limitations on access to land, insisting recipients of the few new allotments that were available have sufficient capital to purchase implements and livestock, and thus effectively excluding the poor. This official sanctioning of economic differentiation was rooted in the need to protect the welfare of the whole community by ensuring that all viable land was efficiently farmed, but such authority over land allocation was a clear departure from the traditional jurisdiction of the congregation. Owning land had always been an essential attribute for full membership in Mennonite society, and consequently there was no traditional social sanction for economic differentiation. However, in the Molochna, by 1833 it had become clear that not everyone would be able to own land. The challenge facing the Mennonite community was to find a way to provide for the poor, and legitimise the wealth of the rich. In the long run, the problem would pose fundamental challenges to congregational unity. Yet it also had positive implications, for the self-administration of land in the Mennonite Colony, as in the Dukhobor community, gave self-administrative

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structures an important functional role that was not present in Orthodox communities. The landed had a vested interest in resolving the problem, and, as with the Dukhobors, this stimulus to active involvement in public life encouraged the development of a Mennonite Commonwealth, a subject taken up more fully in chapter five.

The growth of landlessness was paralleled by the growth of livestock populations in the Mennonite Colony, and the two phenomena were closely related. As table 3.11 shows, by 1830 Mennonites no longer had enough allotment land to feed their livestock, and so it

| Table 3.11: Pasture Requirements of the Molochna Mennonite Colony, 1825-1835 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                             | 1825 | 1830 | 1835 |
| **Total Allotted Land**     | 53,840 | 58,851 | 64,833 |
| **Household Plots**         | 1,833 | 2,366 | 2,984 |
| **Arable (est.*)**          | 6,582 | 14,483 | 19,913 |
| **Allotted Land Available as** |     |      |      |
| Pasture                     | 43,592 | 39,696 | 38,952 |
| **Surplus Land (est.*)**    | 8,873 | 9,642 | 10,552 |
| **Mennonite-Controlled Pasture** | 52,465 | 49,338 | 49,504 |
| **Pasture Required**        | 37,139 | 62,339 | 120,773 |
| **Pasture Surplus or Deficit** | 15,326 | (13,001) | (71,209) |
| **Reserve Land**            | 60,527 | 57,855 | 54,747 |
| **Pasture Surplus or Deficit Including Reserve** | 75,853 | 41,746 | (13,414) |

* Based on data from 1824, 1827, and 1834, that shows that Mennonites planted approximately 0.60 desyrets per desiatina (see GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 786; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 837; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 981).
** one sixth of total land allotted to landed families.
Sources: GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 786; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 893; PJBMA, file 375.
was necessary for them to lease land. A significant source of leased land was their own reserve lands, which were administered by the Guardianship Committee and leased to Mennonites on the same basis as other unsettled crown land.\footnote{Cornies to Fadeev, 7 January 1830, \textit{PjBRMA}, file 169.} As Cornies noted in 1831, such leased land had "the disagreeable aspect that it involves the fulfilment of conditions difficult for the poor, [although] for the rich and the moderately [prosperous], who possess the means to fulfil [the conditions], they are not so difficult."\footnote{Cornies to David Epp, 5 February 1831, \textit{PjBRMA}, file 200.} Moreover, even including this reserve land, by 1835, Mennonites did not have enough pasturage for their livestock.

They had several options to fill the gap between the forage their land provided and the food their livestock required. They could improve the quality of grazing land through irrigation, plant high-yield pasture grasses, or grow fodder crops; they could harvest hay on the high steppe; or they could lease land to expand their grazing area. The cost of irrigation or introducing non-native grasses was extremely high, and the first experiments only began in the late 1830s.\footnote{Witte, "O sel'skom khoziaistve," 110; O. Köppen, "Neskol'ko slov o razvedenii kornovyykh trav v Tavricheskoii gubernii," \textit{ZhMGI} 83 (1863), 269-274.} Mennonites grew significant quantities of oats -- about one четверть for every horse in the colony in the 1830s -- primarily as a fodder crop, and haying on the high steppe, although labour-intensive, began as early as the mid-1820s, but shortages of manpower meant that during haying season workers could demand high wages.\footnote{Schlatter, \textit{Bruchstücke}, 108.}

Hay and oats reduced the gap between land and livestock, but did not close it, so leasing was necessary. This too had its price, but here at least landowners could control their costs. By 1834 Mennonites were leasing 10,637 desiatinas of surplus land from their villages,
along with unknown amounts from the state and neighbouring settlers. Because they controlled the disposition of the surplus land, landowners could, and did, grant themselves very cheap leases, and to encourage sheep breeding the state granted them cheap leases on reserve land as well. Cornies and other leaders in the transition to sheep breeding acquired large areas of cheap leased land in the 1820s, when it was still plentiful and rented for as little as a kopeck per desiatina per year, but by the early 1830s, when late-comers joined the sheep bonanza, leased land had grown expensive. Land requests of Molokans and Orthodox state peasants, detailed in chapter four, show that non-Mennonite sources of rental land were drying up, while isolated data from Cornies' estates at Iushmanlee and Tashchenak documents the rapid increase in rental costs, although its interpretation raises difficulties. Instead of renting land, Cornies paid neighbouring Nogais, and to a lesser degree, Orthodox state peasants, Dukhobors, Molokans, and even German Colonists, to pasture and care for sheep for fixed periods. The amount he paid to different contractors varied by as much as 100 percent in any given year, and the rate for sheep was anywhere from one-seventh to one-fifteenth the rate for cattle and horses, reflecting the higher land requirements and supervisory costs of the latter. Because Cornies was paying for labour as well as land, this data cannot be compared directly to land rental rates from other sources, but the rate of increase is illuminating. In 1824, Cornies paid an average of fourteen kopecks per cow or horse per month for pasturage and herding. In 1833, the rate had risen to 35 kopecks, an increase of 250 percent in ten years. Comparable numbers for sheep were 1.75

122"Kammeral Liste," 1834, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, дело 981.
123On land leases, see Urry, None But Saints, 109; O. Köppen, "Neskol'ko slov," 269-274.
124O. Köppen, "O polevodstve v Tavricheskoï gubernii i o vrednykh na nego vliianiiakh," ZhIMG 83 (1863), 104.
kopecks per head per month in 1824, and five kopecks per head in 1833, an increase of 286 percent. The same sources show that Cornies paid the Mennonite Gebietsamt 623 rubles to lease surplus land in 1829, and 1,221 rubles in 1833. The amount of leased land is not recorded, but the rate could have been no more than the open-market price of sixty kopecks per desiatina recorded in 1837, and was almost certainly much less, so Cornies alone was leasing no less than 2,035 desiatinas of the Colony’s 10,637 desiatinas of surplus land in 1833, or 20 percent of the Colony’s entire supply of surplus land.

Although the surplus was rangeland, and could not have been used to provide allotments to the landless, the fact it went to rich land owners at artificially low rates must nevertheless have seemed unjust to the landless. In effect, by 1830 the landless found themselves competing for land with the sheep of the landed, and they did not compete as equals. The situation precisely parallels that of the 1850s and 1860s, when Mennonite landowners used their control of village assemblies to grant themselves inexpensive leases on surplus lands. The landless, of course, had no vote in the assemblies, so could not defend their own interests.

The fact that there is no evidence of protest by the landless must be credited to the efforts of Colony leaders to find economic alternatives for them. These efforts are detailed in chapter five, so only the early development of labour markets will be sketched here. The main options for the landless were to take up a craft or work as labourers. Mennonites in Prussia had been extensively involved in trade and handicrafts, some 38 percent having a craft when they arrived in the Molochna. However, Prussia was different than the


126 Based on Unruh, Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe, 304-329.
Molochna, for Danzig and Elbing were important port cities, while the surrounding regions were heavily populated, providing a ready market for Mennonite craft production. In the Molochna there was no near-by port, and neighbouring settlers produced most of their own requirements. In 1808 craftsmen were among the wealthiest Mennonites, but in the Molochna, demand for their products was limited, and by the 1830s few could boast a large enough trade to keep permanent stock, or own wagons and horses to deliver their goods. By 1834, "poor but industrious" landless Molochna Mennonite families were a noticeable feature to travellers, and Mennonite memoirists recall such families working long gruelling days producing handicrafts.

By the 1840s, landowners would have twice the income of craftsmen and as much as ten times the income of labourers. This enormous gap suggests an excess of labourers, raising questions about the natural labour absorption rate in the Molochna. One way to estimate this rate is to look at German Colonists, who had similar, western backgrounds, similar land tenure arrangements, but far less landlessness. Table 3.10 (above p. 120) shows the growth of landlessness in both groups. It does not tell the whole story, for about a third of the German Colonist landless lived in one village, Molochna (later renamed Prishib), which was apparently designated as a market town from the time of its establishment. Other German Colonist villages had an average of just six landless families each in 1839, a

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129 Witte, "O sel'kom khoziaistve," 67.
130 Urry, None But Saints, 144-145.
131 Urry, None But Saints, 144.
132 The precise figures were 28% in 1815, 32% in 1839.
sharp difference from Mennonite villages, where over half the families (but just 47 percent of the population) were landless. The German Colonists kept landlessness low in part by distributing their surplus land, rather than leasing it out. They also avoided the problem by maintaining large, multi-generational households, a practice that hides under-employment in their villages.\(^{133}\) Still, with fewer restrictions on land-owning, a greater percentage of German Colonists could farm, so arguably the rate of landlessness more closely approximated the natural rate of labour absorption. In 1839, 16 percent of German Colonists were landless, compared to 47 percent of Mennonites. If the German Colonist level was natural, by implication forty-seven landless persons competed for every sixteen jobs in the Mennonite Colony. Of course, some landless householders from both groups leased land, so this overstates the extent of competition for labour, but the difference between the two groups still implies a significant level of under-employment in the Mennonite settlement. Little wonder wages were low. Some types of craft work could be lucrative, and some landless

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Landless Population</th>
<th>Working-Age Landless</th>
<th>Landless Craftsmen</th>
<th>Landless Labourers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>1,631</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>2,505</td>
<td>1,426</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>3,202</td>
<td>1,828</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>1,343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 786; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 893; GADO, f. 134, op. 1, d. 981.

\(^{133}\) "S vedomostiами mestnykh kolonistikh nachalstv o sostojanii kolonii za 1835 g.," 1836, RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 634. In 1835, the average German Colonist family had 7.56 members, compared to just 4.98 in Mennonite families.
Mennonites chose it in preference to farming, but as table 3.12 shows, between 1828 and 1834 the number of craftsmen in the Colony grew very slowly, by just 2.4 percent per annum, while the number of labourers grew by 12.75 percent per annum, far outstripping the 4 percent per annum growth rate of the Colony as a whole.

In Prussia, landless Mennonites competed for jobs in a proto-industrialized region where their industriousness and skill made them valuable employees. The surrounding, non-Mennonite economy provided landless Mennonites with employment and a market for the products of cottage industry. In Russia, Mennonites were virtually the only significant employers, owning the few agricultural estates, mills, textile manufactures, and brickworks that supplied the landless with jobs. Meanwhile, demand for manufactured goods was minimal, for the Molochna was isolated from export markets, and neighbouring villagers had a largely self-sufficient subsistence economy. The necessary result was the creation of an employer/employee relationship that paralleled the landed/landless relationship. The isolation imposed by the move to the Molochna had taken away the economic options available to landless Mennonites in Prussia and created distinct divisions in Mennonite society.

The connection between this economic differentiation and religious disputes that dogged Molochna Mennonites can only be inferred. Mennonites traditionally styled themselves the "quiet in the land," alluding to their religious ideal of withdrawal from secular entanglements. They possessed a foundation myth of agricultural life as the ideal expression of their withdrawal from "the World."\(^{134}\) In Prussia, Holland, America, and elsewhere, Mennonite communities experienced a constant erosion, as, on the one hand,

\(^{134}\)Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 36-38.
ambitious, entrepreneurial Mennonites moved to town to pursue their fortunes in the World, and on the other, poor, landless Mennonites moved to town to find work and survive. This process closely parallels the way that the rich and poor elements in nomadic societies drift away to sedentary communities, and as with nomads, it made a necessary contribution to the survival of conservative, landed Mennonite society by acting as a safety valve, removing potentially disquieting elements -- the wealthy and the poor -- from their communities. Not coincidentally, many eighteenth-century Prussian Mennonite religious conflicts manifested themselves as disputes between conservative rural and progressive urban congregations.\(^\text{135}\)

Immigration to the Molochina brought a physical withdrawal from the World to match the Mennonite ideal of spiritual withdrawal. However, it was also a withdrawal from the economic safety-valves of the industrializing West. Hence ambitious, entrepreneurial Mennonites remained in the Colony, for the land they were allotted or leased cheaply provided their only avenue to wealth. Meanwhile, lacking access to towns and markets, and not even speaking the same language as the surrounding population that formed the bulk of any incipient regional market, poor Mennonites were also forced to remain in the Colony, working for wealthy Mennonites.

In this pressurised situation, two significant conservative congregations sprang up: the Kleine Gemeinde in 1812, and the Large Flemish Congregation in 1824.\(^\text{136}\) Delbert Plett speculates about the socio-economic make-up of the Kleine Gemeinde based on an 1808 census, concluding that members "were of no particular socio-economic status," but the list

\(^{135}\) Urry, *None But Saints*, 47.
of Kleine Gemeinde families Plett provides is, by his own admission, incomplete, while the

census data on which his calculations rest was compiled four years prior to the formation of
the congregation.\textsuperscript{137} Without more complete information, no useful socio-economic portrait

can be attempted. As for the Large Flemish Congregation, there is neither a comprehensive

list of its members nor a census from which to evaluate their socio-economic condition, so
here again, no quantitative analysis is possible.

All the same, there is much in the recorded beliefs of both conservative

congregations to support the contention they reflected fundamental economic divisions. In

1833, Heinrich Balzer, the most erudite member of the Kleine Gemeinde, launched a

passionate attack on the growing extravagance of the wealthy in Molocha Mennonite

society. Denouncing "pride, ostentation, vanity, greed for money and lust for wealth,

avarice, drunkenness, luxury, vicious life, masquerades, obscene songs, gambling, and above

all the miserable smoking of tobacco," he called on Mennonites only to strive for "the

lowest state, that of husbandman" as that "most conducive . . . for the preservation of

genuine simplicity in God."\textsuperscript{138} This contrast between wealthy worldliness and simple

\textsuperscript{137}Delbert F. Plett, \textit{The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-

1849)} (Steinbach: Self-Published, 1985), 156. In his review of \textit{The Golden Years}, Urry

questions this conclusion, but my own calculations suggest that the twenty-six families

identified by Plett are an astonishingly representative cross-section of the larger community

(Urry, "All that Glisters. . .": Delbert Plett and the Place of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russian

Mennonite History," \textit{JMS} 4 [1986]). Note, however, that there are a number of errors in the
data as reproduced by Plett, and those wishing to examine the matter more closely should
base their investigations on the reproduction of the complete census in Unruh, \textit{Die

niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe}, 304-329. A complete 1813 census, comparable to the
1808 census published by Unruh, exists in \textit{GADO, fond} 134, \textit{opis} 1, \textit{delo} 356, but I was not
permitted to copy it. A careful examination of this census, and a comparison between it and
the 1808 census, may well offer some revealing insights into the socio-economic basis of the

Kleine Gemeinde.

\textsuperscript{138}Heinrich Balzer, "Understanding and Reason. Simple Opinions Regarding the

Difference Between Understanding and Reason, Discussed According to the Teachings of
husbandry is a clear indictment of rising economic differentiation, although the equation of rectitude with husbandry must have been cold comfort to the landless poor. Indeed, it should be noted that the protests came, neither from, nor on behalf of the landed. The date of Balzer's sermon should be stressed. By 1833, pastures were overcrowded and landlessness was rising rapidly, and it was also the first year of the Great Drought (see chapter four), when some accounts claim no rain fell for twenty consecutive months and the Molochna Estuary itself dried up. That winter, families used thatch from their roofs to feed their livestock. Drought, overcrowding, landlessness, and religious discord -- the connection seems compelling.

By 1833, the first stage of adaptation in the Molochna was over. The river basin was filled to overflowing with sheep, the precious river floodplain was crowded with villages, and settlers were about to face the new challenge of how to adapt the economy they had built on the basis of inexhaustible supplies of land to a landscape that was increasingly becoming exhausted.

The Nogais were the least prepared for the looming challenge. Only a small economic elite had participated in the transition to sheep breeding, and this group, which owed its prosperity to Mennonite subsidies, possessed no claim to the leadership of the majority. Indeed their success, based as it was on the use of public land for private gain, at once undermined traditional administrative structures and threatened the economic welfare of the majority. By 1833, there was no sign of the organic development of a new self-

the Gospel," reproduced in Plett, The Golden Years, 244.
administrative system to legitimise economic differentiation and ensure subsistence to the poor.

If Orthodox state peasants were in better shape than the Nogais, it was not by dint of good planning. They, too, had expanded the size of their herds as fast as they could manage, and although the growth rate was slower than that of the Nogais, this was likely only because the Nogais had the advantage of greater experience with pastoralism. Moreover, like the majority of Nogais, the Orthodox peasants had shown little interest in commercial husbandry, ignoring the transition to merino sheep that markets demanded. With the full occupation of all viable crown land looming on the horizon, Orthodox peasants would soon also face the problem of land shortages and economic differentiation. They, too, lacked a tradition that legitimised economic differentiation, and any attempt to reinstate their traditional system of obshchina authority over land was bound to face opposition from established landowners.

Sectarians, on the other hand, faced the new challenges from a position of strength. Molokans, who held the poorest land allotment in the Molochna, had never had the luxury of relying on extensive agriculture, and were already shrewdly employing their limited resources to prosper as market gardeners and speciality horse-breeders. Dukhobors controlled disproportionately large tracts of the Molochna floodplain, and had shown their good commercial sense by investing early in the transition to merino sheep. They had never abandoned communal control of property, and consequently had well-established provisions for the general welfare of the community, while the appearance of a wealthy minority, which provided a ratchet to the economic development of the whole community, was legitimised by a religiously-based internal administrative system. What could go wrong?
Foreign Colonists also seemed well-prepared for the new challenges, for their land was held in indivisible allotments, so demographic growth posed no threat to the viability of their agricultural economy. However, the indivisibility of allotments also meant that, unlike other settlers, all of whom were guaranteed a portion of land either by the state or by their community, the Colonists were faced with growing numbers of landless people. In 1833, this problem had been partially avoided in the German Colonies by distributing surplus land, but at some point in the not-to-distant future, it would have to be faced. In the Mennonite Colony, landlessness was already a serious social problem. Unlike the Dukhobors, Mennonites had no traditional system to sanction economic differentiation and protect the welfare of the landless, and the congregational system had little flexibility to adapt to new demands. The conflicts that loomed for the Mennonites posed a fundamental challenge to their beliefs, but at least it was a challenge that progressive Mennonites were conscious of and prepared to address head-on.
Chapter Four

The Great Drought of 1832-1833

On Saturday, 1 September 1832, a light rain spattered the dusty fields of the Molochna River basin, then quickly blew away west. It would hardly be an event worth noting, were it not for the fact that no precipitation fell again for seven long months, and it was twenty months before the spring rains of 1834 released Molochna settlers from the grips of drought and hunger. Following hard on the heels of the cholera epidemics of 1830 and 1831, the Great Drought of 1833 to 1834 left a permanent mark on Molochna society, pressing home the need for more efficient agriculture, and more efficient administration.

The Great Drought was not confined to the Molochna. Twelve gubernias in the south and west of the Russian empire experienced total harvest failures, and many also had desperately poor harvests in 1834. The need for broadly-based reform at the national level was emphasised to the state by famine-relief expenses that climbed to over eight million rubles, and in the following years, Russia sharply altered its approach to state peasant administration, turning away from wardship policies, and toward new goals of efficiency and standardisation, signalled most notably by the creation of the Ministry of State Domains in 1838.

\[1\] Cornies provides a running account of the drought in his correspondence. See Cornies to Schlatter, 11 March 1833, PJBMA, file 276; Cornies to Blüher, 10 June 1833, PJBMA, file 276; Cornies to Fadeev, 17 July 1833, PJBMA, file 276; Cornies to Fadeev, 13 September 1833, PJBMA, file 276; Cornies to Blüher, 22 June 1834, PJBMA, file 300; Cornies to Fadeev, 18 September 1834, PJBMA, file 300.

\[2\] Details of the drought and state relief efforts are described in “Sravnenie neurozhaev 1833/34 i 1839/40,” 1840, RGL, f. 1589, op. 1, d. 693.
In the long run, both Molochna settlers and the state would see that the only solution to their common problem was to use land more efficiently, but in the short run, both looked to solve the problem by finding more land to exploit in the old, extensive ways. The urgency for reform among Molochna settlers was heightened by the misperceptions of central officials, because the state thought the Molochna was underpopulated, and consequently looked to it as a place to resettle peasants from over-crowded interior guberniias. But for the people who already lived in the river basin, the drought had forced them to realise that their supply of land was on the verge of exhaustion. With the state looking for land for peasants from the interior, and Molochna settlers looking for land for themselves, conflicts between regional and central administrators were inevitable, and the ability of settlers to face down central administrators and defend their rights to land became vitally important. This chapter describes the administrative changes that grew out of the Drought and the cholera epidemic. It employs the story of the exile of the Dukhobors as a case study of the interaction of land shortages, policies of standardisation, and the lack of effective central administrative control, providing a backdrop to the evolution of social and economic institutions that will be described in chapters five and six.

Asiatic cholera, which first appeared in India in 1817, reached pandemic proportions across Europe in 1830 and 1831.³ In Russia, its official death toll in those years was 234,604, and there were countless more unrecorded deaths.⁴ At first, the state reacted with little urgency, imposing poorly-enforced quarantines on regional outbreaks, and leaving medical

⁴Ibid., 98.
treatment to local officials. However, as the disease spread up the Volga, westward to Ukraine, and finally, in the fall of 1830, to Moscow and St. Petersburg, panic set in, and the state imposed draconian quarantine measures, cutting off infected regions, and bringing inter-regional trade to a standstill throughout much of the empire. By the summer of 1831, riots and rebellions swept through infected regions, leading to conditions that historian Roderick McGrew characterises as “a state of civil war,” before the cholera receded and order was restored in 1832.⁵

Cholera first appeared in the Molochna in the Nogai village of Kakbas in September or early October 1830.⁶ Fearing a quarantine, at first the Nogais concealed the outbreak, but it was soon too severe to hide. By mid-December cholera raged throughout the Nogai district, and although no exact count was available, deaths were thought to be in the hundreds.⁷ Johann Cornies was dismayed at Nogai preventative measures, which consisted of sacrificing a black cow, then dragging the hide around the infected village. But after a representative of the Central Cholera Committee visited Cornies in the Molochna on the 16th and 17th of December, the state imposed a strict quarantine on the Nogai district.⁸ This measure was apparently effective, for by early January, the first outbreak, which had never spread beyond the Nogai villages, died out.⁹ A second outbreak appeared on 14 July 1832, this time in the Orthodox state peasant village of Bolshoi Tokmak. Within two weeks deaths were being reported in Orthodox and Nogai villages throughout the Molochna, but

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⁵Ibid., 67.
⁶Cornies to Fadeev, 15 October 1830, PJBMA, file 169.
⁷Cornies to Fadeev, 22 December 1830, PJBMA, file 169. Cornies implies the Nogais paid their nachalmik a bribe to file an October report denying the outbreak.
⁸Cornies to Fadeev, 22 December 1830, PJBMA, file 169.
⁹Cornies to Fadeev, 7 January 1831, PJBMA, file 200.
this time there is no record of its severity or persistence, beyond the fact that it again missed the Colonist villages.\(^{10}\)

If the cholera epidemic directly affected life in the Molochna, there is no clear record of it. Certainly, there were no riots or rebellions, for Cornies would undoubtedly have recorded such events. However, the epidemic had a catalytic effect on social tensions throughout Russia and Europe, and it is fair to assume that Molochna settlers were not immune to the fears and passions that arose elsewhere. Among the outlets for such tensions identified in McGrew's standard history of the epidemic, are "religious fervour, [and] outbursts against popular scapegoats," and this has particular resonance with the story of the Dukhobor exile from the Molochna related below. However, before the exile, and hard on the heels of the cholera, came the Great Drought, and it is impossible to disentangle the effects of the first catastrophe from the second.

Dry spells were not uncommon in the Molochna, and the rainless autumn of 1832 aroused little concern, but by the following March, Cornies wrote to his friend Daniel Schlatter: "not even the oldest people here can remember such weather. The ground is like a dry rock, without any moisture."\(^{11}\) By mid-June, there were reports of deaths from starvation in Orthodox and Nogai villages.\(^{12}\) Colonists fared better, but their livestock faced the same fate as that of all settlers -- Molochna pasturelands were barren, and only a few days of heavy rain in early July permitted livestock to survive through the summer.\(^{13}\) The July rains were too little and too late for grain crops, and Mennonite Colonists established a community fund to buy grain and

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\(^{10}\) Cornies to Fadeev, 29 July 1831, \textit{PfBRMA}, file 200.
\(^{11}\) Cornies to Schlatter, 11 March 1833, \textit{PfBRMA}, file 276.
\(^{12}\) Cornies to Blüher, 10 June 1833, \textit{PfBRMA}, file 276.
\(^{13}\) Cornies to Fadeev, 17 July 1833, \textit{PfBRMA}, file 276.
fodder, sending representatives to surrounding districts to buy whatever provisions they could find. Both Mennonite and German Colonists sold off a quarter of their horses at minimal prices, keeping only what they absolutely needed for field work in the coming year. In the winter of 1833 to 1834, those who could afford it moved their livestock to regions that were less severely affected, paying as much as five rubles per sheep to rent pasture, but most could only wait and watch as livestock died. By January, the only fodder available to most Molochna settlers was a local weed, called *kurei*, which was sometimes known to cause fatal diarrhoea in sheep. By February, even the *kurei* was gone, and settlers fed thatch from the roofs of their homes to their livestock. Some desperate Nogais, facing starvation, raided Colonist cattle herds, and Colonists began posting guards in response. Disease swept through weakened livestock, and thousands of head, already weakened by hunger, died. Only the state’s emergency famine-relief efforts prevented similar massive fatalities in the human population, before rain and warm weather returned in April 1834.

Exact totals of human and livestock deaths during the Great Drought are unknown, for normal record-keeping procedures fell by the wayside, and even the national *revizija*, scheduled for 1833, was delayed until 1835. Combined Orthodox state peasant and Nogai populations in Melitopol *mzd* declined by 7.85 percent between December 1831 and December 1835, but the role of out-migration in this decline is impossible to estimate.

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15 Cornies to Blüher, 15 February 1834, *PJBMA*, file 300.
16 Cornies to Blüher, 15 February 1834, *PJBMA*, file 300.
17 Cornies to Blüher, 22 June 1834, *PJBMA*, file 300.
18 Cornies to Johann Regier, 12 February 1834, *PJBMA*, file 300.
19 Cornies to Blüher, 15 February 1834, *PJBMA*, file 300.
20 "Sravnienie neurozhaev 1833/34 i 1839/40," 1840, *RGLA*, f. 1589, op. 1, d. 693.
21 See table 2.1.
Mennonites, the only group for whom death rates are available, showed no sign of increased mortality rates during the Drought, and the combined Colonist population actually rose 13 percent between 1831 and 1835, but a significant, though undefinable part of this growth came from new immigration. 22 Total livestock numbers in foreign Colonist villages at the end of 1834 were 30 percent lower than they had been two years earlier (expressed in AUs), while cattle numbers were 47 percent lower -- and according to Cornies, Colonists had fared far better than most of their neighbours. 23

Certainly, demographic losses during the cholera and famine were not severe enough to relieve the overcrowding that was increasingly a problem in the Molochna. The eighth reviziiia, completed in 1835, found 97,150 Orthodox, Sectarian and Nogai state peasant male souls living on crown land in the two mainland uezds of Tavrida gubernia. 24 Total crown land in the two uezds was 1,494,363 desiatinas, meaning that if all available land had been distributed, there would still have been just 15.32 desiatinas per male soul. 25 In fact 245,390 desiatinas remained unassigned, so the average allotment was just 12.81 desiatinas per male soul. 26 The unassigned land, scattered in the remotest parts of the two uezds, could not

22"Verzeichniss über die Bevölkerung im Molotschner Mennonisten Gebeite," 1849, PJBRA, file 1402.
23Cornies to Blüher, 22 June 1834, PJBRA, file 300. For Colonist livestock figures, see "Otchet za 1832," RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 633, and "Otchet za 1834," RGLA, f. 383, op. 29, d. 633.
26"Otchet' o zaniatiiaakh Tavricheskoi gubernskoi komissii, dla prigotovitel'nykh rasporniazhenii po priemu Gosudarstvennykh imushchestv, s 10 avgusta na 10 sentiabria 1838 goda," RGLA, fond 1589, opis 1, delo 362.
be conveniently assigned to peasants living in the most crowded areas, and this meant that for most state peasants, the time when "land was free and you tilled where you wished" was gone. Over-crowding had been creeping up on Molocha settlers for many years, and the fact that the critical point hit at almost exactly the same time as cholera and drought is sheerest coincidence. However, the ways people reacted to land shortages were heavily influenced by the experiences of epidemics and hunger.

The first indication of serious overcrowding in the Molocha came in 1832, when Molokan villagers turned to the state for assistance, appealing for more land. Within a year, the Orthodox villages of Berestova, Nikolaevka, and Popovka would also ask the state for assistance, requesting that the Ministry of Internal Affairs step in and repartition their land. In its typical, foot-dragging fashion, the state did not address the matter seriously until the late 1830s, and the broader issue of repartition will be left for chapter six, but information the state assembled about the villages, based on the 1835 repartition, shows how crowded things had become in some areas in Melitopol uezd. The three villages were populated by 8,042 male souls, and had 56,882 desiatinas of good land -- just 7.07 desiatinas per male soul. The state's first thought was to assign more land -- after all, wasn't Tavride guberniia "mnogo zemel'nau?" It soon learned, however, that there was simply no land to assign. In 1835 there were just 92,940 free desiatinas in all of Melitopol, and these, located on the high
steppe, were of questionable value. For the peasants in Berestova, Nikolaevka and Popovka, the six cows, thirteen sheep and 0.66 horses that had been owned by the average Orthodox household in 1827 were already too many for their land. The point had come where something had to give.

The state was already in the process of devising a national policy to deal with land shortages among state peasants. Plans for reforming the administration of the peasantry had been considered and rejected over and over again, dating back into the previous century, and the early years of Nicholas' reign saw a number of serious proposals. In February 1836, Nicholas made P. D. Kiselev head of the Fifth Department of the tsar's personal chancellery, calling him "my chief of staff for peasant affairs." Kiselev's mandate was to define the peasant problem and devise a solution. In January 1838, the tsar ordered Kiselev to take charge of the newly created Ministry of State Domains, vesting him with the authority to implement his solutions.

If Kiselev's objective was to improve peasant conditions, his preferred method was standardisation. For Molochna residents, this was not good news, for peasants in interior guberniias were in far worse condition than those on the periphery, and Kiselev hoped to move peasants from the overcrowded interior to unoccupied land in the Molochna. When local protests made it clear that there was no land to spare, the Ministry of State Domains

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29"Otchet' o zanitiatiiakh Tavricheskoi gubernskoi komissii, dlia prigotovitel'nykh raspriazhenii po priemu Gosudarstvennykh imushchestv, s 10 avgusta na 10 sentiabria 1838 goda," RGLA, fond 1589, opis 1, delo 362.
30These proposals are described in great detail in volume 1 of Druzhinin, Gosudarstvenie Krest'iane.
31Quoted in Druzhinin, Gosudarstvenie Krest'iane, 1:294.
32Druzhinin, Gosudarstvenie Krest'iane, 1:521.
33Druzhinin. Gosudarstvenie Krest'iane, 2:188.
tried to free up land, in March 1841 declaring the guberniia to be *malozemel'naia* and ordering the reduction of all allotments to eight desiatinas per male soul.\(^{34}\) With a stroke of the pen, this decision "freed" 695,149 desiatinas, room enough for 87,000 new male souls to immigrate. Of course, it is easier to order unpopular changes than to enact them, and this would prove the case in the Molochna. Orthodox state peasants responded with petitions protesting that, "on eight desiatinas of poor land one may hardly obtain enough grain to feed oneself."\(^{35}\) Regional authorities entered the fray on the side of the peasants, for the first time displaying a consciousness of the region's unique environmental conditions. Baron von Rosen, who headed the guberniia office of the Ministry of State Domains in Simferopol, wrote to Kiselev protesting that eight desiatinas of land was "too little, because the land in this region is for the most part without water, and in places, saline."\(^{36}\) Admiral M. S. Mordvinov, newly appointed Governor General of New Russia, joined in the protests, noting that much of the land in question was "unsuited to crop-raising. Therefore, [the peasants] employ themselves for the most part in livestock-raising, which demands large pastures."\(^{37}\)

These protests did not go unnoticed. As George L. Yaney observes, Kiselev relied upon peasant consent to enact reforms, and would "call off his reform programs on the

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\(^{34}\)First Department of the Ministry of State Domains to Kiselev, 31 March 1843, *RGLA*, fond 383, *opis* 1, *delo* 190.

\(^{35}\)Veselovskoi Sel'skoi Obshchestvo to Ministry of State Domains, 1841, *RGLA*, fond 383, *opis* 1, *delo* 190. This petition is quoted at greater length in chapter 2, p. ???.


state lands whenever they aroused determined opposition." Although there is no evidence that the state ever officially reversed its decision to reduce land allotments, there is equally no evidence that it implemented them. Still, the decision to reclassify the guberniia as malozemel'naia was not without consequences. Prior to 1841, the state's policy was to maintain allotments of fifteen desiatinas per male soul by allotting new land as the population increased. After 1841, this was no longer the case. The state assigned whatever unoccupied land was available to peasants from other guberniias, and when large tracts of new land became available after the exile of Dukhobor and Molokan Sectarians, much of this, too, was distributed to new immigrants. Consequently, land holdings shrank, slowly placing pressure on peasants to alter their land-use practices to more intensive methods.

Before examining the transition to such new methods in chapters five and six, the immediate social consequences of the crises of the 1830s demand attention. They are most vividly illustrated in the story of the Dukhobor exile, which, not coincidentally, had its direct antecedents in the land requests made by Molokans in 1832. Initially the Molokan requests fell on deaf ears, and it was only after a group of Molokans asked permission to leave the Molochna and emigrate to the Caucasus that the Ministry of Internal Affairs conducted a close investigation of their concerns.39

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The Molokan population had grown to 1,352 male souls, leaving them with less than ten *desiatinas* per male soul. In 1834 the state proposed resolving the problem by pooling together all "sectarian land," Molokan and Dukhobor alike, and redistributing it at the rate of fifteen *desiatinas* per male soul. However, excess Dukhobor land was not held as allotment land, which was subject to redistribution by fiat based on population size, but was held under perpetual lease, granted by imperial decree and exempt from arbitrary manipulations by local officials. Local officials questioned the Dukhobors' right to the "privilege" of such a large and rich land grant, pointing out that much of the land had been given to the Dukhobors under the now-invalid assumption more Dukhobors would immigrate to the region. They proved unable to break the Dukhobor lease on these grounds, but the investigation of the sectarians that grew out of this renewed state attention marks the starting point of the chain of events leading to the exile of the Dukhobors in the 1840s.

Accusations in the 1830s drew upon suspicions and prejudices dating from earlier investigations. In 1815, accusations of wrong-doing made by former members of the sect led to an inquiry by Father Nalimskii, an Orthodox priest, and the arrest of Dukhobor leader Savelii Kapustin and sixteen of his "Apostles." Labelling Kapustin the "leading false teacher" of the Dukhobors, Nalimskii accused him and his followers of vaguely defined

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40 Summarised in a report of the Tavride office of the Ministry of State Domains to the First Department of the Ministry of State Domains in St. Petersburg, 1838, RGLA, fond 383, opis 1, delo 234.
41 "Po otosheniui Tavricheskoi kazennoi ekspeditsii. O Molokanakh Melitopol'skogo uezda zhelaushchikh peresemusia v zakavkazskie provintsii," 1833, GAKO, fond 26, opis 1, delo 9830.
42 For a thorough summary of the accusations and investigation, see Woodcock & Avakumovic, *The Dukhobors*, 49-52. A full record of the investigation is located in GAKO, f. 1, o. 219, d. 3.
"illegal and evil acts," dangerous "not only to the Christian religion, but to the state."43 L. A. Langeron, Vice-Governor of New Russia and a harsh critic of the Dukhobors, reacted by proposing that the Dukhobor community be again broken up and dispersed, but Alexander I intervened, dismissing the charges and ordering the release of Kapustin and his followers.44

In the 1830s the 1815 charges were revived and embellished with new accusations.

Because they are cited as the reason for the Dukhobors' exile, they demand appraisal, starting with the sequence of events leading up to the exile itself. This began with the arrival of Köppen in the Molochna in 1837. He came during his survey of Tavride guberniia for the Fifth Department of the Tsar's Chancellery, forerunner of the Ministry of State Domains and the body responsible for reviewing the condition of the state peasantry.45 Köppen had little to say about the material well-being of the Dukhobors, but repeated accounts of crimes in the villages provided to him by Melitopol Zemski Ispravnik Kolosov. Kolosov, from 1827 to 1830 chair of the District Court in Melitopol, had served on the commission of inquiry that investigated Dukhobor crimes in 1835 to 1836.46 Hostile to the Dukhobors, he claimed the death of Dukhobor leader Vasilii Kalmykov and inheritance of leadership by his son Ilarion in 1832 was followed by "unusual peril amongst the Dukhobors; many murders occurred for various reasons, and many military deserters and bandits hid among them."47 Dukhobors, he claimed, had committed twenty-four murders,

43Ekaterinoslav Arkhiapiskop Iov to Minister of Police, 18 August 1816, GAOO, f. 1, o. 219, d. 3.
44Woodcock & Avakunovic, The Dukhobors, 49-51.
45The Fifth Department project to survey the provinces is described in W. Bruce Lincoln, In The Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats 1825-1861 (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 33.
46Kolosov, "Sekretnaia zapiska," 82-92ob. Kolosov mentions his membership in the commission on page 88ob. of this report.
47Ibid., 86ob.-87.
seven "tyrannical acts of torture," eleven robberies, and had hidden eight deserters. This was a strategically pivotal report that became the key justification for exiling the Dukhobors. It detailed four murders, including a lurid description of the burial alive of a mute, crippled Dukhobor girl named Elisaveta Voronova, and concluded that if the sect leaders could be exiled to "some place else" the remaining Dukhobors would easily convert to Orthodoxy. Köppen appended Kolosov's report to his own, repeated Kolosov's recommendation, and concluded that the "greater part of [the Dukhobors] are discontented with the abuses of the principal sectarians, and can be . . . returned to Orthodoxy." This observation found ready acceptance in St. Petersburg.

In February 1838, Kiselev, newly appointed Minister of State Domains, forwarded to D. N. Bludov, the Minister of Internal Affairs, a copy of Köppen's report along with a letter saying, "His Highness the Emperor, upon reviewing the report, has expressed his Imperial pleasure that I come to an agreement with Your Excellency and the Lord Over-Procurator of the Holy State Synod on measures for the conversion of the majority of the dissenters to Orthodoxy." Bludov responded that most Dukhobors "can easily be converted to Orthodoxy, as soon as the state will take actions to exile the principal sectarians." He forwarded this proposal to Vorontsov, who at first defended the Dukhobors on the grounds that they "raise cattle and sheep, and grow outstanding crops . . .

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48 Ibid., 90ob.-91.
49 Ibid., 91-92ob.
50 Köppen's recommendation is quoted in a report from the MVD to Vorontsov, 22 February 1838, GAOO, f. 1, a. 200, d. 52.
51 Kiselev to Bludov, 3 February 1838, RGLA, f. 1284, a. 197, d. 131.
52 Secret Section of the MVD to Vorontsov, 22 February 1838, GAOO, f. 1, a. 200, d. 52.
can be an extremely useful community and even serve as model agriculturists."\(^{53}\)

However, in August, bowing to the Ministry of Internal Affairs' wishes, Vorontsov sent Bludov a detailed plan for forcing the Dukhobors to convert by exiling to the Caucasus those who refused.\(^{54}\) Nicholas signed the fateful decree ordering the Dukhobors into exile on 17 February 1839.\(^{55}\) In most particulars, it followed Vorontsov's recommendations.

Ultimately, the state ordered 773 Dukhobors to be exiled in the summer of 1841 "without option" [bez zhrebiia].\(^{56}\) The remaining Dukhobors, exiled in four groups during the following four summers, were given the option to convert to Orthodoxy and remain in the Molochna.\(^{57}\) Ministry reactions to Köppen's report and the reports of officials supervising the exile indicate that the state expected most of the Dukhobors to convert. At the highest levels of the administration, then, the point was not punishment, but conversion. This policy could only work, of course, if the allegations of disruptions in the community were true. In the event, only 248 Dukhobors converted to Orthodoxy, while 4,992 affirmed their faith and took the long trek to the Caucasus, a demonstration of solidarity that refutes the claim that the community was disrupted and consequently raises serious doubts about the truth of the principal evidence of disruption, the murder accusations.\(^{58}\)


\(^{54}\) Vorontsov to Bludov, 13 August 1838, RGLA, f. 1284, a. 197, d. 131.

\(^{55}\) Fry, "The Dukhobors," 286.

\(^{56}\) "Spisok naznachennyk k pereselenie v akhaltsyskii uezd bez zhrebiia," 26 March 1842, GAOO, f. 1, a. 151, d. 77.

\(^{57}\) "Spisok Dukhoborstam naznachennym k pereseleniuiu v Akhaltsyskii uezd po zhrebiu," 26 March 1841, GAOO, f. 1, a. 151, d. 77.

\(^{58}\) For a summary of all five parties, see "Otchet o Melitopolskikh Dukhobortsakh . . . pereselennyi za Kavkaz," n.d., GAOO, f. 1, a. 166, d. 32. For the numbers that converted,
Some of the accusations are detailed in an "Extract from the ongoing investigation of various crimes carried out in the Dukhobor and Molokan colonies of Melitopol uyezd." In the absence of extant official records from the investigation, this document is potentially important, but it is also problematic, for it is undated, and there is no indication of its provenance. Its most recent testimony dates from 4 March 1836, the year in which, according to Kolosov, the investigation ended. On the other hand, it describes just nineteen murders, not the twenty-four mentioned by Kolosov, or the figure of twenty-one that appears, uncredited, in the influential study by nineteenth-century Russian historian Orest Novitskii. Still, the nineteen include all four that Kolosov specifically mentions in his report. Whether or not the Extract is complete, it sheds important light on the charges against the Dukhobors. As a closer examination reveals, many of those charges can only be described as unfounded rumour.

To begin with, it must be stressed that some of the alleged murders almost certainly did occur. In two cases the murderers confessed, and one of these, the 1825 murder of

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see "Spisok Dukhobortsev prisoedinennykh k pravoslavnoi tserkvi s 27 Maia 1843 goda po 5 Iunia 1844," and "Spisok Gosudarstvennykh krest'ianin iz sekta Dukhoborcheskogo . . . zhelanie obratit'sia v Pravoslavie," RGLA, f. 383, o. 5, d. 4319; and "Spisok prisoedinovshikhia Dukhobortsakh k pravoslavnoi tserkvi s 1 Iuna 1842 goda po 27 Maia 1843 goda," RGLA, f. 383, o. 4, d. 3212. The figure of twenty-seven families reported by Woodcock and Avakumovic apparently only includes the May 1843 to June 1844 list.

Kolosov said the investigation was ordered by Vorontsov in 1834, and took place in 1835 and 1836. Secondary accounts often refer to a six-year investigation lasting from 1834 to 1839. See, e.g. Baron Von Haxthausen, The Russian Empire, its People, Institutions, and Resources, trans, Robert Farie, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1856), 1:293; Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Doukhobors, 57. Novitskii says it lasted five years, from 1835 to 1839 (Novitskii, Dukhobortsy, 144).

Novitskii, Dukhobortsy, 145.
seventeen-year-old Elisaveta Voronova, was probably the most notorious of all the crimes ascribed to the Dukhobors. The Extract recounts the confession of Ivan Voronov, Elisaveta's brother:

He told how, finding the maintenance of Elisaveta, a mute and a cripple, a burden on his shoulders, he first intended to bury her in his garden and put a hay stack over the grave, but because his wife Marina refused to go away and stay in the cabin [where she couldn't have witnessed the murder] because she thought he wanted to sneak away to meet with another women, he was forced to dig the grave on the steppe instead.

Ivan was said to have described how he buried his sister alive, then confessed to his mother and the village elders. The unfortunate Elisaveta's body was reportedly moved to an unmarked grave in the village cemetery, then made "invisible by sending cattle to trample over it."

The accusation that Dukhobors buried people alive surfaces again and again in subsequent accounts. Vorontsov abandoned his defence of the Dukhobors in part, he wrote, because they "bury the living in the ground." His information was drawn from Kolosov's report, and it thus appears that the example of the single, admittedly gruesome murder of Voronova was exaggerated into a common Dukhobor practice. Haxthausen, in the most famous description of the crimes, says that "bodies were found buried alive," although he gives no proof of the claim, and both Novitskii, and Woodcock and Avakumovic echo Haxthausen.

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62 Case 12, "Vypiska, iz dela," 31-36.
63 Vorontsov to Bludov, 13 August 1838, RGLA, f. 1284, o. 197, d. 138.
64 Haxthausen, The Russian Empire, 1:293; Novitskii, Dukhobortsy, 144; Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Donkhobors, 57.
The second confessed murder was that of Evdokim Lukianov. One day in 1827, Lukianov, a convert from the Dukhobor faith to Orthodoxy, reportedly set out for the Dukhobor village of Bogdanovka to borrow some money from his father. Walking along the road he met three Dukhobors, Onisim Botkin and the brothers Semen and Stepan Voikin, who offered him a lift in their wagon. He discovered they were illegally transporting vodka, demanded some, and threatened to turn them in if they refused. In the ensuing brawl, he was killed. Two other alleged murders, although unproved, also have an air of authenticity. In 1803, in a dispute over an unpaid debt, Semen Negreev was supposedly stabbed to death by his brother Pavl and another man. In 1820, during a dispute over a cow, a certain Karp Susoev was allegedly beaten and later died. These three cases, if true, were hardly evidence of a religiously-based crusade against converts. Rather, they are the type of mundane violence typical of peasant society throughout Russia. They do not denote a crisis in the Molochna Dukhobor community.

Several cases were less mundane, but also less believable due to their reliance on extremely questionable witnesses. The state's star witnesses were Iosif Gankin, a one-time Dukhobor village elder, and his son Fomin. They testified in six cases involving thirteen accused murderers and seven victims. During a District Court trial in 1828 they had testified in five of these cases, but the charges were dismissed and Iosif and Fomin imprisoned for giving false evidence. The two escaped and ran off to Ekaterinoslav, where they converted to Orthodoxy "for protection," and returned with a letter from the Bishop who had converted them asking for leniency. This did not impress District Court Judge Sokolovskii

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65Case 14, "Vypiska, iz dela," 45ob.-49ob.
66Case 1, "Vypiska, iz dela," 1-2ob.
who threw them back in jail. They again escaped, this time to Simferopol where they appealed to Langeron, by now retired from his Vice-Gubernatorial position but still influential. Armed with a letter from Langeron, they returned again, and the still-unimpressed Judge Sokolovskii jailed them again, concluding that Langeron's letter "protected their heads but not their bodies." This time the apparently much-improved penal system managed to hold onto Iosif, but Fomin slipped away again, back to Langeron in Simferopol, who finally contrived to have the charges dismissed. Vindicated, the two returned to the stand to repeat their testimony during the later investigation. 68

The most interesting case involving the Gankins was the alleged 1821 murder of Petr Plakein and a friend, identified only as "Sergei." 69 Later anecdotal accounts often mention the exhumation of bodies during the investigation, but the Plakein case is the only example to appear in the Extract. 70 According to the Gankins, Petr and Sergei were Dukhobors who had been raised in the Molochna and returned in 1820 as army deserters, where they were soon heard making drunken threats to burn down the houses of the elders who had singled them out for conscription. Village officials arrested them, intending to turn them over to the authorities, but the two threatened to reveal names of other deserters in the Dukhobor villages. The Gankins claimed that Vasilii Kalmykov, leader of the Dukhobors, ordered the two murdered to prevent them testifying, and his orders were carried out by five Apostles who disposed of the bodies in a dry well. Dukhobor witnesses, however, disputed the Gankins' testimony, claiming the two men had simply disappeared

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68 The trials and tribulations of Iosif and Fomin are related in Case 12, "Vypiska, iz dela," 31-36.
69 Case 11, "Vypiska, iz dela," 20-31. Some testimony mentions a third victim, identified only as "Ivan."
70 See e.g. Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Dukhobors," 57.
and were thought to have fled to the town of Azov. During the investigation the commission had the well dug up and found it filled with horse bones, and among them "one bone, broken in two, that resembled a human arm, and also two more bones that resembled human bones." This the commission accepted as verification of the Gankins' story.

The principal witness in six of the other cases was a Molokan woman, Agafia Nemanikhina, who had no personal knowledge of the murders and simply relayed rumours heard by her husband Grigorii, who could not testify himself because he was "crazy in the head" [pomeshatel'stro v umel].71 One of the six cases was that of Elisaveta Voronova, described above, but the others were more dubious. The least convincing is short enough to quote in full:

The Fifth [Case]: Concerning two unknown merchants from the city of Feodosiia who came to purchase wool in an unknown year. The Molokan woman Agafia Nemanikhina reports the rumour that of two merchants who came to the village of Terpenie to buy wool, one was drowned by Dukhobors in the Molochna River, and the other has disappeared; concerning these people nothing further is known.72

Several aspects of the accusations demand comment. To begin with, the nineteen murders alleged in the Extract were not part of a savage mid-1830s spree, but were spread over twenty-six years, from 1802 to 1828. This is in sharp contrast to published accounts, which rely heavily on Haxthausen. According to Haxthausen, Ilarion Kalmykov, who inherited the leadership of the Dukhobors in 1832, was an ineffectual leader who spent his time in drunken orgies, while the real administration of the community fell to a Council of

71 This is explained in Case 2, "Vypiska, iz dela," 2ob.
72 Case 5, "Vypiska, iz dela," 9ob.
Elders. The Orphans' Home, the Dukhobor seat of administration, soon became a "den of crime," while the Council of Elders constituted itself a terrible inquisitional tribunal. The principle, "Whoso denies his God shall perish by the sword," was interpreted according to their caprice; the house of justice was called Rai i muka, paradise and torture; the place of execution was on the island at the mouth of the Molochna. A mere suspicion of treachery, or of an intention to go over to the Russian Church, was punished with torture and death.

In the English version, Haxthausen claims the Council had 200 people murdered, while the German and French versions give the number as 400. Novitskii cites the French version, but qualifies it, saying "if one does not believe the rumors about the number of Dukhobor murders, one must in any case accept the results of the investigative commission. It, through all of its persistent and skilful unearthing of secret crimes, revealed twenty-one murders." He then questions his own conclusions, admitting that "unfortunately, the documents addressing this matter, the most interesting and important in the history of the Melitopol Dukhobors during the reign of [Nicholas I], have still not come to light." Even the most judicious study, by Woodcock and Avakumovic, quotes Haxthausen at length. It rejects his claims regarding the number of deaths, but accepts Novitskii's reduced figure of twenty-one. The new evidence cited here finally gives firm grounds for dismissing Haxthausen's exaggerated claims.

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73Haxthausen, The Russian Empire, 1:293.
75Novitskii, Dukhobortsy, 144.
76Novitskii, Dukhobortsy, 145.
77Woodcock and Avakumovic, The Donkobors, 59.
Even the nineteen alleged murders described in the Extract were based on the most tenuous of evidence. In only two cases did accused murderers confess their crimes. In nine the bodies of the alleged victims were not found, although in one, that of Elisaveta Voronova, the murderer had confessed. Thirteen of the fourteen cases had previously been investigated without leading to a conviction. One had originally been ruled death by illness, one a suicide, and one a drowning. Eleven relied heavily on rumours related by Dukhobor converts to Orthodoxy, and none of these converts had first-hand knowledge of the events they testified to. Six of the cases had as their primary witness the Molokan Nemanikhina, who relied exclusively on rumours, while another six relied on Iosif and Fomin Gankin, who had previously been jailed for giving false testimony. These reports are no more credible than accusations of ritual murder levelled so often against Jews. They provide no basis for concluding the Dukhobor community was deeply troubled in the 1830s.

A second report of Dukhobor crimes makes the claims of a split in the community even more doubtful. A December 1840 report of Melitopol Uezd Striapchik [Procurator] Andreevskii provides a summary of the "crimes committed by Dukhobors in Melitopol Uezd" in the period 1831 to 1840. According to Andreevskii, there were just fifty-three significant incidents: eleven cases of arson, eleven of robbery, two of desecrating holy icons, two of concealing runaways, one each of illegally freeing a prisoner, possessing counterfeit money, insolence to a village administrator, and abuse of office, one case of carrying out a death penalty on a condemned man without obtaining the proper authorisation of the authorities, twelve premature deaths from illness, four premature deaths from excessive consumption of alcohol, one suicide, one attempted suicide, and finally, one -- just one --

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78 Andreevskii to Vorontsov, 6 December 1840, GAOO, f. 1, o. 200, d. 52.
murder. The report specifically excluded crimes "presently [under] consideration by the Senate," partly because their disposition had not yet been decided, and partly because they included "cases that occurred prior to the [specified] ten years." Presumably, the excluded crimes were precisely those for which the Dukhobors were about to be exiled. In other words, twenty-two months after Nicholas had ordered the exile, the Senate had still not ruled on them.

Andreevskii's reports of arson must raise the eyebrows of anyone familiar with the history of the Dukhobors in Canada, but due to the dearth of surviving court records regarding crime in neighbouring communities, it is impossible to know if this represents an unusual pattern or incidence of crime. Desecrating icons was certain to attract the attention of the Orthodox state, but two incidents in ten years could hardly have warranted a wholesale exile. Harbouring runaways was the most common complaint against the Dukhobors, but again Andreevskii reports only two instances. Altogether, the total number of incidents -- an average of just 5.3 per year -- is not indicative of severe disturbances in the community. By comparison, Steven L. Hoch documents an average of 256 disciplinary actions per year in the 3500-person serf estate of Petrovskoe in Tambov guberniia in the same era. Peasant societies are notoriously violent and crime-ridden, and it would be fatuous to claim that no murders occurred in the Molochna Dukhobor villages, but barring the discovery of the records of the investigative commission, the accusations of mass murder must be treated as groundless. Most of the murders probably never happened.

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79 On arson in Canada, see Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Doukhobors, 308-331.
Unfortunately, the state believed they did, basing its decision on Köppen's report, and by extension on Kolosov's description of the crimes. Kolosov implied the murders were proved beyond doubt, but in truth the accusations were so dubious that District Court Judge Sokolovskii jailed two of the main accusers in 1828. Why were accusations, so definitively dismissed in 1828, reopened in 1835? Although no clear evidence exists in this regard, likely determinants were the cholera epidemic and the Great Drought. Under such circumstances, the Dukhobors' large land holdings may have prompted jealousy among neighbours. Jews in Russia and elsewhere often found themselves singled out as scapegoats in times of crises, and the Dukhobors, as a prominent religious minority, may have suffered from a similar pattern of discrimination.81

This suggestion does not, however, explain why Köppen accepted Kolosov's version of events. One important factor was undoubtedly Cornies' implicit endorsement. As chairman-for-life of the Molochna Mennonite District's Agricultural Society and a frequent correspondent of Kiselev and other top officials, Cornies was the most powerful, trusted, and influential man in the Molochna.82 At the time he was unhappy over what he saw as the Dukhobors' unscrupulous interference in his program to provide merino sheep to the Nogai Tatars. In an 1836 letter to his friend Aleksandr Fadeev, who had recently left the Guardianship Committee to become Chief Guardian of the Kalmyk Horde, he expressed revulsion at the crimes described in the investigative commission's report, writing "I have

82Cornies' political role is described in Harvey L. Dyck, "Russian Servitor and Mennonite Hero: Light and Shadow in Images of Johann Cornies," Journal of Mennonite Studies 2 (1984), 9-41. On Cornies' anger about Dukhobor dealings with the Nogai Tatars, see "Prikaz Dzhuretskomu volostnomu pravleniiu," P/JBRMA, file 691.
come to an end with the Dukhobors, crime upon crime, it makes your skin crawl." In his report to Kiselev, Köppen named Cornies as a primary informant on Dukhobor religious practices, implying that Cornies supported his conclusions. Cornies' implied endorsement would have reassured Kiselev, and must have helped create support in the capital for Köppen's recommendations.

Religious considerations must be given first place in any explanation for the exile, but it is not by itself an adequate explanation. After all, there is no evidence that the Molokans were subjected to similar pressures, despite the common perception they were all but identical to the Dukhobors. Kolosov's report, so openly hostile to Dukhobors, says only that Molokans were "distinct" from their sectarian neighbours. Köppen gives a fuller description, concluding that "a significant portion of the Molokans, while not renouncing the general tenets of that sect and their mistaken attitudes towards Orthodoxy and the performance of their duties, show in their written addresses the feelings of devotion to the throne of faithful subjects, and are prepared to affirm their obligations." It is perhaps possible to discern Cornies' influence here, too, for he held the Molokans, who were people of the Book, in higher esteem than the Dukhobors. However, there was a second important difference between the two groups. The Molokans were land-poor, and there could have been little profit in levelling accusations against them. The implication is that Kolosov stood to profit from accusations against the Dukhobors. Circumstantial evidence supports this supposition.

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83 Cornies to Fadeev, 28 July 1836, PjBRMA, file 236.
84 Secret Section of the MVD to Vorontsov, 22 February 1838, GAOO, f. 1, o. 200, d. 52.
With good land growing increasingly scarce in the Molochna, if the Dukhobors were forced to vacate theirs, someone was sure to profit. A significant result of the investigations of the 1830s was to break the Dukhobors' perpetual lease and free their 26,878 desiatinas of prime land for reallocation. A possible beneficiary from this was Kolosov, for although there is no record of him receiving Dukhobor land, he was in a position to influence its allocation, a potentially profitable process for anyone not averse to a little graft. There is support for this inference elsewhere. In 1841, in a petition appealing their exile, Dukhobors specifically identified Kolosov as the true source of their troubles, accusing him of "enriching himself in various oppressive ways with our money and estates." Another indication the Dukhobors were subject to extortion by local officials came from a group of Dukhobor exiles en route to the Caucasus, who told German zoologist Moritz Wagner that their money "filled many an official pocket." Intriguingly, in 1903 Joseph Elkinton reported a Dukhobor tradition that their exile was sparked by false accusations of a single, unidentified official angered by their refusal to meet his blackmail demands. The Dukhobors' accusations are at least plausible. As Zemskii Ispravnik Kolosov was in a position in 1835 to institute the investigation, while his former job as Chair of the District Court would have provided direct knowledge of the cases that constituted the charges against the Dukhobors.

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85 Petition from the Dukhobors to Nicholas I, 22 March 1841, GAOO, f. 1, a. 151, d. 77. Note that this petition refutes Aylmer Maude's argument, echoed by Woodcock & Avakumovic, that the lack of Dukhobor protests tends to confirm their guilt (Maude, A Peculiar People: The Dukhobors [New York: Funk and Wagnells, 1904], 149; Woodcock & Avakumovic, The Dukhobors, 59).

86 Quoted in Fry, The Dukhobors, 278.

87 Joseph Elkinton, The Dukhobors: Their History in Russia. Their Migration to Canada (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1903), 261-262.
The Dukhobor reference in their 1841 petition to their "estates" is particularly important, for the only Dukhobor land that figured in Kolosov's denunciation was the 26,878 desiatinas of leased land that brought the Dukhobors under scrutiny in 1832. Kolosov objected to the advantage Dukhobors gained over neighbouring "land poor" Orthodox state peasants by renting the large tract, and also to their paying only an "insignificant price" for it.88 His concerns were echoed by Köppen, who observed that similar land brought lease payments of as much as a ruble per desiatina.89 In 1838 the confiscation of this "excess land" figured prominently in the Ministry of Internal Affairs' recommendations for dealing with the Dukhobors,90 and in 1842, in rejecting a Dukhobor plea to maintain control of the land, an official in the Ministry of State Domains concluded that "in as much as the land is extremely good and contains everything needed for new settlers, and considering that the treasury can realise from it an incomparably greater return, while it now receives only a token payment of twenty kopecks per desiatina . . . I recommend that it be returned to the treasury, particularly in view of the fact that the Dukhobors have in no way earned such kindness from the state."91

It is plausible, then, that Kolosov manipulated the state for personal gain. It still needs to be explained why the state might have been open to manipulation. In part, the answer lies in the shift in state policy after Alexander I's death in 1825. Almost immediately after his ascension, Nicholas I introduced sharply reactionary policies toward sectarians. An

88Kolosov, "Sekretnaia zapiska," 87ob.
89Köppen, "O raskol'nikakh," 44ob.
90"Zapiska zakluchaiushchaia v sebiia predpoloizheniia o merakh votchinenii Malakanov i Dukhobortsov Tavricheskoi gubernii," 22 February 1838, GAOO, f. 1, o. 200, d. 52.
91Ministry of State Domains to Inzov, 3 February 1842, GAOO, f. 1, o. 152, d. 16.
important objective of his "Official Nationality," with its tenets of "Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality," was to reaffirm the commonality of goals of church and state. This rather amorphous principle could have had little focused expression at regional levels, for the inefficiency of tsarist administration in peripheral regions is legendary. Still, the general tenor of Nicholas' policies must have made the Dukhobors an obvious target for regional officials, for the sectarians could no longer expect support from St. Petersburg. On 20 October 1830, Nicholas issued a decree directed at "Dukhobors, Ikonobors, Molokans, Judaizers and others recognised as particularly pernicious heresies." Its first clause reflects a sharp turn in Dukhobor affairs, ordering that "all dissenters ... accused of spreading their heresies and attracting others to them, [and] also [accused of] temptation, unruliness and insolence against the church and the clergy of the Orthodox faith are to be handed over to the courts." The cholera riots of 1830 and 1831 must have further poisoned state attitudes toward Dukhobors, for the riots had scared Nicholas, making him particularly sensitive to any hint of popular unrest. Although the Molochna Dukhobors, who had acquired a reputation for peaceful prosperity during Alexander's reign, avoided any repercussions until 1835, the decision to exile them must be seen within the context of such policies.

If Nicholas' reactionary policies worked against the Dukhobors, oddly enough so did his peasant reforms. With the state seriously considering reducing land allotments of state peasants from fifteen desiatinas per male soul to eight, it is not surprising the large

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92Official Nationality was not officially proclaimed until 2 April 1833, but the attitudes underlying it date from the start of Nicholas' reign. The standard account is Nicholas Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).
93VPSZ, 5:4010.
94McGrew, Russia and the Cholera, 127-128.
Dukhobor allotments attracted attention. While this may not have been enough to make the state's representatives accept open lies about Dukhobor crimes, it was surely motivation not to question well-phrased exaggerations when the opportunity arose to break the Dukhobor lease.

Unfortunately for the Dukhobors, the state accepted the accusations of Kolosov and others. The 26 January 1841 proclamation of exile reads:

All your crimes have been discovered, and the innocent blood which you have shed calls down upon your heads the rigours of the law. By your actions you have rendered yourselves unworthy of the indulgence and pardon which were granted to you by his Majesty, and you have exhausted the patience of the authorities, who are in the end convinced that you should be transferred into distant regions where you will no longer be injurious to your fellow men.  

The Dukhobors did not go without complaint. In March 1841 they petitioned the state, describing their fate in pathetic terms:

We unfortunate 4,000 souls, torn from our homes and the land which we, over dozens of years and with great difficulty obtained, and spilling tears in comprehension of our fate, must set out on a journey, a long journey, and settle in a barren climate on infertile land, impoverished, brought almost to the sacrifice of our lives, comforted only by the knowledge that we are guiltless.

In the petition they asked permission to stay in the Molochna, but adamantly refused to abandon their religious convictions. A second petition, from the group designated for exile without appeal, asked only that the exile be delayed by a year so they could obtain fair prices for the belongings they could not take with them. A third petition,
turning to the question of property, asked that the Dukhobors be allowed to retain control of their 26,878 desiatinas of leased land, presumably by subletting it. All were refused.

As for the final benefactors in the reallocation process, most Dukhobor land went to land-short Orthodox peasants. The Molokans, whose need for land had instigated the affair, also benefited. In 1842 they were granted enough Dukhobor land to bring their total holdings to fifteen desiatinas per male soul. This did not completely satisfy the Molokans, for roughly 1,200 of them asked for and received permission to join the Dukhobor trek to the Caucasus. Such permission was given only grudgingly, for there were suspicions in some quarters that the Molokans were simply trying to avoid tax arrears that had built up during the crop failures of 1839. Those who remained in the Molochna after 1845 no longer held the state's attention. For the most part, the governor of Tavride guberniia contented himself with one or two sentences in annual reports to St. Petersburg, reassuring the capital that the local sectarians were an exemplary lot, farming their fields, tending their gardens, and keeping their religious views to themselves.

The single largest benefactors of the exile were Johann Cornies and his brother David. In 1845, 4,039 desiatinas of the land taken from the Dukhobors passed into their

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99Ministry of State Domains to Inzov, 3 February 1842, GAOO, f. 1, a. 152, d. 16.

100Ministry of State Domains, Department of Agriculture, Tavride Province to Ministry of State Domains, First Department, St. Petersburg, 14 April 1842, RGLA f. 383, a. 1, d. 234.

101The precise number who emigrated is unclear, but between 1842 and 1845 the number of Molokans in the Molochna dropped by 1221, from 2961 to 1740. See “Otchetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov,” 1842, RGLA, fond 1281, opis 4, delo 73a-1843; “Otchetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov,” 1845, RGLA, fond 1281, opis 4, delo 69a-1846.

102“Po pros’ba Molokan Melitopol’skago Uezda selenii Astrakhanki . . . o dozvolenii im pereselit’siia zakavkaz,” 1841, RGLA, f. 1284, a. 199, d. 74.

103See, e.g., “Otchetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov . . . za 1847,” RGLA, f. 1281, a. 4, d. 35a.
hands. The lease price was the same, low, original twenty kopecks per desiatina per year. There is no small irony that the Cornies brothers received land that was taken away from the Dukhobors in part due to religion, in part because it exceeded the standard state peasant allotment, and in part because the twenty kopeck per desiatina lease payment was only "token." After all, Johann and David were also not Orthodox, and were themselves state peasants. Of course, the Cornies brothers were peasants in name only. Johann, the most powerful man in the Molochna, had hosted both Alexander I and Nicholas I in his home, and as chair-for-life of the Agricultural Society acted as the Ministry of State Domains' main representative in the area. No doubt he had "earned such kindness" from the state.

This account of the Dukhobor exile is of interest on many levels. Most basically, it disputes the accuracy of published accounts of the sect by refuting the charges of mass murder that have been levelled against them and concomitant assumptions about strife and disruptions in their community. Even Woodcock and Avakumovic, who are at once judicious and sympathetic toward the Dukhobors, are constrained to conclude that "it is not impossible that at one moment in their history the Dukhobors, isolated at [the Molochna River] like the Anabaptists in Münster, should have found the sense of their divine mission becoming so demanding that destruction did not seem too bad a fate for the heretical." The violence of the alleged crimes has always stood at odds with the Dukhobors' self-proclaimed belief in the in-dwelling spirit of God and consequently in pacifism, and thus it

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104 The terms of the original lease are mentioned in correspondence regarding David Cornies' request to renew it in 1861. See Ministry of State Domains to Governor General of Novorossiia, 24 June 1861, GAOO, f. 1, o. 81, d. 90.
105 See footnote 91.
106 Woodcock and Avakumovic, The Doukhobors, 59.
has raised doubts about the consistency of those beliefs. It has also stood at odds with what is known about their behaviour generally in this time. With evidence of the murders refuted, what remains are accounts of a prosperous and uncommonly unified religious community, victimised by religious persecution, not victimiser.

The Dukhobor story also reflects the Russian state's broader policy toward religious dissent. The standard account emphasises Alexander I's benevolence and Nicholas I's reactionary conservatism. Richard Crummey, in his study of the Vyg community of Old Believers, writes that Nicholas "was often inconsistent and more frequently exhibited inflexibility, insensitivity, and heavy-handed good intentions than malice or deliberate cruelty."\(^\text{107}\) Nicholas' inconsistency is evident in the Dukhobor case. They were a target of opportunity, singled out almost by accident by Köppen as he conducted a survey primarily concerned with finding land for state peasants from interior guberniias. However, the exile of the Dukhobors was manifestly cruel, and even malicious, showing a patently cynical willingness to employ criminal accusations to force conversion. There was nothing subtle about this. It was not the crimes but the opportunity to convert the Dukhobors that caught Köppen's attention, and in all subsequent correspondence, this manipulation was openly acknowledged. Yet, curiously, the real objective, conversion, always remained dependent on the criminal accusations. By comparison, the Molokans were never subjected to similar pressures, because, although the state considered them close relatives of the Dukhobors, there were no criminal accusations, and hence there was no opportunity to force their

conversion. There is an implication here that even the reactionary Nicholas was concerned about public reaction to blatantly unjust religious persecution, and so required a less controversial justification for his actions.

Beyond the treatment of dissidents by the state, and of more direct importance for the present study, the Dukhobor affair also sheds light on centre-periphery relations in Imperial Russia. Sociologists who study centre-periphery relations sometimes make a useful distinction between peripheries, as areas fully subordinated to the centre, and frontiers, as "areas of growth in 'virgin' territory." The Ministry of State Domains' expectation that land would be available for settlement in the Molochna was based on a perception of New Russia as frontier in this sense. The Dukhobor story shows that this was not the case. Land leased to the Dukhobors in perpetuity for just twenty kopecks per desiatina in 1824 had by 1837 appreciated by a factor of five, a clear indication that good land was becoming increasingly scarce.

On the other hand, "periphery," with its connotation of political subordination, is also a problematic label for the Molochna. A defining characteristic of Imperial Russia's administrative system was the inability of the centre to effectively administer outlying regions. In the Molochna, local officials had been aware of land shortages since at least 1832, when Molokans requested more land, but clearly the same knowledge did not exist in St. Petersburg. The gap between the reality of Molochna conditions and the knowledge of central policy makers formed an important barrier to effective central control.

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Kolosov preyed on this gap between regional reality and central knowledge. Setting aside the human tragedy of the Dukhobor affair, this is probably the most important lesson it has to offer. This obscure regional official was able to bring the full weight of the autocratic state down upon the Dukhobors with a few carefully worded and grossly exaggerated charges. This is an important refinement to existing interpretations of centre-periphery relations, for Kolosov's report could not have affected the Dukhobors if the state were not in a position to exercise its power. This was not a case of a lack of central power, but of its misdirection. A critical element leading to the exile was Köppen's arrival in the region, for as representative of a state intent upon reasserting power over its peasants, Köppen provided Kolosov a channel into the centre. In a classic example of the tail wagging the dog, the regional official directed the power of the centre to his own ends.

By the 1830s, then, the Molochna was neither frontier nor periphery. In fact, what happened to the Dukhobors is best understood as part of a transition from frontier to periphery. Köppen, a prime example of the men W. Bruce Lincoln terms "enlightened bureaucrats," came to the Molochna to conduct a survey in preparation for the reform of the state peasantry.\(^{109}\) Reform was by definition an assertion of control, and the attempt to bring the Dukhobors into conformity with the majority of Russian state peasants, both by converting them to Orthodoxy and by reducing their land holdings to the state peasant norm, was part of the process of asserting this control. On the other hand, the fraud that justified the exile was only possible because of the state's ignorance, a product of its lack of full control in the transitional period.

\(^{109}\) Lincoln, *In The Vanguard of Reform*, xiv.
By the 1830s, all Molochna settlers faced the need to renegotiate their relationship with the central state. Dukhobors, confronted by both religious prejudice and jealousy because of their large land holdings, could not defend themselves against the abuse of power, and consequently were exiled. The ways other settlers dealt with the need to defend their land holdings against central demands as well as internal demands, is taken up more fully in chapters five and six.
Chapter Five

Johann Cornies and the Birth of a New Mennonite World-View

Johann Cornies was the dominant figure in Russian Mennonite society in the 1830s and 1840s, and his influence spread far beyond the Molochna, extending to the halls of the Ministry of State Domains in St. Petersburg, and even to the tsar. Denounced as the “tree devil” by outraged conservative Mennonite contemporaries, grouped with Menno Simons himself by Mennonite historian P. M. Friesen in 1911, and labelled the “prophet of progress” by anthropologist James Urry in 1989, Cornies’ legacy of modernisation, secularisation, and religious discord, remains controversial even today.¹

There is no doubt that the effect of Cornies’ actions was, on the one hand, to guide Mennonite society along a path to great prosperity, and on the other, to break down the barriers that insulated Mennonites from secular authority, leading to serious religious dissension. However, the image that has survived of Cornies as a secular figure, acting outside of and in opposition to traditional Mennonite society, obscures the fundamentally important point that Cornies was a devout Mennonite who owed his initial prominence in Mennonite society as much to his position as a leading congregational figure as to his role in secular administrative organs. Indeed, there is an important sense in which Cornies was the leader, not of a secular movement, but of a religious one. It is this that made his actions so politically divisive in a Mennonite world that was dominated politically by congregations. The vision of civil society Cornies began to develop in the 1820s and shaped into an

¹On changing perceptions of Cornies, see Dyck, “Russian Servitor,” passim.
articulate and all-encompassing model by the 1840s was a *moral* vision, born at once of his sophisticated understanding of the challenges facing Mennonites, and of his equally sophisticated assessment of the options available to them if they wished to survive as *Mennonites*. He changed the face of the Russian Mennon religious world, but only to ensure its survival in a changing secular world. Along the way, he helped to transform the entire Molochna economy.

Mennonite relations with secular authority had always been complex and contradictory. On the one hand, the Mennonite religious ideal was to live apart from the secular world in self-sufficient agricultural communities, self-administered in accordance with religious principles. On the other hand, most Mennonites were faced with the reality of living within the European state system, with the fiscal and administrative demands this necessarily entailed. The compromise they reached was to pay taxes and accept secular laws in so far as those laws did not violate their fundamental religious principles -- most controversially, the principle of pacifism. This compromise was acceptable to European states that welcomed Mennonites because Mennonites had something to offer in return -- they were among the most progressive and productive agriculturists in Europe.¹

Although traditions of insularity and pacifism meant Mennonites, before coming to Russia, did not take up secular administrative positions themselves, the need to abide by secular laws and pay secular taxes meant the internal, congregational administrative system at some level necessarily cooperated with the secular system. Congregational authorities thus walked a tight-rope between secular and congregational worlds, the smallest slip often

plunging them into controversy.

The Prussian Mennonite communities that the first Mennonite immigrants to Russia were drawn from were divided between two congregations, the Flemish and Frisian, the former more insular, conservative, and strict in its application of congregational discipline, the latter more willing to accept outsiders and sanction inter-congregational marriages. The first Molochna settlers were almost exclusively drawn from the Flemish congregation. In Danzig in 1808 the Flemish and Frisian congregations united, and in the following years became increasingly open to ideas drawn from non-Mennonite, particularly pietistic Christian groups. When the Russian state authorised a new immigration of several thousand Mennonites from Prussia in 1818, it opened the door to religious controversy by bringing into the conservative Molochna community a large group of Danzig Mennonites, regarded by Flemish congregationalists in the Molochna as Frisians.

The newcomers, most of whom settled in villages on the upper Iushmanee River, were led by Elder Franz Götz and minister Heinrich Balzer. Elder Jacob Fast, leader of the Flemish congregation, and Bernhard Fast, who succeeded him as Elder in 1820, tried to establish good relations with the newcomers. In 1820 Bernhard Fast broke with tradition -- and angered many members of his congregation -- by having Götz ordain him, rather than being ordained by the senior Flemish clergyman from Khortitsa as was customary. That same year, Fast supported the creation of the Christian School Association, which in 1822 accomplished its aim of opening a secondary school in Ohrloff. Mennonite villages already

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2Urry, None But Saints, 41, 99
3Urry, None But Saints, 99-102.
4Urry, None But Saints, 34-49; 99-100.
5Urry, None But Saints, 101.
6Urry, None But Saints, 105.
had primary schools, but their purpose was limited to little more than providing basic literacy and numeracy. While all Mennonites needed to be able to read the Bible, conservatives feared that any further education would encourage children to question traditional beliefs, which could only lead to innovations. Moreover, religious education was the prerogative of ministers, and the creation of a Christian school seemed to challenge this prerogative, while to make matters worse, the Ohrloff school-master, Tobias Voth, who was imported from Prussia, held controversial pietistic religious views. Meanwhile, in 1821, when representatives of the Russian Bible Association visited the Molochna, Fast and Flemish Elder Peter Wedel joined Götz in forming a Molochna chapter of the Association, dedicated to the distribution of Bibles in the Colony and surrounding communities. This again angered conservative Flemish congregationalists, who disapproved of any affiliation with non-Mennonite Christian organisations, and distrusted the administrative system of the Bible Association, which was not under congregational control, and had officers with unfamiliar, and to a conservative way of thinking, militaristic titles such as President, Director, and Secretary.

The final straw for conservative Flemish congregationalists came in 1822, when, against all tradition, Fast permitted a visiting non-Mennonite missionary, Johann Moritz, to address a prayer meeting and take communion in Ohrloff. Although Fast quickly acknowledged his mistake and apologised, conservative leaders could not be placated, and in 1824 they formed a new congregation, the Large Flemish congregation, under the leadership of Altona minister Jacob Warkentin. Roughly three-quarters of the original Flemish

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7Urry, None But Saints, 105-106.
8Urry, None But Saints, 101.
congregation joined them. There were now three official congregations in the Molochna, the Frisian, Flemish (or Old Flemish, as it now became known), and Large Flemish, along with the conservative Small Congregation [Kleine Gemeinde], which had no official status.

Comies first came to prominence in the Mennonite congregational world in 1817 when he was put in charge of the Settlement Committee that supervised the arrival of new Mennonite settlers. It is unclear whether a formal administrative title accompanied this position. In Guardianship Committee correspondence Comies was sometimes addressed as District Mayor, [Oberschulzen], but this title properly belonged to the head of the Mennonite District, a position Comies did not hold. Comies’ biographer, David Epp, says rather vaguely that Comies was given “power of attorney” by the congregation. Whatever his correct title, Comies was just 28 years of age when the congregation appointed him to this responsible position, a sign of the respect his energy and talent had already garnered for him among Molochna Mennonites. However, beside being energetic and talented, Comies was also strong-willed and opinionated, and it would not take long for him to become embroiled in religious controversy.

Because Comies supervised the founding of the new Frisian villages, many conservative congregationalists associated him with the views of the newcomers. Moreover, always a strong believer in the value of education, Comies was a founding member of the Christian School Association in 1820, and in 1822 accepted the role of supervisor of the Bible Association’s distribution depot. As a result of his involvement in these endeavours,

\[9\] Urry, None But Saints, 102.
\[10\] Urry, None But Saints, 111.
\[11\] “Zhurnal registratsii iskhodishchikh dokumentov,” 20 May 1821, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 692.
\[12\] Epp, Johann Comies, 27.
Comies was at the heart of the religious disputes that troubled the Molochna Colony in the 1820s, and although the details are unclear, he apparently even faced accusations of personal misconduct from conservative congregationalists.¹³

Contrary to conservative Flemish assumptions that Comies was politically aligned with Görz and the Frisians, in truth he was a religious moderate and remained a member of the original Old Flemish congregation led by Bernhard Fast. He had little patience with the pietistic beliefs of the Frisian leaders, referring to them dismissively in his private correspondence as the troublesome folk “up there on the Iushanlee.”¹⁴ He was particularly unhappy with Voth, the Ohrloff schoolmaster. Comies had at first strongly supported Voth, but he eventually concluded that the schoolmaster’s involvement in religious affairs was interfering with the practical demands of teaching.¹⁵ In 1829, under pressure from Comies and the School Association, Voth resigned and was replaced by the more moderate Old Flemish congregationalist Heinrich Heese. Because Voth was influential among the Frisians, the dispute between him and Comies brought Comies into conflict with the Frisian villages, a number of which withdrew their support from the Bible Society in reaction to Voth’s departure from the school.¹⁶ Thus by 1829 Comies was at odds with both the conservative Large Flemish congregation and the liberal Frisian congregation.

Most accounts of Comies focus on his secular -- and secularizing -- activities, and

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¹³In an 1826 letter to Daniel Schlatter, Comies wrote, “my affair, which was proceeding in the community at the time of your departure, . . . was brought before the whole community and [it was] publicly acknowledged that they only had the intention of directing envy and insult at me” (Comies to Schlatter, 5 August 1826, PJBRA, file 82). The context suggests that the “affair” pertained to religious disputes.
¹⁴Comies to Schlatter, 12 March 1830, PJBRA, file 169.
¹⁵Comies to Schlatter, 22 December 1828, PJBRA, file 129.
¹⁶Comies to Schlatter, 12 March 1830, PJBRA, file 169.
there is little attempt in the historical literature to define his religious world view. Yet his correspondence was filled with obviously genuine Christian sentiments, as shown in this excerpt from a letter to a Prussian Mennonite acquaintance, bemoaning fatalistic Nogai attitudes toward the cholera epidemic of 1831:

[The Nogais] say [cholera] is a spirit with 3 heads and 500 assistants which was sent by God to remove the vicious people from this earth, and for this reason it is very sinful to apply methods against this divine judgement and whoever among them uses [such methods] dies as a Christian and has no part in the joy of the Muslim heaven. . . . I have had conversations with the priests themselves in an attempt to convince them that they should permit the lay people to use at least some medicines, but . . . the Tatars whom I had taught as doctors to deal with those ill with cholera had to give up on the matter and could speak no further word about it, much less give medicine. . . .

Now they feel sorry for me that I have so little faith in God's help. . . . I do not see any doctor as God and no medicine as the Saviour, but I believe firmly that if God does not give his blessing to our daily bread, it will not nourish us, and [if he does not bless] the medicine, it will not heal anything.17

Here, however imprecisely, is the religious justification of Cornies actions -- he believed in voluntarism, assuming that God's approval of his actions was confirmed by their success. He balanced this confidence with an acceptance of even the most severe personal set-backs as reflective of God's will. After the great blizzard of 1825, he wrote: "there was great external damage due to snow storms but the benefit for eternity [was] definitely much greater. My loss, not less than 30 thousand rubles, was, I believe and feel, permitted by the Lord for my salvation and therefore I praise and glorify His goodness which he shows to His children."18 Yet this was not mere fatalism, for Cornies inevitably learned from such events, basing future plans on the practical lessons they offered.

Cornies probably began to develop his own understanding of what constituted a

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17Cornies to Van der Smissen, 18 September 1831, PBROMA, file 200.  
18Cornies to David Epp, March 1826, PBROMA, file 82.
civil society when he took charge of settling new Mennonite immigrants in 1817. This task brought him into close association with the head of the Guardianship Committee, Samuel Contenius, for the first time, and Contenius' cameralist administrative philosophy would have a fundamental formative influence on Cornies. When the Guardianship Committee appointed Cornies to supervise the settlement of Separatist colonists from Würtemburg on the Berda River in 1820, the development of his administrative world-view continued, and by the time he took a close interest in the Nogais in 1825, he was already formulating his own blueprint for an ideal society.

Cornies' efforts to improve Nogai sheep have already been described in chapter three, but the prize exhibit in his program to "civilize" the Nogais was the model village of Akkerman. Cornies first mentioned the idea of creating a model village in 1825, and by 1832 the project developed into a full-scale plan. Finally built on the Ishmanlee River near Cornies' estate in 1835, Akkerman represented Cornies' vision of an ideal community. He composed a set of instructions comprising thirty-five articles defining every aspect of the village's construction and administration. Houses were to be precisely aligned along both sides of a single street, exactly aligned with the house on the opposite side of the street, exactly four sazhens from neighbouring houses, with a surrounding ditch exactly two arshins wide and 1.5 arshins deep, each with a single gate, exactly centred on the property in front of the house, of "good and solid but simple and inexpensive construction," each house with a front porch, each with doors, shutters and gables painted with oil paints, and so on. Rules of conduct ranged from procedures for filing a complaint with the village

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19 Cornies, "Einiges über die Nogaier-Tataren."
20 Pravila neobkhodimye k sobliudeniuiu, pri ustoistve iz Nogaiskoi derevni akerman v obraztsovuiu ili primernuiu koloniiu," 1842, PJBRMA, file 818. There are numerous other
elder, to the injunction "it is strictly forbidden for anyone to enter or exit the yard from the street by stepping over the ditches, and everyone must enter and exit in the proper manner, through the gates, and children must go into the ditches, so that the ditches will not become filled in."\(^{21}\)

Akkerman was an extension of the state's earlier policies toward the Nogais, for it continued to hold out the regulated, organised peasant village as a symbol of civility. It must be emphasised that the model village was not solely Cornies' project, but was strongly supported by the state. The cameralist policies that defined the Russian state's ambitions for its state peasants had been clearly layed out in the laws governing state peasant administration in 1797.\(^{22}\) What distinguished Cornies was his success in applying such cameralist policies at the local level. Yet Cornies took the prescripts of cameralism, incorporated the practical lessons he learned building Akkerman, combined them with his religious beliefs, and conceived a model for society that went well beyond the designs of the state. Akkerman was to be a Mennonite village, but taken to its furthest extreme, so that in an important sense it was Cornies' model for the future of Mennonite society too.

The nuclear Mennonite villages in New Russia were themselves a recent innovation. When the first Mennonites arrived in New Russia in 1789, they intended to settle on dispersed farmsteads, but the threat of marauding Cossacks and Tatars forced them to build compact, nuclear villages instead.\(^{23}\) The uniformity of the villages was a reflection of versions of this document scattered through Cornies' papers.

\(^{21}\)"Pravila neobkhodimye k sobliudeniiu," 1842, P/JBRMA, file 818.

\(^{22}\)On Cameralism, see Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Society and Institutional Change through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

\(^{23}\)Urry, *None But Saints*, 55.
Mennonite traditions, following logically from the community-minded tenets of Mennonite theology, from a mixture of bitter and prideful memories of a common martyr past, dating back to the Reformation, and from the obvious need for solidarity if the community was to survive as a small ethnic and religious minority in Russia.24

The attempt to impose an ideal version of this outer, physical manifestation of Mennonite religious beliefs on Islamic Nogais provides a fascinating glimpse into Cornies' philosophy. Mennonite commitment to peaceful withdrawal from the secular world effectively precluded proselytisation.25 There are no records of Mennonite attempts to convert Nogais, and indeed, Cornies' regulations for Akkerman emphasised obedience to Islamic law. Yet the implicit assumption governing planning of the model village was that strict physical adherence to this outward manifestation of Cornies' idealized version of Mennonite society was the key to what Cornies elsewhere called the "external prosperity" of the Nogais.26 Nor can there be any doubt that, for Cornies, improving the economic condition of the Nogais was tantamount to improving their moral condition. Of course, the Akkerman project can be interpreted as evidence Cornies understood the Mennonite system of social organisation as nothing more than an efficient vehicle for economic advancement, equally applicable to Islamic Nogais and Mennonites. However, an examination of Cornies' other activities suggests he more likely viewed the project as a reaffirmation of his belief in Mennonite society, and even, perhaps, as an act of


25E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba (Altona, Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons, 1955), 9-10. This attitude rested uneasily with the terms of the Russian Mennonites' Charter of Privileges, which specifically enjoined them to act as a model to other settlers. On divisions within the Mennonite community over their role in the greater society, see, e.g., Urry, None But Saints, 123-137.

Akkerman was not Cornies’ most far-reaching attempt at social engineering. The Guardianship Committee’s main vehicles for improving Colonist agriculture were its various husbandry societies, beginning with the Sheep Society, established in 1824, followed by the Forestry Society (1831), and the Agricultural Society (1836). It was through the latter two organizations that Cornies would apply the lessons learned from his experiments on Nogai society to Mennonites.

The Forestry Society was a state agency, not a Mennonite one, and Cornies was appointed its chairman-for-life by the Guardianship Committee without any consultation with Mennonite district and village administrations. The Guardianship Committee justified the creation of a distinct body to do work that ought to have been supervised by existing Mennonite administrative bodies on the grounds that

the extent of both of these districts [the Molochna and Khortitsa Colonies], which are still increasing regularly and currently encompass fifty-seven colonies, constantly keeps the district officials busy with affairs in respect to administration, settlement, collection of taxes, keeping of accounts, etc., and even with their best intentions, it becomes impossible for them to conduct the exact supervision that is required for success.27

This creation of a separate administrative body planted the roots of future discord, but at first, Cornies’ position was not cause for Mennonite discontent. The Forestry Society is often inaccurately conflated with its successor, the Agricultural Society, but its jurisdiction was much narrower than the later organisation.28 It was intended “to impart advice and instruction to settlers inexperienced in the cultivation” of trees, and its instructions placed

27 “Instruction für die Vereine in den Kolonien des Molotschner und Chortitzer Menonisten Gebiete, zur fördersamen Verbreitung in derselben des Gehölz= Garten= Seiden= und Wein= Baues,” 1830, PJBRA, file 166. Note that Khortitsa had its own Forestry Society.
28 See, e.g., Urry, None But Saints, 112.
special emphasis on giving “these directions in a clear and well-meaning manner.” The instructions included the ominous injunction that farm owners were to be warned in advance, that those among them who are disobedient, and pay no attention to these suggestions, will eventually lose their farmsteads, which are then to be given over to other dependable young householders, who must commit themselves to fulfil what the government demands of them for their own advantage.30

However, the Guardianship Committee gave the Society no independent means to enforce its orders, instead leaving it to issue directions to village assemblies, which were then responsible for carrying them out. In as much as the village Elders were de facto congregational appointees, in practice the Society was constrained to appealing to congregations to impose congregational discipline on those who ignored its recommendations. Consequently Cornies’ position did not impinge directly upon Mennonite traditions that forbade Mennonites from wielding secular authority over fellow Mennonites.

The Forestry Society was supposed to bring about the systematic cultivation of trees in the Molochna. Trees were understood by the Russian state -- and indeed by all nineteenth-century European states -- as an essential element of an agricultural economy, for they provided fuel for heating and cooking, construction materials for homes, outbuildings, implements and furniture, wind-breaks to prevent soil erosion, fruit, and, in the case of mulberry bushes, a basic element for silk production.31

The Guardianship Committee was distinguished from most Russian administrative organs by its flexibility and willingness to accept advice from local experts. In 1831 it sent a

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29 “Instruction für die Vereine,” 1830, PJRMA, file 166.
30 “Instruction für die Vereine,” 1830, PJRMA, file 166.
31 See Harrison, Forests, passim.
draft set of Forestry Society Regulations to Cornies and asked for advice from him and the other members of the Molochna Forestry Society on its final formulation. In the end, the Regulations observed that each region had its own unique soils and climates, and enjoined the Molochna Forestry Society to research broadly in afforestation literature, establish a library of relevant books, and develop programs appropriate to local conditions. This attention to regional conditions was an important element of the Guardianship Committee's success in administering Colonists. Because the Committee was regionally based, its members were aware of local conditions, and able to take them into account. Orthodox state peasant administration, by comparison, was centred in St. Petersburg.

It is difficult to know whether the signal success of the Molochna Forestry Society should be credited to this remarkably enlightened Guardianship Committee policy, or to Cornies' willingness to seize the reins when they were offered and place his own stamp firmly on the Society's activities. Within a few years the Society library included a broad collection of German and Russian books and periodicals on forestry, and by 1847, Ministry of State Domains circulars in St. Petersburg referred to Cornies, who in 1831 had been a self-acknowledged neophyte at forestry, as an expert who had "mastered steppe forestry through experimentation."

Cornies' Nogai projects had shown that he possessed a clear conception of what constituted an orderly civil society. Echoing his approach to the Nogais, first elucidated in 1825, in 1831 he established a model tree plantation at his Lushanlee estate where he

32 Cornies to Fadeev, 24 July 1831, PJBRMA, file 200.
33 For a complete list, see "Catalog. Dei Bücher des Vereins," 1841, PJBRMA, file 797.
34 Cornies to Fadeev, 24 July 1831, PJBRMA, file 200; Baron von Rosen to the Department of Agriculture, 14 April 1847, RGLA, fond 383, opis 10, delo 9108.
experimented with various species of trees and developed and refined specialised implements. The estate also served as his headquarters for overseeing the inspection of existing tree stocks in the Molochna.\textsuperscript{35} By the end of 1832 he had developed a systematic and rigorous program for tree planting that combined the basic principles defined in Society regulations with knowledge he had collected through reading and experimentation, and his own preconceptions about the importance of order and uniformity.

The original Society regulations specified that each village establish a tree plantation of a size equal to one-half desiatina per village household, and that “every householder is assigned the duty of laying out an orchard behind his house of such size as the local situation and the means of the householder permit.”\textsuperscript{36} The Molochna Forestry Society confirmed the requirement for village plantations, and added the specification that each householder set aside one desiatina of their home plot for an orchard, and plant between ten and forty trees per year until the orchard area was completely planted.\textsuperscript{37} The society supplied seeds and saplings, and issued detailed instructions on soil preparation, appropriate distances between saplings, care for the saplings, etc.

There was nothing implicitly controversial in these instructions. Afforestation was among the obligations imposed on Mennonites by their Charter in 1800, and Molochna Mennonites had been extensively involved with and co-operative in the state’s silviculture program since their arrival in Russia. Their accomplishments in forestry were a source of pride to the Molochna Mennonites, and in their address to Alexander I when he passed

\textsuperscript{35}Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 113.

\textsuperscript{36}“Instruction für die Vereine,” 1830, \textit{PJBRMA}, file 166.

\textsuperscript{37}“Po otmosheniiu Departamenta Sel’skogo Khoziaistva o vvedenii u Russkikh pereselentsev khoziaistva i poriadka upravleniia Menonistov,” 24 September 1845, \textit{RGLA}, \textit{fond} 383, \textit{opis} 19, \textit{deki} 7164.
through the settlement in 1825, they promised to redouble their efforts. Although the creation of the Forestry Society marked more rigorous control over tree planting, its demands were not excessive. The Society demanded uniformity in tree planting, fully in keeping with uniformity in housing, the layout of farmsteads, and all the other community norms Mennonites accepted. Consider, for example, the 1824 precedent of the Sheep Society. The state supplied merino sheep, and a rigorously defined program for interbreeding them with native sheep. In 1823, describing the purpose of the proposed Sheep Society, Contenius produced detailed directions on interbreeding through five generations, instructing that "local authorities must pay attention, not just to the entire herd, but to each and every individual generation of sheep." This program, administered in the Molochna by Cornies, provoked no opposition, and was quickly implemented. In view of this, there was little reason to expect opposition to the Forestry Society, particularly given the fact that, by 1830, the religious disputes of the 1820s seemed to have died down, giving Cornies hope that an accommodation had been reached among Molochna congregations.

Unfortunately, just as Forestry Society activities were passing from planning to implementation, the Great Drought of 1833 struck the Molochna. Families busy feeding their thatch roofs to starving livestock understandably had little time for orders to plant trees, and policies that need not have been controversial under normal circumstances soon provoked bitter disputes. As usual, the congregational system provided the medium for political debate.

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38"Instruction für die Vereine," 1830, PJBRA4, file 166.
39Contenius to Guardianship Committee, 19 January 1823, GADO, fund 134, opis 1, delo 741.
40Cornies to Schlatter, 12 March 1830, PJBRA4, file 169.
The first whispers of opposition to Cornies appeared immediately on the heels of the Great Drought. Some landowners ignored instructions from the Forestry Society, and to Cornies, this smacked of "a secret incitement to rebellion against [tree] planting."

In one of the most serious examples of resistance, in January 1835 the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Blumstein experienced so much opposition to their attempts to enforce Forestry Society orders that they resigned. Cornies' reaction to such opposition is instructive. Because the Forestry Society had no direct authority, he appealed to congregational officials for support. In 1835, he invited District Chairman Johann Regier to attend the Forestry Society's meetings, hoping to win his co-operation, and in a letter to congregational officials in 1836 he wrote:

If the unhappy dissension which has existed between the spiritual and worldly leaders from our first settlement here on the Molochna until now is to be set aside and ended, so that the community can be placed on an orderly, solid footing of order and morality and to provide a basis for its general well-being at present and for its most distant descendants, then it is necessary that every elder admonish and encourage his congregation, particularly in accordance with the basis of its confession of faith, so that the congregation in general and every member strive especially and sincerely to fulfil punctually all orders and regulations of the administration.

Obviously, in 1836 congregational authority remained intact in the Molochna, for Cornies required congregational support to implement his programs. But equally obviously, Cornies was conscious of the conflict between congregational and civil authority, and was increasingly insistent that civil authority prevail.

The Great Drought was an important watershed in the continuing development of

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41 Forestry Society to Gebietsamt, n.d. (probably 1834), PJBRA, file 310.
42 Forestry Society to Gebietsamt, n.d. (probably 1835), PJBRA, file 343.
43 Cornies to Fadeev, 15 January 1835, PJBRA, file 315.
44 Forestry Society to Gebietsamt, 10 December 1836, PJBRA, file 361.
Cornies' world view, for it had forced him to reassess the Molochna Mennonite economy, bringing him face to face with the fact that, given prevailing agricultural techniques and land allocation practices, Mennonites could not support themselves in a prolonged crisis. In the autumn of 1833, he wrote to Fadeev: "This is a year of testing in many respects. Even though the total crop failure this year will set the settlers back for several years, we will also reconsider many things, deal with them and carry them out better, in order to prevent similar disasters in the future."  

In the summer of 1834 Fadeev proposed extending the authority of the Forestry Society to the entire Molochna economy, but Cornies, faced with the reality of the previous year's economic disaster and resulting strong resistance within the Mennonite community to the Forestry Society, advised against it. Two years later, in February 1836, Cornies reminded Fadeev of his proposal, suggesting that the timing was now "expeditious" for such an organisation. He assured Fadeev, somewhat disingenuously given ongoing opposition to the Forestry Society, that "until now, the Society has been able to take pleasure in the punctual compliance to its orders by the members of the community and hopes that the same will also occur in the future," but went on to recommend:  

It would be very much to the purpose if His Excellency, the Chief Guardian [i.e. Inzov] were to be so kind as to release a communication to the combined local church conference, in which all Ministers were emphatically admonished that, as possessors of 65 desiatinas of land, they must act as an example to the members of the community through their orderly industry in the plantations and are obligated to support the Society in cases that occur by admonishing the community members to obey and follow the orders of the Society punctually.  

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45 Cornies to Fadeev, 13 September 1833, PJBMA, file 388.  
46 Cornies to Fadeev, 26 February 1836, PJBMA, file 388.  
47 Cornies to Fadeev, 26 February 1836, PJBMA, file 388.  
48 Cornies to Fadeev, 26 February 1836, PJBMA, file 388.
His growing impatience with resistance to reforms was rapidly leading Cornies to break with the traditional division between secular and congregational authority in Mennonite society. In future years he would increasingly turn to the state for support in his attempts to force Mennonites to deal systematically and effectively with the economic problems they faced.

The Agricultural Society was created in 1836. Its proper name, the Society for the Improvement of Agriculture and Trade, indicates the breadth of responsibilities it was expected to take on, while Cornies' appeal to Fadeev for support, quoted above, suggests the weight of authority he wanted it to carry. The new Society, like the old, did not have its own enforcement mechanisms -- it was still formally an advisory body, reliant upon the cooperation of district, village, and congregational authorities. Yet the Agricultural Society was to be far more important and controversial than the Forestry Society. The Forestry Society's authority extended to a part of agricultural activity that was always secondary -- tree plantations never occupied more than a tiny proportion of Mennonite land, and a tiny proportion of Mennonite labour -- but the Agricultural Society "advised" on all the principal economic activities of Mennonites, indeed, on the very activities that defined the Mennonite world view. As Urry explains it, "ownership of land, or at least access to it, lay at the core of Mennonite life. The ethos of religious community was symbolised in agrarian imagery."49

With the establishment of the Agricultural Society, Cornies entered the most important phase of his campaign to transform Mennonite society. His activities had three principal focuses: 1) more efficient allocation of limited Mennonite resources; 2) more efficient exploitation of those resources; and 3) rural industrialisation. These were explicitly

economic goals, but it would be incorrect to assume that they were a product of a strictly secular world view, for in Cornies' mind, efficiency, prosperity, and morality were inextricably linked. He confidently believed that if the Agricultural Society "steadfastly directed its own business and tended to the well-being of its brothers," the end result could only be "morality, industry and love of orderliness, ... upon which prosperity must follow."50

It is vital to recognize that Cornies still operated within the congregational system in 1836. Bernhard Fast, Peter Wedel, and other leading figures in the Old Flemish congregation remained his close allies, and he relied on their support to implement Agricultural Society policies. However, it was Cornies, and not the congregational Elders, who now provided leadership.

The efficient allocation of Mennonite resources was bound to be controversial. As explained in chapter three, Mennonites had no control over the allocation of surplus land, while the un-allocated reserve land was primarily useful only as pastureland. Thus the Society looked to reallocate existing farms more efficiently. Forestry Society regulations had threatened that people who disobeyed Society orders would be dispossessed and their farms given to young families willing to follow directives, and in at least one instance, Cornies apparently succeeded in convincing the district administration to evict a householder, the seventy-year-old Cornelius Fast, from his farm on this basis.51 Cornies justified the eviction on the grounds that "Fast could not have maintained himself further on his farm, even without the [matter of] his not fulfilling the plantings, in that he is a man of almost 70 years without means." But a second important factor in the decision was that "a good, industrious

50 Cornies to Fadeev, 26 June 1839, PJB/RMA, file 521 (italics added).
51 Cornies to Fadeev, 5 April 1833, PJB/RMA, file 251.
farmer came along,” willing to take over the farm and work it properly. At the heart of this policy was Cornies’ belief that the welfare of the Mennonite community had to supersede the welfare of individuals. This policy grew out of his clear understanding that the supply of land was not limitless, so only by its efficient allocation and use could the prosperity of the whole community be maintained.

Individual and community rights had always balanced uneasily in Mennonite theology. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century lessons of martyrdom had taught Mennonites the need to stand together, and in many of its manifestations, Anabaptism is a communitarian theology, but Mennonites had never shared a belief in community of goods with Anabaptists like the Hutterites. Still, the duty of the individual to the welfare of the community remained (and still remains) an important element of Mennonite beliefs. Although Cornies is often represented as an opponent of traditional Mennonite values, and indeed as the very symbol of secularizing trends in nineteenth-century Mennonite society, his policies clearly placed the welfare of the Mennonite community above the welfare of individuals.

Once the Agricultural Society was created, Cornies expanded his efforts to evict inferior farmers from their land and replace them with younger families that promised to abide by Society policies. Farmers who failed to keep up the condition of their farms, whether as a result of alcoholism, marital problems, sloth, disease, or age, were pressured to turn over their land to younger families, better able to meet the demands of Mennonite society as defined by the Agricultural Society. Cornies drafted contracts defining the duties

\footnote{Cornies to Fadeev, 5 April 1833, PJBMA, file 251.}

\footnote{See, e.g., Cornies’ notes from an inspection trip, 10-14 February 1836, PJBMA, file 386; Cornies to Tiegenhagen Schulzenamt, January 1839.}
of families taking over farmsteads, and pressed congregational officials to insist that such families sign them. When the Guardianship Committee placed Cornies in charge of establishing the new villages of Waldheim and Gnadenfeld (1835) and Landskrone (1839), he used the opportunity to rigorously apply his new standards to the new villages, modelling village plans on those he had already conceived for Akkerman.54

Cornies' moral imperative that the limited supply of land be used efficiently was accompanied by a concerted effort to develop more efficient agricultural methods. As chair of the Sheep Society in the 1820s, Cornies had learned the value of improving the quality of agricultural production. When he turned his attention to other branches of agriculture, he carefully experimented with improved crops, improved implements, and improved techniques. Better ploughs and harvesting machinery, more wells, and irrigation dams to flood hay-fields all received his close attention, but the two agricultural changes that marked a crucial turning point in Molochna Mennonite agriculture were the introduction of a four-field cropping system and black fallow.

Traditional arable husbandry in New Russia employed a long-fallow system, with fields cropped for several consecutive years, then left fallow for several more. This minimized the intensive labour of breaking new ground, but because the long cropping period exhausted the soil, fields had to be left fallow for extended periods. As population density increased, cropping periods lengthened, fallow periods shortened, and productivity on the increasingly exhausted soil inevitably dropped. In January 1837 Cornies ordered all Mennonite villages to gradually implement over the following two years a four-field

54 On Waldheim and Gnadenfeld, see Cornies to Fadeev, 28 January 1837, PjBRMA, file 432. On Landskrone, see Cornies to Fadeev, 26 June 1839, PjBRMA, file 521.
cropping system in combination with manuring. At first, Cornies intended to use the fallow field to plant potatoes, but he soon ordered the use of black fallow instead. In the past, most Molochna farmers had allowed fallow fields to reseed with native grasses by invasion, thus providing grazing for livestock while it lay fallow. The disadvantage of this was that grasses used up soil nutrients and moisture, retarding the recovery of the soil. The Society ordered householders to prevent livestock from grazing on fallow fields, and to plow them regularly throughout the summer to prevent the growth of grass and weeds. This permitted fallow fields to recover more quickly, making more efficient use of land, but at the expense of far more labour. As Cornies described it in 1839, “occupation with field cultivation now binds everyone to his house and his soil; there are few easy, comfortable days which occurred so frequently with sheep-raising, and it is literally fulfilled here that man must eat his bread by the sweat of his brow.”

As a result of these new methods, output/seed ratios in the Mennonite Colony increased significantly -- wheat yields, for example, averaged 4.75:1 from 1828-1835, and 7.08:1 from 1836-1848 -- but the truly dramatic increase in production came as a result of increased yields per desiatina. The four-field system put a greater proportion of the arable under crops, while black fallow resulted in increased retention of moisture in the soil so

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55Cornies to Fadeev, 26 June 1839, P/BRMA, file 521.
56Cornies to Fadeev, 28 January 1837.
57An important technological factor in this process was the development of the bukker, a forerunner of the disk cultivator used by modern farmers to destroy surface weeds while minimizing the exposure of deeper soils to moisture evaporation. See Leonard Friesen, “Bukkers, Plows and Lobogreiku: Peasant Acquisition of Agricultural Implements in New Russia before 1900,” Russian Review 53:3 (July 1994), 399-418.
58Cornies to Fadeev, 28 January 1837, P/BRMA, file 432.
59Cornies to Fadeev, 26 June 1839, P/BRMA, file 521.
more seed could be planted per desiatina, resulting in an average annual increase in wheat output on one Munsterberg farm from 131 chetverts per desiatina in 1828-1835 to 309 chetverts per desiatina in 1836-1848 (see figure 5.1). All this, combined with a steady increase in sown land after 1836, resulted in an almost fourfold increase in the average gross wheat output of Mennonites after 1835 (see table 5.1).

Among Cornies’ many accomplishments, none was more important for his ability to steer the Molochna economy than his studious attention to markets. Cornies read a wide range of European and Russian agricultural periodicals, but his most important source for keeping abreast of markets was the Moscow wool merchant T. S. Blüher. Cornies met Blüher in Moscow in 1824 while en route to St. Petersburg to buy breeding stock for his sheep farm. The two men developed a fast friendship and corresponded on a broad range

61Cornies’ extensive correspondence with Blüher, which spanned twenty-three years (1825-1848), is scattered throughout the PJBRMA.
Table 5.1: Gross Grain Production (chetverts) in the Molochna Mennonite Settlement, 1828-1848

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th>All Grain</th>
<th></th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th>All Grain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>8,630</td>
<td>43,105</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>36,034</td>
<td>86,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>8,889</td>
<td>56,373</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>18,389</td>
<td>53,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>5,546</td>
<td>26,835</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>29,320</td>
<td>80,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>13,999</td>
<td>71,446</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>23,943</td>
<td>77,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>9,922</td>
<td>38,079</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>24,992</td>
<td>76,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>33,149</td>
<td>103,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>6,300</td>
<td>18,033</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>48,629</td>
<td>122,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>14,409</td>
<td>61,236</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>21,719</td>
<td>41,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>15,427</td>
<td>54,268</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>67,583</td>
<td>179,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>31,924</td>
<td>103,210</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>84,804</td>
<td>180,381</td>
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<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>20,486</td>
<td>39,908</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


of subjects, but wool markets were always at the forefront. Cornies shipped his wool directly to Blüher, bypassing the middlemen who bought up most wool produced in Ukraine. He frequently sent Blüher samples of various kinds of wool, asking the merchant to explore marketing possibilities, and he also asked Blüher's advice on silk marketing. As a result of such contacts, when international wool markets began to decline in the late 1830s, Cornies was among the first to recognize the trend. This decline, coupled with the growing European demand for grain, was an important motivating factor to the increased attention Cornies and the Agricultural Society paid to arable husbandry in the late 1830s.

Before 1836, arable husbandry was a marginal commercial proposition in the Molochna, because the lack of a local port meant grain had to be hauled overland to distant markets. Grain's low value-to-weight ratio, and problems of spoilage, thus discouraged

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62 Cornies to Blüher, 18 January 1832, PJBRMA, file 236.
commercial grain production. In 1836, the state opened a port at Berdiansk, just sixty-five kilometres east of the Molochna, and this transformed the Molochna economy, opening the way to explosive economic growth. Where once every commercially-minded farmer who could afford it invested in sheep, suddenly grain became an important commercial option, and in 1837 Cornies observed that "a few landowners are even expressing the opinion that field cultivation would be more worth-while than sheep-breeding. The plow, which formerly belonged to the lower classes, is rising appreciably to become an honourable implement, as has long been desired."63

Cornies' attention to markets allowed him to encourage the production of commercial crops appropriate to international market conditions. Beside wheat, most important among such crops in the Molochna was flax. Introduced in 1836, by 1860 flax seed had become a major export crop, with over 95,000 chetverti shipped through Berdiansk that year.64 However, if the seed, used to produce linseed oil, was a valuable export crop, at least as important from Cornies' perspective was the use of flax straw for local linen production. "Many hands lie idle [here], especially during the winter," he wrote in 1836 "and they could find other useful activity if the needed flax were cultivated, spun and manufactured into linen in the District."65 It is here that the community-based motives of Cornies' actions are most evident, for he placed great emphasis on providing employment for the growing numbers of landless Mennonites.

The growth of landlessness in the Molochna has already been discussed in chapter three. By 1839, 47 percent of Mennonites were landless, and by 1847, the figure had risen to

63Cornies to Fadeev, 26 April 1838, PJBRA4, file 496.
64See table 5.4.
65Cornies to Fadeev, 28 January 1837, PJBRA4, file 432.
53 percent. Hidden in this statistic is an important change in the character of landless families. They had always been younger than landed ones, for it was only natural that newly married couples lived with parents until they were able to establish their own household.

Cornies himself numbered among the landless in 1813, when he, his wife, and their infant son still lived with Johann Sr. However, while in 1847 landless families were still younger -- and consequently smaller -- than landed families, the gap was narrowing. In 1813, the average landless family had just 3.64 members, compared to 5.59 members in landed families. By 1834, landless families on average had 4.12 members, while by 1847, they averaged 4.48 members. Although they remained smaller than landed families, the trend was clear -- landlessness was increasingly becoming a hereditary condition, as young families grew old without being able to acquire land.

Cornies was keenly aware of this development, and much of his activity in the last ten years of his life was directed toward resolving the problems it posed for Mennonite society. The ideal solution, allotting land to the landless, was not an option -- there was simply not enough viable land to be had, excepting of course the surplus land, over which Mennonites had no direct control. Cornies had long been concerned that the rapid growth of the Mennonite population, and the lack of available land in the Molochna, might soon

66 "Vedomost'. O blagosostoianii kolonii Molochanskago Menonistskago Okruuga za Genvar mesiats 1839 goda," GAOO, fond 6, opis 1, delo 5099; "S mesiachnymi vedomostiami o blagosostoianii berdianskago okruga za Ianvar 1847," GAOO, fond 6, opis 2, delo 10063.
67 "Vedomosti Molochanskago Menonistskago Okruzhnago prikaza o khoziaistvennom sostoianii kolonii za 1813 god," GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 356.
68 "Vedomosti o blagosostoianii Molochanskikh kolonistov za istenii fevral mts. 1813 goda," GAOO, fond 6, opis 1, delo 773.
69 "Kammeral Liste," 1 January 1834, GADO, fond 134, opis 1, delo 981; "Vedomost'. O blagosostoianii kolonii Molochanskago Menonistskago Okruuga za Genvar mesiats 1839 goda," GAOO, fond 6, opis 1, delo 5099; "S mesiachnymi vedomostiami o blagosostoianii berdianskago okruga za Ianvar 1847," GAOO, fond 6, opis 2, delo 10063.
make out-migration from the Colony necessary. As early as 1826 he cautioned his Prussian friend, David Epp, regarding future prospects for Mennonite immigration to New Russia from the Vistula:

Time is rushing by, as on the wings of the eagle, [to a period] when Russia will no longer want fine immigrants, because from the interior of the Empire, where the overcrowded population is causing a great dearth of land, thousands are streaming to the southern and eastern steppe. Where ten or fifteen years ago one saw nothing but sky and steppe on a journey of several days, now the most poverty-stricken villages of 1,000 to 2,000 souls have been established.⁷⁰

In 1831, when the Guardianship Committee proposed offering to landless Molochna Mennonite families forty-desiatina allotments on the Tashenak River, southwest of the Molochna, Cornies advised that few were likely to accept such an offer when they could still “receive better land for settlement, and get more land as well” in the Molochna.⁷¹ However, with the rapid occupation of surplus land by new villages in the late 1830s and 1840s, Cornies became an enthusiastic supporter of the newly-proposed Judenplan project, which in the 1850s established mixed villages of Mennonites and Jewish peasants on crown land outside the original Mennonite allotment.⁷² The Russian state intended the project to provide Mennonite farmers as models to educate Jewish settlers, who were inexperienced with agriculture. However, for Cornies, the Judenplan offered a desperately needed outlet for the landless.

The alternative to out-migration was to provide gainful employment for the landless, and this Cornies did, with remarkable success. In 1836, Cornies proposed the creation of a

⁷⁰Cornies to David Epp, 14 August 1824, P/JBRMA, file 82.
⁷¹Cornies to Fadeev, March 1831, P/JBRMA, file 200.
craftsmen's village alongside the village of Halbstadt. The new village, to be called Neuhalbstadt, was to be occupied by landless craftsmen and their families, of which there were 251 in the Molochna Mennonite Colony in 1836. Cornies wrote that "these craftsmen, who live scattered around the District, only produce work that has been [specially] ordered, because most of them do not have sufficient means to purchase materials and to keep a supply of the products of their craft on hand to be sold." The idea of establishing a craftsmen's village was not original to Cornies -- the Molochna German Colonist village of Prischib had been a craftsmen's village since its establishment in 1806 -- but in the context of the landlessness problem, Neuhalbstadt gives important evidence of Cornies' views. As usual, he perceived the benefits of the project in a mixture of moral and economic terms:

The goals of achieving the best development of the spiritual and physical strengths of those practising a craft, so that they can raise their own prosperity, and of the delivery of better and cheaper craft production for use by inhabitants who practice field cultivation, would be met if a portion of the craftsmen's class were settled together in one location, from which more industry and zeal to perfect their products would develop and the products themselves would be sold more easily. The agriculturalists, moreover, would be able to fill their needs better and more cheaply in one location from one or another.

Halbstadt was the obvious site for the new village, for its central location at the confluence of the Tokmak and Molochna Rivers had already made it the home of a number of brandy, beer, and vinegar manufactures, several trading companies, the Klassen Cloth Factory, and the Gebietsamt offices. Residents of Halbstadt were less than enamoured with

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76 "Vedomosti o blagosostoianii Molochanskih kolonii . . . za Fevral mesiats 1807 goda," GAOO, fond 6, opis 1, delo 302.
the idea, for the plan called for granting each craftsman a three desiatina allotment, to be carved from Halbstadt’s reserve land. They were to be compensated with land from the settlement’s near-by communal sheep farm, but this exchange of flood-plain land for high-steppe pasture was a poor deal at best. Nevertheless, against their objections, Cornies pushed the proposal through, and in 1841 the craftsmen’s village was established. It would eventually grow to be the commercial and industrial centre of the Molochna, a position it retains to the present day.

Cornies also concerned himself with provisions for the much larger group of landless families dependent on cottage industry. In 1838 he received the Guardianship Committee’s endorsement for a plan to set aside in every Molochna Mennonite village between four and six 300-square-sazhen lots for “poor young families of the artisan class,” whom he characterised as “non-self-supporting [nIesosstoeiate;ry].” The holders of these small allotments were known as anwohner – cottagers – and while there had always been anwohner in the Mennonite settlement, the creation of distinct anwohner districts soon became a distinguishing characteristic of Molochna Mennonite villages. Such districts are frequently cited as evidence of the inequity of land allocation in Molochna Mennonite society, so it is important to note that they grew out of a conscious effort to improve the lot of landless renters.

A third project aimed at alleviating demographic pressures was the creation of the euphemistically-named “shared farms.” The Mennonite Charter forbade subdivision of the

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78Urry, None But Saints, 140-141.
79Cornies to Pelekh, 12 January 1840, PJBMLA, file 612.
80Urry, for example, writes that anwohner “were often poor, forced to live on the edge of the village and the fringe of society because they had no choice” (None But Saints, 60).
standard sixty-five desiatina farm allotments, a provision that had important benefits for Mennonites, because it forced them to maintain viably-sized farms. During the landlessness crisis of the 1860s, one of the most important concessions made to the landless was the creation of half-farms and quarter-farms, which sacrificed the economic benefits of maintaining full-farms in order to provide subsistence allotments to the landless. This concession is often cited as a victory of the landless over "greedy" land-owners, but in fact, Cornies had been quietly circumventing the law against subdivisions since the mid-1840s.\footnote{For a critical view of the role of landowners, see Urry, \textit{None But Saints}, 203-205.}

The first evidence of half-farms arose in 1845, when, in a widely distributed account of Mennonite administrative practices, Cornies described the rules governing "those cases when two families want to share one farm."\footnote{"Po otrosheniiu Departamenta Sel'skago Khoziaistva o vvedении u Russkikh pereselentsev khoziaistva i poriadka upravleniia menonistov," \textit{RGLA, fond 383, opis 10, delo 7164}.} Such an arrangement was intended to permit two young families, who otherwise could not have afforded their own farm, to purchase one jointly. In order to circumvent the law against divided farms, one family was to be formally designated as owner, and the other designated as "helpers," but in practice, each was to have its "own equal share of the land, work its share independently, and be sole recipient of the produce of its share."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Part 3, Item 3.} Although the two families were officially supposed to share a single home and live as one household, the regulations allowed that "if the families are too large and cannot live in one house, then they may build a second house."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Part 3, Item 2.} There was even a provision for the families to sell their halves separately.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Part 3, Item 6.} This shared-farm arrangement, which foreshadowed the creation of half-allotments by some twenty years, was a common...
practice in the Molochna by 1847, when data from twenty-seven villages shows that seventy-seven of 621 farmsteads, or roughly 12 percent, were shared.86

The document in which shared farms are described is a lengthy description of Molochna Mennonite administrative practices that Cornies compiled for Kiselev, the Minister of State Domains. It is a comprehensive blue print of Cornies' vision of civil society in its fully mature form.87 Kiselev was in charge of reforming the state peasantry, and his projects would eventually have an important influence on the Emancipation Edict that freed Russia's serfs in 1861. He and his senior aides were profoundly impressed with the order and industry of the Molochna Mennonite Colony, looking to it as a model for what might be accomplished in Russian state peasant villages. The description that Cornies provided Kiselev was thus widely distributed to the Ministry's gubernia-level offices as a primer on efficient social management.88 Cornies is often described as an agent of tsarist policy in the Molochna, but this instance shows a second side of this relationship, in which Cornies acted as an agent for the dissemination of Mennonite policy throughout the Russian administrative system.

Of the thirty-five page, five-part, 126-point description, only slightly over three pages and twenty-six points addressed the duties and authority of district and village Elders, while the remaining thirty-two pages and 100 points described the duties, authority, and accomplishments of the Agricultural Society. Duties ascribed to district and village Elders

86"S mesiachnymi vedomostiami o blagosostoiianii berdianskago okruga za Ianvar 1847," GAOO, fond 6, opis 2, delo 10063.
87"Po otosheniiu Departamenta Sel'skogo Khoziaistva o vvedenii u Russkykh pereiselenetsev khoziaistva i poriadka upravleniia menonistov," RGLA, fond 383, opis 10, delo 7164.
88For example, the version cited here comes from the records of the Ministry of State Domains in Saratov gubernia.
were limited to taxation and the enforcement of local laws, and conformed closely to the law of 1797 which defined their roles in all state peasant villages. Notably lacking was any mention of congregational authority.

On the other hand, the description identified the Agricultural Society's role as reaching into every corner of Molochna society, claiming that its authority, once based on the cooperation of congregational officials, was now explicitly based on the authority of the Guardianship Committee, which, the description implied, enforced the Society's orders by decree. Although village Elders were still responsible for enacting such orders, the description characterized them as little more than liaisons between the Society and individual householders. Even their election by the village was supposedly vetted by the Society, "in consultation with representatives of the state, and in cases where they are unfit, the villages are forced to choose new ones."^89

The all-encompassing administrative system Cornies envisaged evidences the effect of contemporary European economic theory on his thought. The language of such theory had been creeping into Cornies' writing for several years, most notably in his increasing tendency to categorize members of Mennonite society into "classes," but in the 1845 description, phrases plucked from such theories jump from the page. For example, the Society, Cornies claimed, ensured "that [labourers] receive good pay, but only in measure to the work they perform," and it prevented the development of "any monopolies whatsoever."^90 Yet Cornies was a Mennonite, too, and at the heart of his world view

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^89"Po otmeniiu Departamenta Sel'skago Khoziaistva o vvedenii u Russkikh pereselentsev khoziaistva i poriadka upravleniia menonistov," Part 2, Item 32, RGLA, fond 383, opis 10, delo 7164.
^90"Po otmeniiu Departamenta Sel'skago Khoziaistva o vvedenii u Russkikh pereselentsev khoziaistva i poriadka upravleniia menonistov," Part 3, Items 22 & 27, RGLA,
remained the good of the community. He charged the Society with providing loans (at
interest) to young, industrious Mennonites to permit them to establish themselves in trades,
and with finding them allotments and helping them build homes.\textsuperscript{91} And, "in every case" the
Society was to "ensure that the rich and strong do not oppress the poor and weak."\textsuperscript{92} As for
settling families on new land, "the objective," he wrote, was the profitable development of
both the Colony, and "the very land that [the new settlers] till."\textsuperscript{93}

It is perhaps appropriate to pause briefly and reflect on the magnitude of Cornies' ambitions for Molochna society, as reflected in the 1845 description. This largely self-educated Mennonite farmer, living in an isolated river basin on the southern frontier of the Russian Empire, was fomenting a revolution -- of the industrial kind. The complex integrated economy he envisaged, with large and small industrial enterprises, cottage industry, commercial agriculture, primary and secondary schools, credit institutions, and a social safety net, was progressive by any standard, and fully two generations ahead of any semblance of comparable developments in the rest of Russia. Moreover, it was far more than a simple echo of contemporary economic thought in western Europe, for the concern with public welfare, and particularly provisions to evict slip-shod farmers from their land and give it to young, poor, but industrious families, represented a uniquely Mennonite contribution to economics.

Not surprisingly, it was also a vision deeply distressing to conservative Mennonite congregationalists, for by 1845 Cornies had altogether abandoned any pretence at enforcing

\textit{fond 383, opis 10, delo 7164.}

\textsuperscript{91}\textit{Ibid.}, Part 3, Item 11.

\textsuperscript{92}\textit{Ibid.}, Part 3, Item 27.

\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Ibid.}, Preface to Part 4.
his actions through congregational channels. Where, in 1836, he had appealed to congregational officials for cooperation, he now issued decrees, backed when necessary by the ready support of the Guardianship Committee. Always a decisive and domineering figure, Cornies had become authoritarian and even dictatorial in his actions, provoking bitter opposition from leaders of conservative congregations. 94

Opposition to Cornies in the late 1830s and 1840s, as in the 1820s, was led by Jacob Warkentin, Elder of the Large Flemish congregation. The confrontation began in 1837, centering around the election of the District Mayor. 95 Since 1833 the position had been filled by Schönsee householder Johann Regier, a member of the Large Flemish congregation, but also a supporter of the Forestry and Agricultural Societies. By all accounts an able administrator, unfortunately Regier was also an alcoholic whose sometimes disreputable conduct attracted the opprobrium of his congregation. Faced with the embarrassing possibility that the Large Flemish Congregation might ban the District Mayor, in 1837 Warkentin asked the Elders of the other Molochna congregations to support him in an appeal to the Guardianship Committee to have Regier, along with senior assistant Toews, removed from their positions, but the other Elders refused. As Regier's second term of office came to an end in 1838, Warkentin appealed directly to I. N. Inzov, head of the Guardianship Committee, to disbar Regier from standing for re-election. Meanwhile, Cornies was busy behind the scenes too, writing to Fadeev that, although "the current Mayor Regier and his senior assistant Toews act and work to the community's best advantage in cooperation with the Society purely out of conscientious conviction . . ."

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94 See Dyck, "Russian Servitor."
95 Urry, None But Saints, 127.
[Warkentin] wishes to put an end to this fruitful situation and is already making incognito preparations." He appealed to Fadeev to, "as far as it is possible for you, through the Guardianship Committee, . . . make efforts so that Mayor Regier and his assistant Toews keep their positions for another term." Cornies prevailed, and in 1838, Regier was reelected.

Two aspects of Warkentin's efforts to unseat Regier deserve special attention. First is the political implications of the dispute. Regier was a political hot potato for Warkentin, for he was at once a member of Warkentin's congregation, the senior elected figure in the congregational administrative system, and a figure trusted by the Agricultural Society, which was rapidly consolidating its position as the most powerful civil agency in the Molochna. If Regier were banned, Warkentin's weight in the balance of political power in the Molochna Mennonite Colony would undoubtedly decline.

The second important aspect is Warkentin's willingness to appeal to the Guardianship Committee for support. Warkentin is commonly identified as the champion of congregational over civil authority in the Molochna. There is no reason to doubt that he, like Cornies, was motivated by a real concern for the welfare of Molochna Mennonite society, but his readiness to appeal to Inzov to obtain the dismissal of a Mayor elected by the community at large and supported by the other Elders shows that the era of independent congregational rule was effectively over.

At the next election, in 1841, Warkentin again opposed Regier, but this time he tried

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96 Cornies to Fadeev, 26 April 1838, PJBRMA, file 496. Fadeev had by this time already left the Guardianship Committee to take up a new post as Chief Guardian of the Kalmyk Horde, but he remained highly influential with Guardianship Committee members.

97 Cornies to Fadeev, 26 April 1838, PJBRMA, file 496.

98 Urry, None But Saints, 125.
new tactics, proposing his own candidate, the widely respected Tiege resident Peter Toews. 99

The combination of Regier's' alcoholism and Cornies' increasingly authoritarian manner helped Toews win the election handily, but claiming voting irregularities, Cornies, supported by district secretary David Braun, refused to accept the results and Regier continued to act as Mayor. Warkentin travelled to Odessa and protested to Evgenii von Hahn, who, as newly appointed deputy to the aging Inzov, was increasingly the real seat of power in the Guardianship Committee. Hahn ordered a new election, and, aided by the fact that Regier died in the interim, Toews won an easy victory. 100

Warkentin and his supporters believed themselves the clear victors in this struggle for political supremacy in the Molochna Mennonite Colony, and rumours even circulated that Cornies was to be exiled to Siberia, but their jubilation did not last long. 101 Without the cooperation of the District Administration, Cornies' programs could not function, and the state was too reliant on Cornies to allow his political authority in the Molochna to collapse. Later in 1841, during an inspection tour of the Molochna, Hahn confronted Warkentin, accusing him of meddling in official matters, and dismissed him from his position as congregational Elder. At the same time, following the principle of "divide and conquer," Hahn dissolved the Large Flemish congregation, in its place creating three smaller congregations. 102 This was a shocking violation of congregational autonomy, for Warkentin was in no sense a civil official, nor the Large Flemish congregation a civil organization. It marked a stunning political victory for Cornies, and he would rule supreme in the Molochna

99Urry, None But Saints, 128.
100Urry, None But Saints, 128.
101Urry, None But Saints, 128.
102Urry, None But Saints, 129.
until his death in 1848, and even extend his authority to the Khortitsa Mennonite Colony when he was made head of the Khortitsa Agricultural Society in 1846.103

The dispute between Cornies and Warkentin should not be interpreted as a social conflict, for the leaders of the Large Flemish Congregation were prosperous landowners, and their concerns revolved around Cornies' intrusion into their right to run their own farms. Although significant economic differentiation had occurred in the Molochna by the mid-1830s (see figure 5.2), there is no evidence to suggest that there was social conflict before the landless crisis of the 1860s, despite the fact that landlessness was growing rapidly already in the 1830s. This is a testament to the astonishing growth the Molochna economy experienced between 1836 and 1848, and to Cornies' efforts to provide a role in this growth to all elements in Molochna Mennonite society.

Cornies' programs took advantage of the opening of the port at Berdiansk to usher

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103Urry, *None But Saints*, 135.
in an era of rapid economic growth in the Molochna. Located just sixty-five kilometres east of the Molochna, the port provided an outlet for the region's produce, for the first time making arable husbandry economically significant. Table 5.2 shows the remarkable pace at which exports from the port, and the closely related trade at fairs, grew. It should be noted that this data, and related statistics on industrial enterprises provided below (see table 5.5), are two of the few extant sets of sources showing that the German Colonist villages shared with the Mennonites in the economic boom.

The explosive growth of trade at fairs, the clearest evidence of economic growth in the Molochna, requires more careful analysis. Fairs played a vital role in the Russian economy for a variety of reasons. Russian peasants were subject to travel restrictions, so merchants had to come to them, while at the same time, before 1863 townsmen were not permitted to operate shops in peasant villages, a rule which fairs circumvented. Finally,

| Table 5.2: Trade at Fairs and Total Exports from the Port of Berdiansk, 1836-1860 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| **Average Annual Trade Volume** | **Berdiansk Exports**   |
| **At Fairs** (Paper Rubles)     | (Paper Rubles)          |
| 1843-1845 263,283                | 1836 112,085             |
| 1846-1850 549,748                | 1838 2,971,426           |
| 1851-1855 1,252,326              | 1840 4,282,221           |
| 1856-1860 1,392,249              | 1860 6,423,812           |

Sources: Tavricheskaia Gubernskaia Vedomosti, 26 (1 July 1841); Khanatskii, ed., Pamiatnaia Knizhka Tavricheskoi gubernii, 434; PJBRMA, file 1858; "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov," RGLA, f. 1271, a. 4, d. 49a-1844, d. 49-1845, d. 69a-1846, d. 50-1847, d. 35a-1848, & d. 45a-1849; RGLA, f. 1281, a. 5, d. 52-1850, d. 30a-1851, d. 48a-1852, d. 73a-1853, & d. 60a-1854; RGLA, f. 1283, a. 1, d. 2481; RGLA, f. 1281, a. 6, d. 97-1856, d. 97-1857, d. 86-1858, d. 52-1859, d. 20-1860, d. 48-1861, & d. 47-1862.
following changes to tariff laws in 1822, trade at fairs was duty free. There were 5,653 fairs in Russia in 1860. Of these, 102 (2 percent) had a trade volume of more than 100,000 rubles, while 4,808 (85 percent) had a trade volume of less than 10,000 rubles. Twenty-one of the largest fairs had a total turnover in excess of one million rubles each, led by the great Nizhni Novgorod fair where trade exceeded sixty-one million rubles. Fairs served both the wholesale and retail sectors of the Russian market, trading in raw wool and cotton, textiles, manufactured goods, imported luxury goods, and livestock, but not in grain, which was bought directly by grain brokers. In her study of the Nizhni Novgorod fair, Anne Lincoln Fitzpatrick breaks the fairs into three categories: small fairs, with a turnover of less than 10,000 rubles, catering to local needs, and supplying peasants with manufactured goods and a market for the goods they themselves manufactured; medium fairs, with a turnover of between 10,000 and 100,000 rubles, serving as regional markets and including wholesale as well as retail trade; and large fairs, with a turnover in excess of 100,000 rubles, mainly dedicated to wholesale trade, and serving as the principal agency for the wholesale market in the empire.

In Ukraine there was a circuit of eleven very large fairs, each with a gross trade in excess of one million silver rubles. Largest of all, and second largest in the empire after Nizhni Novgorod, was the January fair in Kharkov, where turnover could top twenty-five

million rubles. None of the other ten exceeded ten million rubles. Cotton was the staple of the Ukrainian trade, with the exception of the June fair in Kharkov, where wool took first place. Horses, cattle and sheep also played a prominent role.

In Melitopol and Berdiansk uezds there were just twenty-nine fairs in 1843, the first year for which statistics are available, but by three years later the number had grown to fifty, and it would reach sixty by 1860. The volume of trade at fairs in Melitopol and Berdiansk uezds hit its pre-reform peak in 1860 at over 1.9 million rubles. Six of the fairs in 1860 fell into the over-100,000-ruble class, placing them among the largest 102 fairs in the entire empire that year. On average fairs were larger in the two uezds than in the rest of the empire. While 85 percent of all fairs in the empire in 1860 had a turnover of less than 10,000 rubles and only 2 percent had a turnover of over 100,000 rubles, in Melitopol and Berdiansk, only 48 percent were under 10,000 rubles, and 10 percent were over 100,000 rubles.

The May 9th Bolshoi Tokmak fair was the great event of the year in the Molochna. Mennonites and other German-speaking Colonists, Orthodox state peasants, and Nogais mingled with Jewish hatmakers from Kherson, Tatar wine merchants from the Crimea, wool buyers from Kharkov and hide buyers from Moscow. Booths selling wine, vodka and tobacco, perfume and makeup, glassware and pottery did brisk business, while weary shoppers could even stop to take in a performance by travelling comedy troops. Wool took centre stage, each year fifty or more wool buyers arriving to obtain a share of local kurdimb wool production. In 1845, they took away over 80,000 puds of wool, and this was by no

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110Tavricheskaia gubernskaia vedomosti 4 (28 January 1838).
Table 5.3: Goods imported through Berdiansk, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Value (Paper Rubles)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lumber, shovels, and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous tools</td>
<td>29,250 puds</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
<td>927 puds</td>
<td>2,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textiles</td>
<td>5,806 puds</td>
<td>14,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oranges</td>
<td>135,977 pieces</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit &amp; Berries</td>
<td>3,207 puds</td>
<td>8,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Foodstuffs</td>
<td>2,879 puds</td>
<td>4,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>2,952 puds</td>
<td>20,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peppercorn</td>
<td>316 puds</td>
<td>1,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>58 puds</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive Oil</td>
<td>481 puds</td>
<td>3,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigars</td>
<td>2 puds</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>117 puds</td>
<td>543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matches</td>
<td>50 puds</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal &amp; Charcoal</td>
<td>4920 puds</td>
<td>19,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coinage</td>
<td></td>
<td>35,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap</td>
<td>57 puds</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>818 puds</td>
<td>1,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>122,978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Source: "Verzeichniss der aus dem Hafen am Berdiansk im Jahre 1860, aus= und ein=geführt," 16 February 1861, PJBRMA, file 1877.

means atypical.\textsuperscript{111}

The growth of fairs in the region is clearly linked to the opening of the Berdiansk port. Tables 5.3 and 5.4 list the type and quantity of goods that passed through Berdiansk in 1860. Small quantities of luxury goods were arriving in the port, and a very small amount of cotton, but the amounts could hardly have satisfied demand, so fairs must have filled this role. Turning to exports, it is apparent that a very significant proportion of grain production

\textsuperscript{111} Wilhelm Bernhard Bauman, “Opisanie kazennago seleniia Tokmaka, v Tavricheskoii gubernii,” \textit{ZhMTD} 26 (1848), 1-9.
Table 5.4: Goods Exported Through Berdiansk, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Value (Paper Rubles)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>5,876 puds</td>
<td>32,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>473,370 chetverts</td>
<td>4,800,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rye</td>
<td>10,043 chetverts</td>
<td>50,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>12,073 chetverts</td>
<td>42,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats</td>
<td>5,888 chetverts</td>
<td>18,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustard</td>
<td>12,306 chetverts</td>
<td>50,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flax seed</td>
<td>95,050 chetverts</td>
<td>940,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour</td>
<td>11,330 puds</td>
<td>16,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool</td>
<td>13,342 puds</td>
<td>113,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rag wool</td>
<td>1,795 puds</td>
<td>2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silk cocoons</td>
<td>55 puds</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow hide</td>
<td>9,695 puds</td>
<td>190,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse hair</td>
<td>112 puds</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallow</td>
<td>35,877 puds</td>
<td>161,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bast</td>
<td>17,967 pieces</td>
<td>1,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6,423,814</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: "Verzeichniss der aus dem Hafen am Berdiansk im Jahre 1860, aus= und eingeführt," 16 February 1861, PJBRLA, file 1877.

In the region was leaving through Berdiansk, the 608,730 chetverts exported through the port in 1860 probably representing the total of grain exported from the region that year.

On the other hand, only 13,342 puds of wool were exported, less than a fifth what was traded at Bolshoi Tokmak. The 8.5 rubles/pud average price of this wool shows that it was merino wool, and given the over 1.1 million merino sheep in Melitopol and Berdiansk in 1860, the amount exported through Berdiansk cannot have represented much more than 15 percent of production. So, of the region’s two primary agricultural products, wool passed northward, through the fair system, while grain went south, through Berdiansk. As

\[112\] According to Aksakov, merino sheep produced about 3.5 funts of wool per sheep (Izsladovanie o torgovle, 200). There were 1,103,945 merino sheep in the two uezds in 1860, so wool production would have been 3,863,808 funts, or 96,595 puds
for other commercial goods, no doubt they came into the region through both Berdiansk and the fairs, and in fact the fairs must have acted as a distribution network for the goods that arrived in Berdiansk from abroad.

Of course, fairs were not the only suppliers of manufactured goods to Melitopol and Berdiansk, for yet another sign of the growth of the local economy was the rapid growth of local industry. It is impossible to accurately track such growth, for the statistics are spotty,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Enterprises</th>
<th>Sales Volume (Paper Rubles)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>92,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>118,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>158,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>195,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>369,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>460,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>228,249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>235,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>271,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>274,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>340,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>336,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>513,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>411,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>541,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>876,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>538,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>787,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>471,927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5.5: Industrial Production in Melitopol and Berdiansk Uezds, 1843-1861*

Sources: "Otcetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov," RGI, f. 1281, o. 4, d. 49a-1844, d. 49-1845, d 69a-1846, d. 50-1847, d.35a-1848, & d. 45a-1849; RGI, f. 1281, o. 5, d. 52-1850, d.30a-1851, d. 48a-1852, d. 73a-1853, & d. 60a-1854; RGI, f. 1283, o. 1, d. 2481; RGI, f. 1281, o. 6, d. 97-1856, d. 97-1857, d. 86-1858, d. 52-1859, d. 20-1860, d. 48-1861, & d. 47-1862.
and the total volume of industrial production, shown in table 5.5, is probably seriously under-reported. Such Industry was primarily a phenomenon of the Colonies, but not solely — the largest single industrial enterprise in the region was the tallow factory in Bolshoi Tokmak, while other Orthodox state peasant villages had tallow factories, brick and tile factories, tanneries, etc.

The clearest evidence that the fruits of this economic growth were enjoyed by landless as well as landed Mennonites comes from records of investment in sheep metatayage. By the 1840s, the philanthropic program Cornies had established in the 1820s to encourage landed Mennonites to contribute to Nogai economic development (see chapter three) had also come to serve as an avenue for agricultural investment for landless Mennonites.

The serious slump in international wool markets, which bottomed out in 1847, combined with a rise in grain prices, saw Mennonite land-owners gradually shift from raising sheep to growing grain. As table 5.6 shows, between 1835 and 1847 Mennonites increased the amount of their arable land by 55 percent, at the same time reducing their cattle and sheep holdings. Only the number of horses, needed as draft animals, stayed roughly constant.

The workings of the metatayage system in the mid-1840s are detailed in two lists describing 188 contracts concluded between 1843 and 1847. Ninety-three Mennonites took part, providing 10,279 sheep to Nogais. Just six contractors, including Cornies, provided over a third of the sheep, the remaining eighty-seven providing an average of just

### Table 5.6: Land Sown and Livestock per Mennonite Household, 1835 and 1847

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1835 (per Fullholder)</th>
<th>1847 (per Fullholder)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desiatinas sown</td>
<td>12.36</td>
<td>19.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>115.00</td>
<td>91.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes complete data from all 42 villages
** Only includes data from 27 villages.

Sources: “Tabellen. Ueber den Zustand der Molotschner Mennonisten Gemeinde in Zahlen im Jahre 1835,” 1837, PJB/RMA, file 1138. This document provides only the number of chetverts of grain and other crops sown. The number of desiatinas sown has been calculated using figures from “Verzeichniss. Des Molotschner Mennonisten Gebiets Amtes über die Aussaat des Sommergetreides im Jahre 1857,” and “Über die Winterssaat in der Kolonie des Molotschner Kolonisten Gebiet,” 1858, GAOO, f. 6, o. 4, d. 18086; “S vedostiamy o blagosostoianii Molochanskago kolonistskago i menonistskago okruga,” 1847, GAOO, f. 6, o. 2, d. 10080.

seventy-seven each. As for the Nogais, no single metayer engaged in more than one contract, and no contract exceeded 120 sheep.

Farm inventories from 1847 exist for twenty-seven of the forty-four Molochna Mennonite villages, providing an economic profile of thirty of the ninety-three Mennonite metayage contractors. As table 5.7 shows, on average contractors kept substantially more livestock of all kinds than other Mennonites, but sowed less land. As market forces pushed them to put more land under crops, they needed either to sell their livestock, or move it to different land. Metayage contracts provided a way to keep part of the income from displaced sheep without incurring any direct costs for land rental, fodder, or labour at a time when investment was better directed into grain growing.

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114“S mesiachnymi vedomostiami o blagosostoianii kolonii Berdianskago okruga za Ianvar 1847,” GAOO, f. 6, o. 2, d. 10063.
Table 5.7: Land Sown and Livestock Held by Metayage Contractors and Other Mennonites in 1847

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Contractors</th>
<th>All Mennonites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Horses</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>111.81</td>
<td>91.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Sown</td>
<td>17.31</td>
<td>19.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: “S mesiachnymi vedomostiam o blagosostoianii kolonii berdianskago okruga za Ianvar 1847,” GAOO, f. 6, o. 2, d. 10063.

Most of these contractors continued to keep unusually large herds of sheep on their own land in addition to those they contracted to Nogais, but there were interesting exceptions. Peter Regier of Altona, who kept just seventy-eight sheep on his own land, contracted 852 sheep to Nogais, using metayage as a significant form of agricultural investment. Meanwhile a few contractors were unusually poor, such as the brothers Heinrich and Gerhard Wiens, who shared a farm in Blumenort and had only seven sheep between them apart from the 194 they contracted to Nogais.

Twenty of the identifiable contractors were landless. Unfortunately little further is known of their circumstances. One, Peter Loewen of Altona, was the single largest contractor, supplying 978 sheep to Nogai metayers. Even at deflated 1840s prices this must have represented an investment of over 20,000 rubles, making the landless Loewen a rich man. On the other hand, the other nineteen averaged just 65 sheep under contract, much fewer than most land-owning contractors. The depression in wool prices permitted landless Mennonites to buy merino sheep at deflated prices from landowners who were putting

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115 These contractors can be identified as landless because they lived in one or another of the twenty-seven villages for which farm inventories exist, but did not appear in the inventories, which list only the landed families.
pasture lands to the plough, while metayage permitted them to keep the sheep without incurring direct costs beyond the original purchase price. Thus the metayage program, which began as a way to improve Nogai sheep, became a way for landless Mennonites to invest in the agricultural economy.

Metayage made economic sense for Nogais, too. Due to the five-fold gap between the price of merino and kurdiuch wool, Nogais could make more money raising merinos with prices at their lowest than they ever did raising kurdiuch sheep. One indication of the profitability of raising merinos comes from a different program, introduced by Cornies in 1843, to sell sheep to Nogais on credit.¹¹⁶ A record of thirty sales survives. Credit was interest-free, averaging 277 rubles per purchase, although whether this was in silver or paper rubles is unclear, as is the number of sheep involved. Nogais had no difficulty repaying the loans, repaying all but twenty-five rubles within four years, and this shows that raising merino sheep was profitable.

Such positive evidence must be balanced by contrary indications of problems both for Nogai metayers and their Mennonite suppliers. Cornies had always been less optimistic about Nogai progress in his private correspondence than in official reports, as early as 1836 writing to Fadeev, "these people lack patience and perseverance, and . . . knowledge of the methods of raising [merino] sheep."¹¹⁷ Some Mennonites apparently lacked "patience and perseverance" with Nogais as well, for that same year Cornies asked the Inspector of Colonies to caution Mennonites not to "mock or ridicule Nogais about their inability to

¹¹⁷Cornies to Fadeev, 30 December 1836, PFBRMA, file 236.
accomplish what they have started." Cornies showed dissatisfaction with the terms of metayage contracts in 1837, proposing a revised twenty-two-clause contract that, had it been implemented, would have rigorously redefined Nogai obligations. It foresaw monthly inspections, stipulated when sheep would be moved to pasture, when they would be mated, and when they would receive fodder, defined procedures for removing weak sheep from the flock, and sharply redefined the treatment of sick sheep, specifying that "regardless of whether the sheep are well or sick, [the metayer] may not slaughter them under any circumstances, and if he does he will have to pay for them, and beyond that will face punishment in court."\footnote{\textit{Zemskii Ispasnie} Kolosov to Inspector Pelekh, 14 February 1836, \textit{PJBRMA}, file 691.}

Nogais, too, had concerns, in 1839 a group from Akkerman petitioning their "esteemed benefactor" Cornies for help.\footnote{\textit{Ob iavlenie konditsii,"} 1837, \textit{PJBRMA}, file 406.\footnote{\textit{Ob iavlenie konditsii,"} 1837, \textit{PJBRMA}, file 406.\footnote{\textit{Nogais to Cornies, 1839, PJBRMA, file 543.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}}}}} They described how their merinos had been afflicted since 1837 with a disease that reduced wool production and prevented successful breeding, so that in 1837 and 1838 they realised no profits. Then, in 1839, drought destroyed fodder crops and so they anticipated even greater losses. Because of this, they said, "many of our people want to breed only [\textit{kurdinch}] sheep," and they asked Cornies to intervene to help cure the disease and end their losses.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

In the 1840s Mennonite contractors began subtly manipulating the terms of contracts to their own advantage. They gradually increased the proportion of lambs included in contracts from 10 percent to over 19 percent, thus reducing wool production, and, because ewes could not safely be bred before the age of 2.5 years, also reducing reproductive
potential. At the same time, they began supplying some male lambs in place of female lambs. A herd of fifty ewes -- the standard contract amount -- needed just one ram, so for Nogais, the ten to fifteen male lambs that began to be included in some contracts were superfluous, while the corresponding reduction in female lambs reduced the reproductive potential of the herd. Moreover, male sheep were less valuable wool producers, because, while they produced more total wool, they produced less clothing wool, which brought a far higher price on international markets.122

The same conditions that made metayage a preserve of wealthy Nogais in the 1830s still applied in the 1840s, and this had important implications for the increase in differentiation in Nogai society. The problem, at root, was as much demographic as economic. There is no precise demographic data on Nogais in the 1840s, but already by 1837, when their population was 32,058 persons (see table 2.1, p. 28), Nogai holdings of "good land" amounted to just 17.8 desiatinas per male soul. Located on the Azov Lowlands, it was the most arid land in the entire Molochna region, and could not support their population on the basis of a pastoralist economy. If they were to survive, let alone prosper, it was essential they turn to more intensive agricultural methods.

The transformation to arable husbandry would require employing the best Nogai land, on the Molochna and Iushanlee River floodplains, for cropping. However, commercial sheep-breeding demanded the use of precisely the same land as pasturage. Because this land was already designated as common pasture, Nogai metayers, with their disproportionately large flocks of Merino sheep, were able to monopolize it. Orthodox state peasants in the

122On ram vs. ewe wool and international demand, see Barnard, *Australian Wool Market*, 5-6.
Molochna, faced with the same problem, decreased their commons, increased their arable, and instituted land repartition on the arable portion, thus ensuring adequate access to land for the poor (see chapter six). Poor Nogais may have tried similar tactics, for in November 1846 Mennonite suppliers began requiring Nogai metayers to provide written guarantees from village Elders confirming their right to use the commons for contracted sheep, implying this right was in dispute. The fact Nogai metayers successfully obtained such guarantees suggests that, unlike Orthodox state peasants, the Nogai poor were unsuccessful in asserting their claims. Consequently they could not follow the example of Orthodox peasants and turn to growing grain. The structure of Nogai-Mennonite economic relations thus encouraged a sheep monoculture at just the time when market demand dictated transition to arable husbandry. Meanwhile, the introduction of pasture guarantees to Nogai metayers was an important symbolic juncture in Nogai history, for it formally abrogated the customary nomadic right of common access to pasture.

Despite the negative potential of the metayage system, before 1848 it prompted no crisis in Nogai society. To that date, the Nogais seemed to be sharing in the Molochna's economic boom, dragged along on the coattails of Mennonite prosperity. However, the crisis was looming, and as chapter seven will show, when it came, its implications were as important for Mennonites as they were for Nogais.

When Cornies died in 1848, few Mennonites mourned his passing. He was, in the end, more feared than loved, and as Harvey Dyck has pointed out, only eight of the forty-

\[123\] Bauman, "Zusammenstellung," 1847, PJBRMA, file 1291.
\[124\] See guarantee to a contract between Regier and Adzhigulov, 3 November 1847, PJBRMA, file 1268.
four extant village histories that were written on the orders of the state shortly after his death have anything positive to say about him. Yet, it must be noted that these histories were written in the midst of the most severe drought since the Great Drought of 1833 to 1834, a situation hardly likely to weigh in Cornies' favour in the minds of those who compiled the histories. The fact that this drought, unlike the Great Drought, caused barely a stir in the Molochna Mennonite economy is a greater testament to Cornies' accomplishments than any tributes that village officials might have written. Heeding the lessons of 1833 to 1834, Cornies had overseen a massive increase in agricultural and industrial productivity, while consciously providing a place for landed and landless alike in this new, industrializing world.

The religious turmoil that accompanied the transformation has perhaps received more attention from historians than it warrants. It must be remembered that to a significant degree these were political disputes. There is little, if any evidence that they were accompanied by social turmoil. And, before condemning Cornies' actions, it is important to ask what other options there were? In the 1860s and 1870s, Mennonites bought land and established Daughter Colonies, but this solution grew out of a real social crisis in a society that was already exploiting its other economic options to their fullest. Until internal solutions had been exhausted, it is hardly reasonable to expect that the Mennonite Colony would have taken more radical steps. Nor was land redistribution an attractive alternative, even setting aside the fact that it was forbidden by the Mennonite Charter, and certain to be even more vehemently opposed by conservative land owners than were Cornies' reforms.

126 The 1848 drought is described in chapters six and seven.
That option was tried by Orthodox state peasants, and the results, described in chapter six, served no one's interests.
Chapter Six

The Orthodox State Peasant Path: Land Repartition

The combination of isolation from markets and state authority, and a sparsely populated, arid, grassland environment, had led Orthodox state peasants in the Molochna to adopt a subsistence economy emphasising animal husbandry and gardening. The opening of the Berdiansk port and the creation of the Ministry of State Domains fundamentally altered their existence. Ironically the new Ministry, which was intended to improve the condition of the peasantry by easing land shortages in interior gubernias and ending administrative inefficiencies, increased state interference in the affairs of Molochna state peasants while threatening to reduce their land allotments. At the same time, continued growth of both human and livestock populations placed strains on pasturelands that soon demanded a reckoning. Orthodox peasants once again proved their ability to adapt, on the one hand turning to arable husbandry and exploiting newly accessible grain markets, on the other, introducing repartition in their obshchinas to resolve the inequalities in land distribution that had become increasingly troublesome as their population grew.

The decision to impose land repartitioning is a puzzling one, for until the 1830s economic development in Molochna state peasant villages, with its emphasis on pastoralism, had in many ways paralleled that in Mennonite villages. In the 1830s Orthodox peasants stood at a fork in their developmental road. One way led to industrialization, modernization, and perhaps, prosperity. The other led to communal land repartition, backward agricultural practices, and economic stagnation. They chose the latter, inviting state intervention to
institute radical land reforms. Although practical administrative factors played an important role in this parting of ways with the Colonists, in the final analysis, it was a decision that can only be credited to a native peasant perception of justice as rooted in access to land.

The creation of the Ministry of State Domains, and its decision to reclassify Tavrida guberniia as land-poor and reduce peasant allotment sizes, has already been described in chapter four, but the Ministry, and its forerunner, the Department of State Domains at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, also explored a number of other ways of improving peasant agriculture. Plans to establish tree plantations, encourage potato cultivation, and establish agricultural schools, were all in the works in the 1830s and 1840s.

Colonist efforts to establish tree plantations dated from the first decade of the nineteenth century, but Orthodox state peasants had never shown any interest in following their example. In 1834, the Ministry of Internal Affairs entertained a proposal for the "development of forests in sandy steppe places in the uezds of Tavrida guberniia." The author of the report wrote that the peasants' failure to establish tree plantations to that date was "partly because [they], for various reasons, [have] no desire to develop tree plantations, partly because the steppe is considered unsuited to growing trees." The central features of the 1834 proposal were the establishment of a forestry institute, the purchase of necessary tools, the hiring of workers, the establishment of a system of supervision and inspection, and the construction of depots for storing seed. A budget of 5,000 paper rubles was proposed to meet initial costs, while a further 25,000 was requested for ongoing expenses.

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1"O razvedenii lesov v stepnykh uezdakh Tavricheskoj gubernii," 7 November 1843, RGLA, f. 387, op. 1, d. 10407.
2Ibid.
3Ibid.
The proposal suggested growing, first and foremost, grape vines, and then a mixture of birch, asp, black poplar, acacia, and various ivies. Curiously, it took no notice whatsoever of the Colonist tree plantations already established in the region. By 1835 Colonists had over 400,000 trees growing on their plantations and private plots, none of which were birch, asp, black poplar or ivy. Of the varieties proposed for planting on peasant plantations, only grape vines and acacia were already under cultivation in the region. This blindness to the example of the Colonists would not be quickly remedied. Even Köppen, who of all people should have been aware of the Colonists' accomplishments, took no note. When he wrote to Kiselev in 1839 in support of the forestry program, which by then had fallen under the auspices of the Ministry of State Domains, he pointed to successful tree-planting experiments on the shores of the Caspian sea, in Astrakhan, and in the Caucasus, but said not a word of the Colonists. It was only in 1843 that the first mention of using Colonist expertise appeared, when Rosen, head of the Ministry of State Domains in Tavride guberniia, wrote to Kiselev proposing the establishment of a forestry school under the supervision of Cornies, who already operated an agricultural school for state peasants. Rosen believed the school, which was opened in 1844, would overcome the main obstacle to establishing tree plantations, peasant ignorance.

Despite all the state's efforts to encourage Orthodox peasants to grow trees, there is little evidence of success. In 1849, fifteen years after the initial proposal, there was only one Orthodox state peasant tree plantation in all of Melitpol and Berdiansk uezds, and it was located in the village of Terpeniia, which the Orthodox peasants had inherited from the

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4 Köppen to Kiselev, 19 March 1839, RGLA, f. 387, op. 1, d. 10407.
5 O razvedenii lesov v stepnykh uezdakh Tavricheskoj gubernii," chert' 2, 28 July 1843, RGLA, f. 387, op. 1, d. 10408.
recently exiled Dukhobors. Although Cornies established a forestry school, it trained only a handful of peasants -- in 1854 it had just four students. Clearly Orthodox peasants had little interest in growing trees. This is perhaps understandable, in as much as they had spent the previous half-century learning to live without them.

The Ministry of State Domains' efforts to encourage potato cultivation met with only slightly greater success. Motivated by an empire-wide crop failure in 1839, Nicholas I in 1840 initiated a program to diversify food crops by promoting potato cultivation throughout Russia. However, from the very outset the Ministry of State Domains assumed that, due to the "hot climate and dry soils" in New Russia, the program would have little application there. Fragmentary data from 1856 and 1858 shows that state peasants in Melitopol and Berdiansk uezds planted only four to five thousand chetverts of potatoes per year, about one-twentieth of a chetvert per capita. Undoubtedly, the main reason for the peasants' reluctance to grow potatoes was that the state's assessment of the unsuitability of the New Russian climate was entirely accurate; potatoes thrive on low temperatures, short days, and very wet soils. The lack of rainfall in Melitopol and Berdiansk meant that without irrigation potatoes could not be grown effectively as a field crop, and although, like cabbage,

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6"O razvedenii lesov v stepnykh uezdakh Tavricheskoj gubernii," chast' 3, 1843, RGIA, f. 387, op. 1, d. 10409.
7PBRMA, file 1787.
8For the decree, along with plans and reports on its implementation, see "O sostavlenii predpozhenii na chet usilenia razvedenii kartofelia," RGLA, f. 1589, op. 1, d. 694.
9Ibid.
10"Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov . . . za 1856," RGLA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1857; "Otchetov Tavricheskikh Gubernatorov . . . za 1858," RGLA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 52-1859.
they could have been grown in watered gardens, as the temperatures along the coast of the Sea of Azov climbed into the high 20s during the mid-summer months, potato growth would have become stunted. Although Colonists achieved some success growing potatoes -- in 1858, for example, they planted 9,639 chetverts, or roughly one-half chetvert per capita, and reaped a harvest of 51,065 chetverts\textsuperscript{12} -- cabbages, which needed less water than potatoes and thrived in hot temperatures, were already a fixture in peasant diets, so it is little wonder that the potato program, which saw large increases in production in northern and central Russia, was all but ignored among Orthodox state peasants in the Molochna.

A third state program to improve state peasant agriculture was the creation of agricultural schools for state peasants. Seven such schools were founded in Russia in 1842, with the nearest to the Molochna in Ekaterinoslav. Because the Ekaterinoslav school enrolled a total of only 150 students at any one time, and allocated just fifty-five positions to students from Tavride guberniaía, it could have had little effect on state peasant farming practices.\textsuperscript{13} Closer to home, in 1839 the Ministry of State Domains enlisted Cornies to train state peasants on his estate at Iushanlee.\textsuperscript{14} Once again the number of students was very small, in 1846 the first graduating class consisting of just eight students: three Nogai boys, two Ukrainian boys, and three Ukrainian girls. The five Ukrainian students protested plans to send them back to their home villages, asking instead to be settled together in Terpeniaia, where they could remain close to Cornies' Iushanlee estate.\textsuperscript{15} Again, the potential impact of

\textsuperscript{12}"Otchetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov . . . za 1858," \textit{RGLA}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 52-1859.

\textsuperscript{13}"Ob izbrani na uchebnykh fermy mal'chikov iz gosudarstvennykh krest'ian," 1851, \textit{RGLA}, f. 383, op. 14, d. 16143.

\textsuperscript{14}Department of Agriculture of the Ministry of State Domains to First Department of the Ministry of State Domains, \textit{RGLA}, f. 383, op. 10, d. 9232.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.
these students on peasant agriculture could only have been minimal.

While Orthodox state peasants showed little interest in state-initiated reform plans, they, like the Mennonites, were willing to turn to the state for support in implementing their own reforms. The 1833 request of the villages of Berestova, Nikolaevka, and Popovka to have the state repartition their land is described briefly in chapter four, but a more thorough examination of the problems these villages faced, and the solutions they and the state proposed, is needed. The request for repartition came in the midst of a long and complex dispute between the three villages. Trouble had begun in 1812, when a land surveyor named Razumov, who was assigned to map the district, misplaced the border between Berestova, Nikolaevka, and the Nogai land grant, giving the Nogais 10,000 desiatinas of land that ought to have belonged to the Orthodox state peasants. So, at least, the peasants claimed, but unfortunately for them, in 1815 their original 1803 land grant, the 1812 map, and their petitions protesting the mistake, were destroyed in a fire at the land surveyor's office in Simferopol.16 New petitions eventually earned their case a hearing by the Senate in St. Petersburg, where in 1824 it was ruled that, although the two villages were indeed short of allotment land -- their formal allotment amounted to less than ten desiatinas per male soul - free access to vast supplies of open steppe more than compensated them, so that they "cannot be regarded as land-poor."17

The state's typically ill-informed belief that arid steppe land was adequate compensation for a lack of good bottom land left the Berestova and Nikolaevka villagers

16Berestova obshchina to Vorontsov, 6 October 1834, GAOO, f. 1, op. 191, d. 28.
17The case is summarized in a report from the Agricultural Desk of the Department of Finance in Tavride gubernia to the Civil Governor of Tavride, 5 November 1834, GAOO, f. 1, op. 191, d. 28.
with a serious land shortage, and they renewed their petitions, provoking a new survey of
the district in 1831. The surveyor, one Golenkin, increased the Berestova allotment by
giving them 6,000 desiatinas of land belonging to the neighbouring village of Popovka.
Predictably, Popovka responded with its own petitions, prompting another survey in 1832.
This time a different surveyor, Odintsov by name, confirmed the new border between
Berestova and Popovka -- but granted 1,900 desiatinas of Berestova land to Nikolaevka.
More petitions followed, and in 1833 a third surveyor, Kuznetsov, muddled things further
by giving Popovka 6,000 desiatinas of Berestova land as compensation for the land lost by
Popovka in 1831. This left Berestova, the original petitioner, with less land than it had at the
start, and to make matters worse, the land Kuznetsov awarded to Popovka was not the
same, unoccupied land that Popovka had been forced to give up in the first place, but
instead contained several khutors, two windmills, an orchard, and a number of vegetable
gardens. Berestova now appealed to the District Court and successfully won back its land,
but when the Popovka villagers vacated in the summer of 1834, they took with them all the
standing grain and hay and stripped the khutors of everything movable. Protesting to
Governor General Vorontsov, the Berestova village Elders wrote:

Berestova obshchina has been left without grain and without hay, and if this
depredation [nasiliia], instigated by the land surveyor, continues further, then the
village of Berestova, which now has only the most insignificant quantity of land, as a
result of its utter impoverishment will not be in a position to pay its taxes.18

To resolve the problem, Berestova proposed that the state consolidate the land
holdings of seven villages -- Berestova, Nikolaevka, Andreevka, Popovka, Chernigovka,
Novogrigor'evka, and Petropavlovka -- into one district, add "as much Nogai land as

18Berestova obshchina to Vorontsov, 6 October 1834, GAOO, f. 1, op. 191, d. 28.
possible” to their combined land holdings, and redistribute the land proportionately on the basis of male souls. Almost four years later, in March 1837, the Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered Vorontsov to institute precisely this solution, and ceded the seven villages 10,000 desiatinas of Nogai land to supplement their holdings.

After 1837 the Berestova case disappears from extant records, and in order to follow the process of repartition further it is necessary to turn to a different example. However, first there are a number of elements of the Berestova case that demand further comment. To begin with, this is a particularly clear example of the state’s lack of understanding of environmental conditions in the Molochna. The Ministry of Internal Affairs continued to understand land as simple area, equating high steppe with river bottom, and consequently failed to resolve what was, after all, a fairly straight-forward issue of land shortages. It is also noteworthy that the state made no distinction between the landholdings of different villages. Surveyors glibly shuffled land from village to village, without any indication that the village obshchinas, or their individual residents, had tenure rights. From the state’s perspective, peasants had a right to a minimum amount of land, but not to any specific piece of land.

The peasants themselves obviously had a different point of view, for they regarded both their village’s land as a whole, and the mills and khutors of individual villagers, to be real property. They apparently understood such property rights to be based on their payment of taxes, for when the Berestova obshchina appealed to Vorontsov, its final argument was that if its problems were not resolved, it would not be able to pay its taxes.

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19 Berestova obshchina to Vorontsov, 6 October 1834, GAOO, f. 1, op. 191, d. 28.
20 Department of State Domains of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to Vorontsov, 15 March 1837, GAOO, f. 1, d. 191, op. 28.
This threat is often repeated in other peasant petitions relating to land claims, so it seems likely peasants knew from experience that it was effective.21

The peasants lacked a sense of common interests extending beyond the borders of their own villages. The Popovka seizure of Berestova grain, occurring as it did on the heels of the Great Drought, might perhaps be credited to desperation, but even so, it bespoke a complete disregard for people who, after all, lived just a few kilometres down the road. The limited horizons of Ukrainian and Russian peasants is not a new discovery, but it is worth noting how starkly it contrasted with Mennonite reactions to the Drought. Beyond the rights of individual villagers, individual villages, and individual congregations, Mennonites possessed a sense of the common good, and organized famine relief efforts to serve the whole community. Lest this be thought of as a uniquely Mennonite characteristic, foreign to Slavic peasants, it is worth recalling, too, the unity of the Dukhobor community in the face of exile. The lack of mechanisms to self-administer inter-village disputes left Orthodox state peasants dependent on the state to resolve the increasingly pressing problems of overcrowding and land shortages. The state's solutions are detailed in its plans to repartition the land of the largest village in the Molochna, Bolshoi Tokmak.

The Bolshoi Tokmak repartition is exceptionally well documented, providing a unique look into conditions in one Orthodox state peasant village in the Molochna, and revealing that the lack of corporate identity amongst villages was echoed within individual villages too. Rich peasants and poor ones, traders and artisans were deeply divided over the basic issue of land rights. In resolving their differences, they resorted to the old standby of

21 For other examples that explicitly relate land rights to taxes, see the series of fifteen petitions protesting land reductions in 1841, RGLA, f. 383, op. 1, d. 190.
the Russian peasantry, land repartition, turning aside from the path of development they had shared until then with their Colonist neighbours, and following a road that would soon lead to economic stagnation.

Bolshoi Tokmak, established in 1783 on a rich stretch of bottom land on the Tokmak River, was by the 1830s the largest settlement in the Molochna by a substantial margin. Although formally designated as just another agricultural village, in 1844 it had fifteen windmills, two watermills, three oil presses, a large tallow factory, a candle-making factory, and a brick and tile factory, and its approximately 6,700 residents included nine blacksmiths, twenty-six shoemakers (six of them German Colonists), five hatmakers, sixteen weavers, sixteen tailors (six of them Jews), seventeen millers, two butchers, fifteen potters, nine tanners, two carriage-makers (both German Colonists), one watchmaker (German), and six coopers. A further 126 families engaged in one or another of these trades part-time as an adjunct to farming. 22

The village was in fact no longer just one village, but consisted of a large, central settlement -- Bolshoi Tokmak itself -- and seven satellite settlements, which had originally been founded as khutors, but had evolved into villages in their own right. About a third of the population migrated from the central village to the khutors each spring, returning to Bolshoi Tokmak at the end of the agricultural season, and it was this third that controlled most of the wealth of Bolshoi Tokmak. One khutor-dweller rented 1,000 desiatinas of land from a nearby estate-owner, while many others rented smaller amounts from various sources. On average the wealthy peasants owned three times as much livestock as the

22 Bauman, "Opisanie kazennago seleniia Tokmaka," 5-6. According to Bauman there were 3,342 male residents in 1844.
families who did not own land in the khutors.

Alongside the rich peasants, there was also a group of poor peasants. According to Wilhelm Bauman, the agronomist assigned by the Ministry of State Domains in 1844 to administer the Bolshoi Tokmak repartition, many peasants had only a "hands-breadth" of land under crops, and, even had they held more land, their lack of draft animals meant they could not have farmed it.25 Poor peasants lacked draft animals because the rich were monopolizing the common pastures. Unlike in the Mennonite villages, where the commons were stinted, Orthodox state peasant commons were completely unregulated and subject to abuse. Rich peasants kept large herds of livestock on their khutors through the winter, where they were fed fodder, and then released them onto the commons as soon as the snow receded.24 This was a formula for disaster. The earliest stages of growth are critical for pasture plants, for it is then that their roots spread and gain the capacity to store food.25 Overgrazing at this vital stage kills plants, and "in such cases, less palatable or wholly unpalatable plants commonly take their place and thrive because livestock avoid them."26 In Bolshoi Tokmak, the consequence of such overgrazing was the creation of a near-barren stretch of land for a kilometre around the village.27

Under such conditions, cottage industry and agricultural wage labour became increasingly important for poor peasants. The transition to arable husbandry, which will be described below, sharply increased the number of seasonal jobs in the region, and rich peasants in the Orthodox villages were themselves significant employers of poor peasants.

25Bauman, "Zusammenstellung," 3-3ob.
26Semple, Grassland Improvement, 106.
26Semple, Grassland Improvement, 106.
Bauman records a curious system of wage-fixing, in which Orthodox state peasant obshchinas met annually to set a high daily wage rate for workers from outside of their obshchina. There was no fixed wage rate for members of the obshchina, but because wages for outsiders were inordinately high, employers were encouraged to hire obshchina members first. Rich peasants, Bauman reports, were thus forced to support the poor.\footnote{Bauman, "Zusammenstellung," 3-30b.}

Agricultural labour was the single most important source of wage labour in the Molochna. Its relative significance is shown by the fact that wages fluctuated sharply in accordance with the agricultural season, peaking at as high as 1.25 rubles per day in mid-summer -- a man with a horse or two oxen could earn twice that much -- and falling to half that in the winter months.\footnote{Scattered wage data from 1854, 1857, 1859 and 1860 can be found in GAKO, f. 26, op. 1, d. 20812; f. 26, op. 1, d. 21942; f. 26, op. 1, d. 23043; f. 26, op. 1, d. 23801; f. 26, op. 1, d. 24037; f. 26, op. 1, d. 24040.} Records from Cornies' estate at Lushanlee give some indication of the nature of labour opportunities in the region. Cornies typically employed between fifteen and twenty full-time workers, usually under contract for either six months or a year. Half of these were shepherds, whom he hired from state peasant villages in Melitopol, Berdiansk, and various places in Ekaterinoslav gubernii.\footnote{PIBRMA, 1214.} The shepherds apparently often came as members of artels, for each year a large group of them would come from a single village, all hired on the same day and for the same term. A few employees were listed as labourers, and unlike the shepherds, they brought their families with them to Lushanlee. Although they also were under temporary contracts, two of them, Demid Fatsenko and Ilia Odinets, worked at Cornies' estate continuously throughout the five-year period (1846-1850) for which records are available. Cornies also usually had three or four foreign employees.
working as supervisors or specialists. Almost all of the contract workers were men, the exceptions being Helena Fietz, a German maid who came to Iushanlee via St. Petersburg in 1848, and Olga Roshchvei from Bolshoi Tokmak, who came to Iushanlee with her family in 1846 under a one-year contract as a labourer.

Cornies also employed a significant number of temporary workers, particularly in peak agricultural seasons. In 1847, for example, he paid for a total of 12,011 days of work from temporary workers.31 Of this, 57 percent (6794 days) came in August and September during the harvest and the second shearing season, and a further 17 percent (2043 days) came in April and May, during planting and the first shearing season. Unlike with his contract workers, some 29 percent (3486 days) of the temporary workers were women. There is no indication where these temporary workers came from, but clearly there was an available labour force in the region. Otherwise the wage control system described by Bauman would not have been necessary. Moreover, the female half of the temporary work force must have been local, for migrant labourers were almost exclusively males. On the other hand, with the spread of repartition in the 1840s and 1850s, the local supply of labour would have declined as once-land-poor peasants received allotments. Migrant workers from the over-populated industrial regions were a fixture on the steppe by mid-century, and the artels Cornies hired are proof of their presence in the Molochna, so no doubt they filled some of the temporary positions as well. Nogais, who continued to practice extensive forms of agriculture, also had surplus labour to offer, but oddly, although they had frequently worked for Cornies as labourers in the 1820s, they seldom appeared on his pay books in the 1840s.

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31PJBRM4, 1177.
As noted in chapter five, industry was primarily a feature of the towns and Colonies, but it was not solely a Colonist phenomenon. The largest single industrial enterprise in the Molochna region was the tallow factory in Bolshoi Tokmak, which averaged gross annual sales in excess of 100,000 rubles in the late 1850s. A substantial part of the 35,877 puds of tallow exported from Berdiansk in 1860 must have come from this factory. Bolshoi Tokmak also had a large candle-making factory, as well as a brick and tile factory, and there were smaller brick and tile factories in several other state peasant villages. Just who owned these enterprises is impossible to say, except for the tallow factory in Bolshoi Tokmak, which belonged to a merchant by the name of Litiachin. More important than ownership, though, is the fact that they provided wages to Orthodox state peasants, although the extent of such industrial wage labour in the region can only be guessed at. Most enterprises were very small, and probably only employed the families who owned and ran them from their homes. Likely, the large estates employed more agricultural workers than the nascent industries did industrial workers.

Before looking in more detail at the repartition of Bolshoi Tokmak, it must be reemphasized how closely Orthodox state peasant economic development paralleled Colonist development at the end of the 1830s. Under conditions of hereditary tenure, a significant group of landowners -- about half of the Mennonites and a third of the Orthodox peasants -- controlled most of the land and wealth, basing their success on sheep-breeding. A small group of craftsmen -- about 11 percent of Bolshoi Tokmak families and 8 percent of Mennonite families -- were providing goods and services to the booming economy. Finally a large group from both communities were either landless or land-poor,

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32 Khanatskii, ed., Pamiatnaia knizhka Tavricheskoj gubernii, 225.
and worked as labourers or supported themselves by cottage industry. It also must be noted that these Colonist and Orthodox peasant economies were to a significant degree intermixed, so that, for example, Colonist estates and industries employed Orthodox peasants, while the Bolshoi Tokmak fair served as a wholesale clearing house for Colonists as well as Orthodox peasants. Still, while landless Colonists and land-poor Orthodox peasants worked along side one another as employees of wealthy Mennonites, there is no record of Colonists working for wealthy Orthodox peasants.

These parallel developments suggest that, in the late 1830s, the possibility existed for Orthodox state peasants in Bolshoi Tokmak to continue along the same path of industrialization and prosperity that Mennonites followed. Yet they did not, for in 1836 the Bolshoi Tokmak obshchina petitioned the Ministry of Internal Affairs to impose a land repartition, explaining the request on the grounds that the village’s “wealthy householders have acquired the very best and largest quantity of the land, and the poor are victimized.”

This sharp break with previous practice demands explanation.

Part of the answer lies in the fact that the Orthodox poor were not entirely landless. Although many of them only had a “hands-breadth” of land, every household shared full rights to the commons, while the state distributed additional land after each repartition to households that were land-short. Obviously the exhaustion of land reserves was an important impetus to demanding a redistribution of the existing supply, but as important was the fact that the poor, as land-holders, shared a full vote in the village assembly. By

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33 Agricultural Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to Governor General Vorontsov, 27 July 1836, GArO, f. 1, op. 191, d. 32. “The poor are victimized” is a liberal translation. The actual phrase is: “skudnye ostaiutsia pred nymi [the rich] kraine obizhennymi,” or literally “The poor stand before them utterly offended.”
comparison, landless Mennonites had no vote. The decision to repartition was not unanimous — the rich “opposed it with all their strength, which caused disputes, fights, and not infrequently, ruinous lawsuits.”34 But the land-poor held a majority in the village assembly, and imposed their will.

While voting rights explain how the Orthodox poor could force repartition, there is more to the story than this. There is no indication that the Mennonite landless ever expressed any desire for repartition, even if they had possessed the ability to force it. Clearly, there was also a different understanding of what constituted equitable land distribution in the two communities.

Orthodox state peasant support for land repartition should not be interpreted as the product of an inherent peasant opposition to wealth — after all, until shortages arose, no one complained that some were wealthier than others. However, peasants believed that everyone was ultimately entitled to enough land, to a subsistence minimum. When there ceased to be enough surplus land to ensure this minimum, the poor demanded a larger share of existing supplies.

This Orthodox peasant attitude toward land had some important similarities to the state’s attitude. To both, land was, first and foremost, a public resource, and not real property. But there was an important distinction — while the peasants were prepared to repartition the arable, they viewed home plots, khutors, windmills, etc., as real property. There was no indication that poor peasants ever proposed dispossessing the rich of such things. The state, by comparison, was prepared to reassign land regardless of the fixed assets that stood upon it.

34Bauman, “Opisanie,” 2
One final point about this process must be made. Just as the land dispute between the villages of Berestova, Nikolaevka, and Popovka had to be resolved by state intervention, the internal land dispute in Bolshoi Tokmak also demanded that the state intervene. Clearly, internal administrative mechanisms were too weak to deal with such a controversial issue. In this context, it is vital to note how important the creation of the Ministry of State Domains was. The Berestova case began in 1812, and was still not fully resolved in 1837. By comparison, the Ministry of State Domains moved much more quickly in dealing with Bolshoi Tokmak, resurveying the region and formulating a plan for the repartition within eight years of the first request. The state's renewed will to take direct charge of its peasants through the Ministry provided poor peasants with a lever against the rich -- just as it provided a lever for local administrators against the Dukhobors. Once again, the similarity between Orthodox and Mennonite experiences is clear. At almost exactly the same time that poor Orthodox peasants were turning to the Ministry of State Domains to resolve their internal problems, Cornies and Warkentin were lobbying the Guardianship Committee for support. Moreover, as with Mennonites, the willingness of the peasants to use Ministry authority to impose repartition does not indicate that the peasants were prepared to cede full control of their affairs to the state.

Returning to the repartition itself, in 1843 the Ministry of State Domains decided to use the Bolshoi Tokmak request for repartition as an opportunity to implement its newly conceived "Project for the correct economic distribution of land in state peasant villages in the southern guberniias." After first sending a survey team to accurately map the area, in

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35The Project itself is not extant, but it is described in a number of the documents cited here regarding the Bolshoi Tokmak repartition. The full name of the Project is "Proekt pravil khoziaistvennogo raspredeleniiia zemel v kazennykh seleniakh inzhurnykh gubernii."
1844 it sent Bauman to inspect the agricultural systems in use and recommend changes.

Although Bauman's report is not extant, much of its content can be inferred from correspondence it generated, while essays he later wrote confirm and expand on the earlier correspondence.36

In 1844, Bolshoi Tokmak volost consisted of eight villages divided into five obshchinas (see table 6.1). They were populated by 3,344 male peasants and possessed 33,203 desiatinas of good land, an average of 9.93 desiatinas per male soul. Bauman found that almost half of this land -- an average of four desiatinas per male soul -- was used as commons, and occupied all of the area closest to the villages. Meanwhile, some peasants lived as much as six versts from their grain fields. There is no indication how much land was employed as arable, but a long-fallow system was in place, and if the peasants employed one-third desiatina per male soul for their dwellings and gardens, as did peasants in Orekhov

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages, grouped by Obshchina</th>
<th>Male Souls</th>
<th>Good Land (desiatinas)</th>
<th>Poor Land (desiatinas)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolshoi Tokmak</td>
<td>2,279</td>
<td>22,629</td>
<td>4,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nizhnii Karakulak</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>1,589</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sladkaia Balka, Il'chenko, &amp; Verkhnii Karakulak</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>3,505</td>
<td>1,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocherstvovata</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>2,601</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ospushkova &amp; Skelivatova</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>2,879</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,344</strong></td>
<td><strong>33,203</strong></td>
<td><strong>6,627</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bauman, "Zusammenstellung," PJBRA, 1291

36Bauman, "Zusammenstellung"; Bauman, "Opisanie kazennago seleniia Tokmaka.
volost to their immediate north, then they were left with 5.6 desiatinas per male soul for arable.\textsuperscript{57} The fifteen year rotation described in chapter three would have left a third of this, slightly less than two desiatinas per male soul, available for sowing in any given year, but as table 6.2 shows, well over two desiatinas per male soul were actually under crops by the mid-1840s. With this much land sown, peasants in Bolshoi Tokmak volost could no longer have maintained the old pattern of cropping for five years and falling for ten, for such a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Land Sown Per Male Soul</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Land Sown Per Male Soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1852</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1853</td>
<td>3.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
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<td>1844</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average: 3.45

Sources: RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 72-1842; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 49a-1844; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 73b-1845; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 69a-1846; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 50-1847; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 35a-1848; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 45a-1849; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 52-1850; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 35b-1851; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 48a-1852; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 73a-1853; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60a-1854; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1283, op. 1, d. 2481; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1856; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1857; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 86-1858; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 52-1859; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 20-1860; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 48-1861; RGI\textsuperscript{a}, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 47-1862.

\textsuperscript{57}See chapter three, p. 92-93.
rotation would have permitted only one-third of the arable under crops at any one time. The combination of increased population and increased cropping had set in motion a process that by the 1880s would see the cropping period throughout New Russia climb to between six and nine years and the fallow period drop to two to three years. In fact, Bauman recorded that in some places in Bolshoi Tokmak the fallow period had already dropped to as little as two years, and at most it was six years, although the cropping period remained at five years.

While this process of intensification showed no signs of adversely affecting crop yields before 1861, in the long term it would over-tax the capacity of the soil. Modern studies suggest that, where grass leys are used in fallow periods, the ley period ought to match the cropping period if soil degradation is to be avoided. In a situation like that in Bolshoi Tokmak, where fallow fields were not planted to grass, but were simply left to re-seed by invasion, the necessary ley period would have been longer still. As Postnikov shows, despite technological advances in peasant agriculture, in the 1880s peasants in the Molochna were obtaining yields little better than they had in the 1840s and 1850s, and indeed worse than in the period 1857 to 1861, and he points to the growing evidence of soil exhaustion resulting from over-cropping.

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38 On the 1880s pattern, see Postnikov, Krest'ianskoe Khozjaistvo, 193.
40 Semple, Grassland Improvement, 22.
41 Regarding yields, see Postnikov, Krest'ianskoe khoziaistvo, 255. Postnikov gives yields per desiatina as follows: Winter rye - 4.1 che. / des.; Spring wheat - 3.2 che. / des.; Barley - 5.2 che. / des. Because breakdowns by crop are not available for the period 1840-1861, it is impossible to make direct comparisons, but given the standard practice of planting one chetvert per desiatina, the average seed/output ratio for all crops would have been little different than the 1/4.09 achieved in the period 1840-1861, and would have been worse than the 1/5.13 obtained in the period 1856 to 1861. Regarding soil exhaustion, see ibid, 190.
Bauman recommended a series of fundamental changes. To begin with, he suggested the commons be reduced from four to three desiatinas per male soul. The 6.5 desiatinas per male soul this would have left as arable, he suggested, ought to be used in a four-field rotation, following the practice Mennonites were already successfully employing in nearby villages. He also recommended the arable be moved to the river floodplain area closest to the village. Because this would have resulted in grazing livestock far from permanent water sources, he proposed digging water reservoirs on the steppe. He thought that if these were dug to a depth of three to four arshins, they would hold water right through the dry season. Finally, he recommended establishing a tree plantation on land the village presently employed for gardens, a proposal apparently supported by Cornies, who is referred to in the report as being well known to the ministry for having "mastered the methods of steppe forestry." 

Appended to the report were recommendations by the nachalniks of Bolshoi Tokmak volost and Berdiansk uezd. The volost nachalnik generally supported the report, but recommended minor revisions, suggesting the commons be reduced to only 1.5 desiatinas per male soul, although he recommended peasants be granted an additional one desiatina per male soul for grazing in the rocky hills near the village of Karakulak. He also cautioned that the place Bauman had designated for a tree plantation was too dry, and suggested an alternative site on Chungul Creek, at some distance from the village. The uezd

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42"Po otnosheniu Departamenta Sel'skago Khoziaistva o raspredelenii zemel v dache selenii Bol'shago Tokmaka s vyselivshimi iz nego derevniami Berdianskago okruga," 14 April 1847, RGLA, f. 383, op. 10, d. 9108.
43Ibid.
44Timofeev does not say which Karakulak, but he was presumably referring to Verkhnii Karakulak, which had a very large proportion of poor land.
nachalnik likewise largely accepted Bauman's report, although he recommended pasture lands only be reduced by one-fifth. He objected to the volost nachalnik's proposal to pasture sheep near Karakulak because, he said, the land there was too poor.

Elders from each of the five peasant obshchinas in the volost also submitted opinions on Bauman's proposal, and here it met with less enthusiasm. The Elders accepted the basic redistribution of their land on a proportional basis, and did not object to the reduction of the commons to three desiatinas per male soul. However, they were not willing to alter the practice of long fallow, claiming that if they tried to place the land under more intensive cultivation it would "become altogether hard and not yield crops." They also rejected the idea of moving the commons away from the village and from immediate access to the river, protesting that their livestock had to be pastured near fresh water. They explained that the proposed reservoirs would not work because, except for areas immediately around the villages of Bolshoi Tokmak and Ostrikova, the water in the volost was bitter and salty, and if it were held in reservoirs through the dry season it would grow progressively worse. Although they acknowledged that without other options the livestock would drink such water, they claimed that the result would be an increase in livestock disease.

The report of the village elders is not included with the reports of the regional authorities, but is described in the Ministry of State Domains summary ("Po otomesheniui Departamenta Sel'skago Khoziaistva o raspredelenii zemel v dache selenii Bol'shago Tokmaka s vyselivshimi iz nego derevnimi Berdianskago okruga," 14 April 1847, RGLA, f. 383, op. 10, d. 9108.).

"Po otomesheniui Departamenta Sel'skago Khoziaistva o raspredelenii zemel v dache selenii Bol'shago Tokmaka s vyselivshimi iz nego derevnimi Berdianskago okruga," 14 April 1847, RGLA, f. 383, op. 10, d. 9108.

Ibid. The peasants probably had a better appreciation of the water requirements of their livestock than Bauman. Modern experts place great emphasis on water quality, and A.T. Semple specifically criticizes the practice of constructing shallow reservoirs on
The Ministry of State Domains' summary of Bauman's report stressed at the outset that the "Project for the correct economic distribution of land" could only be implemented with the voluntary agreement of the peasants, which was apparently not forthcoming. However, the summary went on to dismiss peasant objections, claiming they stemmed from a "fear of work" and implying that peasant agreement was not really necessary. The summary did not, however, give any directions for implementing the project, and there is no evidence that any of Bauman's recommendations, apart from the basic repartition, ever took effect.

The imposition of repartition had far-reaching effects on Orthodox state peasant agricultural practices. As table 6.3 shows, the peasants' average gross harvests between 1840 and 1861 were over seven chetverts per male soul, despite three near-total harvest failures, and from 1857 to 1860, they averaged in excess of ten chetverts per male soul. By comparison, gross harvests over the period 1808 to 1827 had averaged just 3.82 chetverts per male soul. The increase was achieved, not by higher yields, but by planting more seed -- the output/seed ratio for 1840 to 1861 was just 3.55:1, slightly less than the 3.64:1 of the earlier period. Clearly, Orthodox peasants were not following the Mennonite example and applying technology to increase yields.

For the most part, Orthodox peasants in the Molochna grew the same basic crops in the 1840s and 1850s that they had in the first three decades of the century: wheat, rye, buckwheat and millet. Barley also entered the market, as did flax seed, which, as noted in

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rangeland, saying it "wastes water and fails to supply dependable and potable stocks." Semple, *Grassland Improvement* (Cleveland: CRC Press, 1970), 258.

"Po otoshenium Departamentu Sel'skago Khoziaistva o raspredelenii zemel v dache selenii Bol'shago Tokmaka s vyselivshimi iz nego derevnnymi Berdianskago okruga," 14 April 1847, RGLA, f. 383, op. 10, d. 9108.
Table 6.3: Orthodox State Peasant Harvests in Melitopol and Berdiansk Uezds, 1841-1862

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male Souls</th>
<th>Grain Sown</th>
<th>Grain Harvested</th>
<th>Output/Seed Ratio</th>
<th>Gross Harvest Per Male Soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>53,524</td>
<td>89,995</td>
<td>349,767</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>6.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>53,760</td>
<td>83,742</td>
<td>502,287</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>9.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>53,794</td>
<td>50,305</td>
<td>738,963</td>
<td>14.69</td>
<td>13.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>79,418</td>
<td>171,082</td>
<td>297,286</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846-1853</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>89,822</td>
<td>202,264</td>
<td>745,912</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>8.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>89,583</td>
<td>166,664</td>
<td>105,608</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>89,745</td>
<td>127,772</td>
<td>169,287</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>89,791</td>
<td>252,582</td>
<td>1,240,493</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>13.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>101,993</td>
<td>239,209</td>
<td>1,048,005</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>10.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>102,481</td>
<td>232,373</td>
<td>1,102,589</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>10.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>88,762</td>
<td>223,443</td>
<td>226,908</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>7.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 72-1842; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 49a-1844; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 73b-1845; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 69a-1846; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 50-1847; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 35a-1848; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 45a-1849; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 52-1850; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 35b-1851; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 48a-1852; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 73a-1853; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60a-1854; RGIA, f. 1283, op. 1, d. 2481; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1856; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1857; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 86-1858; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 52-1859; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 20-1860; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 48-1861; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 47-1862.

chapter five, became an important export crop. Price records show significant changes from the earlier period (see table 6.4). Prices in the Molochna no longer were lower than in the rest of the gubernia, showing that the port at Berdiansk had overcome the high transportation costs that the mainland uezds in Tavride gubernia had once suffered from.

49P/BRMA, file 1291.
50Note that rye had now entered the commercial market. During the Mnogoremel'naia period the price of rye in the Molochna had shown no significant correlation with prices in
Table 6.4: Regression Analysis of Melitopol and Berdiansk Uezd Grain Prices, 1843-1861.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th></th>
<th>Rye</th>
<th></th>
<th>Oats</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melitopol</td>
<td>Berdiansk</td>
<td>Melitopol</td>
<td>Berdiansk</td>
<td>Melitopol</td>
<td>Berdiansk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err of Y Est</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Squared</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Observations</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of Freedom</td>
<td>68.00</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X Coefficient(s)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Err of Coef.</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Dependent variable: uезд
Independent variable: guberniа

Sources: RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 49a-1844; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 73b-1845; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 69a-1846; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 50-1847; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 35a-1848; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 45a-1849; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 52-1850; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 35b-1851; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 48a-1852; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 73a-1853; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60a-1854; RGIA, f. 1283, op. 1, d. 248; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1856; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1857; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 86-1858; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 52-1859; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 20-1860; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 48-1861; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 47-1862.

The increase in the arable in state peasant villages had important implications for the rest of Orthodox state peasant agricultural strategies. As peasants increased the amount of land under crops, their livestock holdings began to shrink. The data available will not permit a precise delineation of this process, because livestock holdings are only reported in aggregates including Colonist, Nogai, and estate livestock, and each of these groups kept far the rest of the guberniа, but it now reacted to changes elsewhere (see table 6.4). On the other hand, the correlation between wheat prices in Berdiansk and the rest of the guberniа (r-squared = 0.46) is actually below the threshold usually considered to denote statistical significance. This anomalous result probably is due to the fact that Berdiansk only reported grain prices sporadically in the first years after its establishment, so that the available data is insufficient to establish a correlation with any degree of certainty. The result for Melitopol (r-squared = .56) suggest that, as expected, wheat prices were linked to the larger guberniа market.
more livestock per capita than did the Orthodox state peasants. However, as table 6.5 shows, although total livestock holdings in Melitopol and Berdiansk were little different in 1861 than they had been in 1843, the number of merino sheep grew sharply, while the number of domestic sheep, along with cattle and horses, declined sharply. State peasant sheep were almost exclusively domestic breeds, so it is clear that their total livestock

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Horses Per Male Soul</th>
<th>Cattle Per Male Soul</th>
<th>Domestic Sheep</th>
<th>Imported Sheep</th>
<th>Sheep Per Male Soul</th>
<th>Animal Units per Male Soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>292,500</td>
<td>462,108</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>441,088</td>
<td>652,217</td>
<td>10.63</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>439,500</td>
<td>597,981</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>4.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>447,000</td>
<td>657,760</td>
<td>10.02</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>36,798</td>
<td>489,868</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>177,443</td>
<td>547,153</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>353,838</td>
<td>470,903</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>37,633</td>
<td>158,442</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>60,083</td>
<td>497,292</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>164,882</td>
<td>536,285</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>270,277</td>
<td>862,630</td>
<td>8.97</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>270,290</td>
<td>770,242</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>3.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>271,611</td>
<td>748,077</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>310,287</td>
<td>881,239</td>
<td>8.92</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>288,388</td>
<td>823,688</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>462,270</td>
<td>894,576</td>
<td>9.58</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>393,673</td>
<td>1,103,945</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>327,252</td>
<td>960,018</td>
<td>9.55</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Sources: RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 72-1842; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 49a-1844; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 73b-1845; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 69a-1846; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 50-1847; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 35a-1848; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 45a-1849; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 52-1850; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 35b-1851; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 48a-1852; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 73a-1853; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60a-1854; RGIA, f. 1283, op. 1, d. 97-1856; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1857; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 86-1858; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 82-1859; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 20-1860; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 48-1861; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 47-1862.
holdings per male soul were falling.  

Table 6.6, which shows livestock holdings per male soul excluding merino sheep, gives some indication of the progression. The figures in this table can only point at approximate trends, for Colonists, Nogais and estate owners are still included, and probably Orthodox state peasant holdings were smaller still. Nevertheless, these figures show a striking development. The holdings per male soul after 1854 ranged between 1.98 and 2.28 AUs. At the peak of the earlier period, in 1827, AUs per male soul reached 2.24, a figure almost identical to the earliest recorded years from the later period. Although the lack of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AUs</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>AUs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1852</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1853</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>1856</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1857</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1858</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>1860</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 72-1842; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 49a-1844; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 73b-1845; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 69a-1846; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 50-1847; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 35a-1848; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 45a-1849; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 52-1850; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 35b-1851; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 48a-1852; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 73a-1853; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60a-1854; RGIA, f. 1283, op. 1, d. 2481; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1856; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 97-1857; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 86-1858; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 52-1859; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 20-1860; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 48-1861; RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 47-1862.

51On state peasant livestock preferences, see Friesen, "New Russia," 110; Bauman, "Opisanie," 5.
data from the years 1828 to 1843 makes it impossible to be certain, it may well be that the highest level of state peasant livestock holdings had already been reached by 1827.\textsuperscript{52}

The shift to arable husbandry in the 1840s was not solely, or even primarily a reaction to market demand, for the introduction of repartition had an important impact on the increase in the area under plough. In theory repartition redistributed all land in the obshchina equally, but in fact, the unregulated commons were monopolized by rich peasants, so repartition only had real significance on the arable. Rich peasants, who owned large flocks of sheep as well as disproportionately large amounts of the arable, were under no pressure to exploit their share of the arable intensively. As long as sheep remained profitable, the rich could continue to concentrate their efforts on them, and treat the arable in the same casual manner that their forefathers had. At the same time, even if their abuse of the commons was causing its rapid deterioration, as long as rich peasants owned khutors, they did not need to worry. Indeed, by grazing their herds on the commons early in the year, they spared their own land during the critical early season.

Rich peasants also had the ability to buy fodder to feed their livestock during the two or three months each winter when grazing was impossible. The purchase of fodder was beginning to significantly affect the cost of animal husbandry by the 1840s. In 1848 Russian regional historian A. A. Skal'kovsky wrote that fodder had always been regarded as free on the steppe, because as long as large areas of grasslands remained unpopulated, peasants could simply go out and harvest what they needed.\textsuperscript{53} However, in the 1840s, for the first time, the state began keeping records of the price of fodder, and while such records are too

\textsuperscript{52}The disastrous harvest failures in 1833-1834 and 1839 would have mitigated against the per capita holdings rising much further.

\textsuperscript{53}Skal'kovskii, \textit{Opyt statisticeskago opisaniia}, 368.
fragmentary to allow cost-accounting, the fact that they were kept at all shows that, with the growth of the population of both people and livestock, the availability of free fodder was disappearing. For poor peasants, who did not own khutors and could not afford to lease land or buy fodder, the monopolisation and destruction of the commons by the rich meant the carrying capacity of the commons was reduced to the point where survival dictated raising grain. When repartition returned land to those peasants who had been reduced to farming only a "hands-breadth" of land, it did not return to them control of the commons, which remained open to unrestricted use, so they turned to raising grain on the part of the land they did control. And, because the proportion of the total of Orthodox state peasant land holdings that was in the hands of the poor rose through repartition, the total of land under crops rose as well.

It must be noted, however, that because the commons continued to occupy the area closest to the village, the shift to arable husbandry did not place the prime, floodplain land under crops. Instead, peasant allotments were located on the high steppe, and thus heavily dependent on inconsistent Molochna weather. This had important long-term implications, for the intensive cultivation of the high steppe was certain to lead to soil exhaustion. However, the poor had little choice. Their allotments, exclusive of the commons, were only four or five desiatinas per male soul, too little land to support a family by raising livestock, so to survive they had to take their chances with the weather and grow grain.

In the Molochna, Orthodox state peasants, like Mennonites, shifted to growing

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54Detailed maps of the district, dating from the 1840s and 1850s, confirm this. See, e.g., "Umen'shennyi plan kazennykh dach, sel i dereven Orekhovskoi volost, Berdianskago uezda, Tavricheskago gubernii, sostavlen v 1853 godu," GAZO, f. 263, op. 1, d. 51.
grain in the 1840s, but unlike Mennonites, their actions were driven by land shortages, rather than changing market demand. With the implementation of repartition, Orthodox peasants headed down a radically different road than Colonists, one that would ultimately lead to economic stagnation.

Orthodox peasant decisions in the 1830s and 1840s are fully consistent with James Scott's moral economy paradigm. Driven by the spectre of famine, peasants made the avoidance of dearth their first priority, implementing a policy that placed subsistence ahead of wealth. This begs the question of why Mennonites, who were, after all, themselves peasants -- at least, they had been when they arrived in the Molochna -- took such a sharply different path. The moral economy paradigm seems to possess little utility in answering this vital question.

In looking elsewhere for answers, two points must be reiterated. To begin with, prior to repartition Orthodox state peasants had much less collective control over their own land than did Colonists, who controlled their own surplus lands, and consequently developed a system of self-administration over community resources. Orthodox state peasants, by comparison, were entirely dependent on the state to grant new land as their population grew. For Colonists, the surplus land system provided an impetus to establish an internal administrative system, and lent legitimacy to the participants in that system. Although Mennonite society was faced with many internal political disputes about who would control the system of internal administration of common resources, there was never any doubt that it would be Mennonites who ultimately held the reins of control. Even when Mennonite leaders sought Guardianship Committee support against their political opponents, they did not invite direct state participation in deciding internal matters, but
rather sought the authority to make community decisions themselves. Orthodox peasants, meanwhile, lacked any such internal administrative system, so when problems arose, they were constrained to invite outside assistance. Where the state granted Cornies the authority to manage Mennonite resources, it sent its own representative to Bolshoi Tokmak to decide how state peasant resources should be divided.

As a consequence, there arose in Mennonite society a corporate identity, what is commonly called the “Mennonite Commonwealth.” Mennonites, whether landless or landed, identified with the Commonwealth, and accepted, however grudgingly, decisions by community leaders about how the common good should best be served. The wealth of some was legitimized because it served all, and the poverty of others was made bearable by the promise that the poor would eventually share in the growing wealth of the whole community. Private enterprise blossomed in the name of communal good.

Orthodox peasants, meanwhile, had no common resources, and consequently, there was no impetus for the creation of a corporate identity. When demographic pressures made land scarce, they had no choice but to turn to the state, for they lacked any legitimate system to reallocate resources by themselves. Although their rejection of most of Bauman’s recommendations reveals their desire to maintain independence from the state, when they invited state intervention, they surrendered a critical element of their independence. Ironically, the peasants’ lack of a corporate identity led to the rejection of private enterprise and the arbitrary outside imposition of communal resource-sharing.
Chapter Seven

Afterward: Consolidation and Alienation

The livestock epidemic of 1847 and harvest failure of 1848 were less severe than the Great Drought of 1833 to 1834, but they nevertheless mark an important point in the development of the Molochna, for they forced consolidation of trends that had been developing over the preceding fifteen years. For Orthodox state peasants, after 1848 there was no going back to the old, pastoralist way of life. The rate of repartitions rose, and more and more state peasant land went under the plough. For the interlocked development of the Nogais and Mennonites, however, the 1850s were a time of crucial new developments. Encouraged by Mennonite investment, Nogais had continued to base their economy almost exclusively on pastoralism in the 1840s, and when the epidemic hit, they had nothing to fall back on. In the 1850s they fell into dependency on Mennonites, until finally, in 1860, impoverished and alienated, they fled the Molochna altogether.

The Nogai exodus had important, unanticipated implications for Mennonites, because landless Mennonites had come to rely heavily on land leased from Nogais. When the Nogais departed, this land was ceded to Bulgarian immigrant settlers, and Mennonite leasers turned back to the Colony, looking for a share of Mennonite land. The landlessness crisis that followed was thus closely linked to the long history of Nogai-Mennonite economic relations.

Uezd-level harvest data is not available for the period 1846-1854, but gubernia figures, provided in table 7.1, tell the story. State peasant harvests in 1848, including those of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State Peasants</th>
<th>Colonists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sown</td>
<td>Harvested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>255,417</td>
<td>460,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>231,419</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
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<td>308,779</td>
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<td>736,800</td>
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<td>260,465</td>
<td>440,649</td>
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<td>1851</td>
<td>245,807</td>
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</tr>
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<td>273,165</td>
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<td>314,633</td>
<td>1,700,944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>282,077</td>
<td>1,086,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>240,179</td>
<td>1,570,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>354,725</td>
<td>1,646,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>344,133</td>
<td>1,493,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>322,053</td>
<td>1,574,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>283,404</td>
<td>1,548,380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: RGLA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 69a-1846; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 50-1847; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 35a-1848; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 4, d. 45a-1849; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 52-1850; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 35b-1851; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 48a-1852; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 73a-1853; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 60a-1854; RGLA, f. 1283, op. 1, d. 2481; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 97-1856; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 5, d. 97-1857; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 86-1858; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 52-1859; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 20-1860; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 48-1861; RGLA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 47-1862.

the Nogais, barely returned the seed planted, while Colonist harvests, while better, were also desperately low. Livestock levels are provided in chapter six (table 6.6, p. 247). In 1848, livestock holdings in Berdiansk and Melitopol uezds fell to just 0.82 AUs per male soul, and state peasants were particularly hard hit.

With wool prices already at an all-time low, there was little impetus to reinvest in livestock, and so the decimated herds of Orthodox state peasants and Nogais were not
Table 7.2: Colonist Transition to Arable Husbandry, 1837-1861

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sown plus Fallow Land As A Percent of All Allotted Land</th>
<th>Livestock Per Capita In Animal Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mennonites</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonists</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


replaced, while Colonists, too, increased the pace of transition to arable husbandry. The progression in Colonist villages is shown in table 7.2. By 1861 they were already pushing their ploughed fields beyond the floodplains and onto the steppe, placing more and more marginal land under crops. By 1889, Colonists would be using about 70 percent of their land as arable. This process did not affect all villages equally, because later settlers received much worse land than the early ones. Already by 1835 the only land available for new villages was far up secondary streams, in more and more arid locations. A founding member of the village of Gnadenfeld, established on the Apanlee River in 1835, described how her family had come to a barren steppe without any roads and paths. No tree, no bush, only tall, dry, bitter grass and prickly camel fodder grew on the dry, cracked ground. . . . There were no wells, only an almost dry stream which provided water for man and beast. . . . Those not near the stream found no water except at great depths. This proved to be bitter, salty water unsuitable for drinking, cooking and washing. The entire village of Gnadenfeld had only three wells with suitable water. For almost fifty
years the villagers hauled their drinking water from these wells.¹

For Orthodox state peasants, post-1848 developments followed the path already established in previous years. Prior to 1840, just six land repartitions had ever occurred in all of Tavride guberniia, but there were nineteen in the 1840s, and forty-four in the 1850s.² Following the pattern described for Bolshoi Tokmak in chapter six, arable land increased accordingly: by the 1880s, roughly three-quarters of all peasant land was under crops, while common pastures disappeared altogether in some places, leaving peasants dependent on rented pastures and fodder crops to feed their draft animals.³

For Nogais and Mennonites, however, the 1850s saw important changes. The livestock epidemic signalled the end of sheep metayage — from 1848 to 1850 there were just 41 new contracts, and after 1850 there were none. This is probably because the destruction of Nogai herds was enormously costly to everyone involved. For Nogais the immediate expenses involved in new metayage contracts remained, but income from existing herds was gone, making it difficult to afford new contracts. For Mennonites, their capital investment disappeared with the death of the sheep, and even if they could afford to replace them — a doubtful proposition, particularly for the landless — the risks, freshly demonstrated by the epidemic, must have been forbidding.

Meanwhile, in early 1848 Nogais for the first time borrowed, not sheep, but money from Mennonites. The loans were small, averaging just seventy-three rubles, due in full from six months to two years later, and without interest. Records of thirty-one loans survive,

¹Quoted in Goerz, The Molotschna Settlement, 28.
³Postnikov, Krest'anskoe khoziaistvo, 166.
although there is no indication if they were repaid on time, or indeed repaid at all. Other sources show Nogais had great difficulty repaying their debts after 1848. Johann Cornies died in 1848, but that year and the next his heirs again sold sheep from his Iushanlee estate to Nogais on credit. The amount, 21,134 rubles, was almost three times what had been granted in 1843 (see chapter five, p. 215). All but twenty-five rubles of the 1843 loans were repaid within four years, but repayment of the 1848 and 1849 loans stretched over nine years, and in the end, 5,844 rubles, almost 28 percent of the total, were never repaid. Records from 1848, 1849, and 1851 show other Mennonites also sold sheep, worth over 28,000 rubles, on credit to Nogais, and although there are no payment records it is unlikely they were any better repaid than Cornies.

The most compelling evidence of a crisis in Nogai society after 1848 comes from the two model villages, Akkerman and Aknokas. In January and February 1851, thirty-three Nogais from the model villages rented an average of 3.6 desiatinas each to Mennonites for between 3.5 and 4.5 paper rubles per desiatina, to be paid directly to the treasury to cover tax arrears. The rental price was high — pasture land still rented for as little as 1.38 rubles per desiatina in the Molochna in 1851 — but this was because the land in question was river floodplain, the most valuable land in the region. Pre-revolutionary Russian historian A. A. Sergeev suggests renting out land to pay tax arrears was common to all Molochna Nogais in

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4*PJRMA*, file 1352.
6*PJRMA*, files 1477, 1576, and 1687.
7*"Otdacha nogaitsarni v arendu zemli s tsel'iu uplaty nalogov," 1851, *PJRMA*, file 1615.
9*See, e.g., the map of land rented by David Schellenberg in 1853, *PJRMA*, file 1686.
the 1850s, although he credits it to laziness, writing "the Nogais were indifferent to agriculture and gardening and rented their land . . . on the easiest of terms."\textsuperscript{10}

An 1850 report on the condition of the two model villages shows that, while some residents were still wealthy, many had been reduced to abject poverty. Differentiation in the model villages in 1850 was an extreme version of that in Shuiut Dzhuret in 1836 (see table 7.3). A much larger percentage of households in Akkerman and Aknokas owned sheep, and the rich in Akkerman and Aknokas were much richer than those in Shuiut Dzhuret, while the poor were poorer. The report details the economic condition of some Nogais involved in rental transactions. Unfortunately, inconsistent spellings of Nogai names and the use of only first names in some contracts makes it impossible to identify all participants, but ten of the thirty-three can be identified. Eight of these ten were poor, owning no sheep and on average fewer than three head of livestock, while the other two owned eighty-four sheep between them, putting them at the bottom end of the sheep-owning households. Thus, as

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
 & Shuiut Dzhuret (1836) & Akkerman & Aknokas (1850) \\
 & Sheep Owning & Other & Sheep Owning & Other \\
\hline
Percent of Households & 22.00 & 78.00 & 48.00 & 52.00 \\
Sheep/ Household & 50.00 & 0.00 & 119.46 & 0.00 \\
Horses/ Household & 12.11 & 4.59 & 8.70 & 2.04 \\
Cattle/ Household & 9.11 & 2.09 & 3.07 & 1.12 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Economic Differentiation in Shuiut Dzhuret (1836), and Akkerman and Aknokas (1850) }
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{10}Sergeev, "Ukhod Tavricheskih Nogaitsev," 181.
might be expected, Nogais who rented their land out to pay tax arrears were poor. The loss of use of their best land could only make them poorer, and confirming this, records for Akkerman from 1853 show the amount of land rented to Mennonites had climbed to an average of 12.75 desiatinas per participating household, while the number of households involved grew from thirty-three to thirty-seven. As for Mennonites who rented the land, unlike with metayage contracts in the 1840s, the majority of identifiable renters -- seventeen of twenty-four -- were landless, while none of the landed renters were owners of exceptionally large sheep herds.

While poor Nogais in Akkerman and Aknokas were losing control of their land, a curious parallel process also appeared -- in thirty-eight extant contracts, Mennonites contracted to Nogais as metayers. The contracts called for Nogais to provide ploughed land, which the Mennonites were to sow. Nogais would harvest the crops, and the product would be split evenly. Twenty-nine of the thirty-eight Nogais involved can be identified, thirteen of them coming from the wealthy, sheep-owning group. Only thirteen Mennonites can be identified, and of these, just three were landed. Here is startlingly evidence that in some instances, wealthy Nogais were becoming landlords to poor Mennonites, showing that consequences of the 1848 epidemic were dire for landless Mennonites, too.

In 1853 the Governor of Tavride reported to the Ministry of State Domains, "the Nogais . . . are almost completely identical to the Tatars." This contrasted sharply with the

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12"Otdacha nogaisami v arendu zemli s tsel'iu uplaty nalogov," 1851, PJBRA, file 1615.
13"Otchetov Tavricheskich Gubernatorov . . . za 1853," 1854, RGLA, f. 1281, o. 5, d. 60a.
1842 report that "Nogais are far better than the Tatars, and are progressing by the year." The optimism that had permeated official reports before 1848 was gone. Nogais, too, were no longer optimistic, and in the 1850s their leaders increasingly aligned themselves with the Crimean Tatars, ultimately joining in the Tatar exodus to Turkey in 1860.

A full explanation of the Nogai exodus from the Molochna requires a brief detour into the subject of relations between the Russian state and the Crimean Tatars. These relations had never been good, and they deteriorated rapidly in the 1840s and 1850s, reaching bottom during the Crimean war, when suspicions of Tatar collaboration with Turkish forces caused the state to consider evicting large numbers of Tatars from their homes and relocating them inland. Tatar dissatisfaction with the tsarist state centred on Russian nobles who had acquired large parcels of Tatar land, often through dishonest means. The last straw for the Tatars was the Ministry of State Domains' rejection in 1859 of Tatar petitions for new land grants to ameliorate their poverty.

There is no evidence to suggest the Nogais were subject to the same suspicions as the Crimean Tatars during the war. On the other hand, like other residents of the southern gubernias, they were obliged to contribute to the war effort, sending 940 head of cattle to feed the troops at Sevastopol and supplying seventy-five wagons to transport materials. Such contributions, though small, must have been a heavy burden for the already struggling

14"Otchetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov . . . za 1842," 1843, RGLA, f. 1282, a. 4, d. 73a.
15"Otchetov Tavricheskih Gubernatorov . . . za 1842," 1843, RGLA, f. 1282, a. 4, d. 73a.
17Pinson, "Russian Policy and the Emigration of the Crimean Tatars," 46.
Nogais. Just as significantly, war-induced shortages drove grain prices to new heights in 1854 and 1855, and while grain producers profited, grain buyers suffered as a result of inflation. Land values soared along with wheat prices, but the best Nogai land had already been leased to Mennonites at pre-war prices, and Nogais were left to buy grain produced on their own fields at prices that far outstripped the rents they received.

After the war, Nogai leaders aligned themselves closely with their Crimean Tatar neighbours. In 1857 a group of Nogai murzas joined in Tatar petitions for increased land grants. Justifying their claims with stories of the services their forefathers had provided the state, they protested that, "not having private land, we not only have been reduced to poverty, but a great many among us are compelled, in order to obtain subsistence, to work as simple servants." In ruling to reject the Nogai petition, the Ministry of State Domains concluded that, although many of the Murzas possessed legitimate proof of the noble status granted their ancestors by Catherine II in the eighteenth century, those ancestors were already long dead and claims based on their service had no significance. With a stroke of the pen, those that remained were reduced to state peasants, pure and simple, with no claim to special privileges.

In the fall of 1859, some 16,000 Nogais from the Caucasus obtained permission to emigrate to Turkey. They travelled overland to the Molochna, wintering with their Molochna cousins, then journeyed on to the Crimea in the summer of 1860, where they continued by ship. When they left, the Molochna Nogais went with them. In 1859 there

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were 35,149 Nogais in the Molochna. By October 1860, there were 105. By January 1862, there were twenty. Nogai land, including that rented by Mennonites, reverted to the state, which assigned much of it to Bulgarian colonists.

This brings to an end the story of Nogais in the Molochna, but leaves the Mennonites at a critical juncture. Although the landlessness crisis of the 1860s is beyond the scope of this dissertation, its onset is so closely tied to the Nogai exodus that it needs to be briefly reviewed. The landlessness crisis is one of the dominant themes of the historical literature on this period of Mennonite history, and unfortunately, it is impossible to deal with it without addressing the often dubious assertions that have become paradigmatic in the literature. These assertions, while multi-faceted, are summed up in David Rempel's contention that the crisis stemmed from the failure over the years to use the surplus and reserve land funds for their intended purpose. Instead of dividing the thousands of desiatinas comprised in these funds, the farmers . . . had leased the land to themselves at unconscionably low fees as pasture for their private and communal flocks.

Lying shallow beneath the surface of this interpretation are assumptions about class antagonism and economic forces that seriously distort the reality of economic and social interaction among landed and landless Mennonites, and do a real disservice to those who administered the Colony. As described in chapter five, in his actions, from industrialisation to agricultural diversification, Cornies, along with those who supported him, was constantly cognizant of the needs of the whole community, and his decisions were heavily influenced by Mennonite ethical norms.

The primary criticism levelled against the landed is that they failed to distribute

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22Ibid., 205.
surplus and reserve lands. These two categories of land have already been defined in chapter
three, but it may be convenient to briefly review them. Reserve land was crown land set
aside for future settlement by new Mennonite immigrants. Mennonites had no direct
control over the unoccupied portion of this land.24 In addition to the reserve, to allow for
natural population growth the state gave each Mennonite village at its establishment surplus
land equal to one-sixth its allotment land for future distribution.25 This land was owned by
the village collectively, and its allocation fell fully within the discretion of landed
Mennonites. On the eve of the landlessness crisis, surplus land in the Molochna amounted
to 15,820 desiatinas — enough to grant just 243 of the 2356 landless families allotments at
the state-mandated sixty-five desiatina norm.26

While it is clear that the surplus land offered no solution to the landlessness crisis,
the fact that the landed failed to distribute it at all demands closer attention. Although there
was not enough surplus land to provide a real solution, and, as pointed out in chapter three,
it was of marginal quality anyway, its monopolization by the landed may well have been
perceived as unjust by the landless, and thus acted as a rallying point for landless
disaffection. The failure to allocate surplus land to the landless has been explained as
resulting from the fact that landed Mennonites granted themselves cheap leases on it
instead, thus monopolising it. Such landed lesers are in turn condemned for subletting the
leased land at much higher rates to the landless.

There is an element of truth in these allegations, albeit a small one. Three
Mennonite landowners leased a total of 8,360 desiatinas of the surplus land. The remainder

26Franz Isaac, Die Molotschner Mennoniten, 32.
was divided between the Neuhalbstadt cloth factory (3000 desiatinas) and the communal sheep fold (4460 desiatinas). While the three private leasers may have been the targets of landless wrath, there are no grounds for tarring all landed Mennonites with the exploiters brush, and the idea that the landed as a group refused to redistribute the surplus out of financial self-interest clearly is without merit.

As for the accusation that landed leasers sublet land to landless Mennonites at unconscionably high rates, in truth surviving records show that Mennonite leasers paid lower rent to Mennonite landholders than they did to Nogais.27 Although the large landholders were undoubtedly turning a profit on the venture, the low rates they gave to Mennonite renters does not bear out the charge of profiteering.

Not only is there little merit to the charges against landed Mennonites -- there is also no evidence whatsoever of disaffection among the landless before the Nogai exodus. As already argued in chapter five, it seems probable that the landless, whatever their dissatisfaction with not owning land, accepted the existing system as just. The ability of landless Mennonites like Peter Loewen (see p. 215) to become wealthy without land helps to account for this lack of internal opposition to the landlessness situation. The economy was working, there were options for the landless, and the Molochna Mennonite Colony was economically and politically stable.

What threw the Molochna Mennonites into crisis was not deep-seated class alienation, but the sudden loss of thousands of desiatinas of land. As a result of inflation after the Crimean War, landless Mennonites who held cheap long-term leases on Nogai land experienced an economic boom. No doubt, the sudden reversal of fortunes when the

27See, e.g., "Landpacht-Rechnung," 1851, PIBRMA, file 1557.
Nogais left was an important contributing factor to their activism during the landlessness crisis. The crisis did indeed see Mennonites divide into landed and landless factions, leading to the legalisation of the subdivision of allotments, but as pointed out in chapter five, this was hardly revolutionary, having already been instituted by Cornies in the 1840s. Of far greater significance for the resolution of the crisis was the creation of the so-called "daughter Colonies," new Colonies established on land purchased or leased by the original Colonies. It should be noted that the problem was not solved by establishing such new villages on reserve land. Although, as Rempel points out, there were thousands of unoccupied desiatinas of reserve land, this land was far too arid to be suitable for establishing new villages.

Two further points must be made about the resolution of the landlessness crisis. Firstly, it is not surprising that the loss of access to thousands of desiatinas of land provoked a crisis. Indeed, it would be astonishing had it not. The ability of Mennonite society to weather such a storm is a testament to the strength of the system Cornies had engineered. Secondly, the solution -- finding land for a relatively small portion of the landless in newly created daughter Colonies or on half and quarter allotments -- suggests that, far from rebelling against the traditional ideals of Mennonite society, the "rebels" sought inclusion in the Mennonite mainstream. This was hardly a rebellion against the Mennonite Commonwealth.

The interlocking story of Nogai and Mennonite economic developments has several important lessons. Firstly, contrary to the image portrayed in most Mennonite sources, Mennonites were neither isolated from surrounding populations, nor simply paternal benefactors to backward neighbours. Whatever Cornies intended, Mennonite-Nogai
relations soon came to be governed by pragmatic economic considerations, with Nogais providing a significant avenue for Mennonite investment. Some Nogais grew rich in consequence, but most grew poor, and by encouraging animal husbandry to the exclusion of arable husbandry, in contradiction of shifting market demand, Mennonites unintentionally set the Nogais up for a fall.

It must be emphasised that traditional Nogai pastoral practices had already led to the brink of disaster through overgrazing in 1825. Something had to change, and Cornies' programs had been intended to guide that change along manifestly successful Mennonite paths. Even after Cornies' death, when the 1848 epidemic wiped out Nogai herds, Mennonites gave interest-free loans to Nogais, despite being hard-hit by the disaster themselves. Moreover, the Mennonite solution to the problem, transition to arable husbandry, was not necessarily a panacea. Nogai land was the poorest in the Molochna region, and only a relatively small proportion of it, along the banks of the Molochna and Iushanlee Rivers, was truly suited to crop agriculture. The Bulgarian colonists who inherited the land in the 1860s quickly pronounced much of it uninhabitable, and were only persuaded to stay by a large-scale state-funded well-digging program.²⁸ Still, some Nogai land was suited to arable husbandry, and indeed was ploughed and planted in the 1850s -- mainly by landless Mennonite renters.

Placed in the context of Mennonite-Nogai economic relations and the post-1848 Nogai economic collapse, the Nogai exodus itself appears at least partly a product of Mennonite landlessness. Because the landlessness crisis occurred in the 1860s, the

²⁸Khanatskii, ed., Pamiatnaiia Knizhka Tavricheskoii gubernii, 168-169. For the hydrographic survey prompted by the complaints, see "Raboty po snabzheniiu vodiui pereseletsev, proizvedennyia v Tavricheskoii gubernii v 1862 godu," ZbMGI 83 (July 1863).
significance of landlessness in earlier decades has received only passing attention, but the
Nogai story suggests it needs to be reassessed. The role of Mennonites as models to
surrounding settlers was hotly debated in the 1830s and 1840s. Progressive Mennonites, led
by Cornies and supported by the state, argued that the terms of the Mennonite Charter
obliged them to act as model settlers. Conservative Mennonites responded that Mennonite
faith was founded on separation from “the World,” and thus precluded active involvement
with other settlers. Participation by landless Mennonites in Cornies’ metayage program is a
pointed reminder that the conservative ideal of living as “the quiet in the land” was only
possible for those with land. For the 53 percent of Molochna Mennonites without land by
1848, the insular ideals of conservative congregations offered but cold comfort.

29 The best source on the subject remains Rempel, “The Mennonite
30 Ury, None But Saints, 108-137.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Orthodox state peasants, Sectarians, Islamic Nogai Tatars, German speaking Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans arrived in the Molochna facing virtually identical challenges. Isolated from the state’s authority and from markets, they confronted harsh environmental conditions on the arid, treeless steppe, and with the exception of the Nogais, they had no experience with agriculture under such conditions. All proved adaptive, turning to animal husbandry to solve their common problems.

Within a few decades, they faced a second common challenge: adaptation to demographic growth and land shortages. Nogais reached the crisis point first. As pastoralists by tradition, they had arrived in the Molochna with large herds, and their land grant was the poorest in the region. Consequently, by 1825 their herds exceeded the carrying capacity of their land, and they faced the need to change. By the mid-1830s, Orthodox state peasants faced the same dilemma. In 1835, the average Orthodox state peasant land allotment in the Molochna was just 12.81 desiatinas per male soul, already less than the fifteen desiatinas per male soul that made a region “land rich” in the state’s eyes. Nor was there free crown land in the region to make up the shortfall; although some 97,000 desiatinas of crown land in Melitopol uezd remained unassigned in 1835, it was scattered in the most remote and arid places, and had little value to the existing population.¹ Foreign Colonists, too, faced land

¹“Otchet’ o zaniatiakh Tavricheskoj gubernskoj komissii, dla prigotovitel’nykh rasporiazhenii po priemu Gosudarstvennych imushchestv, s 10 avgusta na 10 sentiabria
shortages. By 1839, fully 47 percent of Mennonites were landless, and other foreign Colonists had only avoided the same problem by using up their entire supply of surplus land.

This study began with the question of why these different ethno-cultural groups, facing common conditions, parted ways and followed sharply divergent developmental paths in reaction to demographic pressures. My answer is primarily based on a comparison of Mennonites, Orthodox state peasants, and Nogais. In part, this reflects the fact that far more documentary evidence survives for these three groups than for other Molochna settlers, but it also accurately represents the role of the Dukhobors, who were exiled to the Caucasus at just the point in time when land shortages became critical. As for non-Mennonite German-speaking Colonists, relatively little direct evidence survives about them, but what does survive strongly suggests that their development in the 1840s and 1850s kept pace with the Mennonites.

The Great Drought of 1833 to 1834 gave particular urgency to the need to change agricultural practices in the Molochna. Johann Cornies even saw a positive side to the Drought, thinking it would force Mennonites to "reconsider many things, deal with them and carry them out better, in order to prevent similar disasters in the future."² Because it affected the entire Empire, the Drought pushed the state to renew efforts to reform state peasant administration, contributing to the decision to create the Ministry of State Domains in 1838. The new Ministry played an important role in the Molochna, selectively lending its authority to settlers' demands for change.

² Cornies to Fadeev, 13 September 1833, PJBRA, file.
With the need for change apparent, the critical question became the forms that it would take. Studies of peasants, both in Russia and elsewhere, identify them as "risk averse," preferring economic and social solutions that minimize the risk of starvation in times of dearth to innovative solutions that offer potentially higher returns but at greater risk. The characteristic Russian peasant manifestation of "risk averse" practices is communal land repartition. What makes the Molochna case particularly interesting is that, at the critical juncture in the 1830s, when Orthodox peasants fell into the expected pattern and instituted communal repartition, Mennonite peasants chose a different path.

A key element in this argument is that Mennonites, when they came to the Molochna, closely conformed to standard definitions of peasants. They had lived in insular, self-sufficient agricultural communities, played no role in the state administrative system, and been subject to state expropriations that, as a result of religious prejudice, often were even more severe than those experienced by their non-Mennonite peasant neighbours. In Mennonite historiography, these characteristics are commonly ascribed to Mennonite religious beliefs. Consequently, the process of economic change in the nineteenth century that saw Russian Mennonites transform themselves from peasants into farmers, labourers, industrialists, etc., is interpreted as a process of secularization, rather than de-peasantisation.

Religion clearly played a key role in the development of the Molochna Mennonite Colony. Common religious beliefs were important to the development of an independent administrative system, while the sense of facing an alien world as a small, religiously and ethnically united group helped foster a sense of community. Meanwhile, the congregational system provided a medium for political activity. The importance of religion in forging community identity is further reinforced by the Dukhobor example. Dukhobors, too,
developed a sense of community in the Molochna, forming a “Dukhobor Commonwealth” strong enough to resist the state’s efforts to convert them to Orthodoxy, even at the expense of accepting exile.

But still, the Mennonite religious ideal called for the Colonists to live in a manner that is almost indistinguishable from peasanthood. That ideal, and their condition as peasants, underwent fundamental changes in the Molochna as a result of the self-administrative system Mennonites developed -- a system that included among its most important functions the administration of land allocation and use. To understand the changes Mennonites in the Molochna underwent, it is necessary to temporarily set aside religious issues and think of Mennonites as peasants in the process of “depeasantising.”

A critical factor that helped Mennonites break out of peasanthood was their abundance of land in their first years in the Molochna. Land was the central productive factor in an almost exclusively agricultural economy, and its abundance meant there was no need to create special systems to enforce its equitable distribution. At the same time, it was possible for particularly ambitious Mennonites to accrue wealth and invest in commercial ventures. This accrual of wealth served as a ratchet to economic growth and modernization, allowing investment in improved breeds of sheep, agricultural machinery, and land. But, of course, this was not just the Mennonite story. Orthodox state peasants, Dukhobors, and even Nogais, were also getting rich in the Molochna in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, before the 1830s, peasant economic development in the Molochna had only minor ethno-cultural variations.

So, why did Mennonites continue along the path of de-peasantisation in the 1830s, while Orthodox peasants reverted to peasanthood? Mennonite economic success in Russia
has traditionally been explained as a consequence of the state endowing them with more land than Orthodox peasants. This “land explanation” can quickly be dismissed. Although initial Mennonite allotments of sixty-five desiatinas per family did give the average Mennonite family more land than the average Orthodox peasant family, by the 1830s, rapid demographic growth in the Mennonite Colony had already eroded this advantage. Although *landed* Mennonite families still had more land per male soul than Orthodox families, by 1839, land per Mennonite male soul, including the landless, had dropped to 10.98 desiatinas, and by 1847 the figure had dropped to 9.35 desiatinas. By comparison, in Bolshoi Tokmak volost, the most populous state peasant district in the Molochna, average land holdings in 1844 were 9.93 desiatinas per male soul. Even the distribution of land within the two communities was similar. In 1844, about a third of all Bolshoi Tokmak peasants had large holdings in the khutors, 11 percent engaged in trades, and 55 percent owned “only a handsbreadth” of land. Meanwhile, in the Mennonite Colony in 1847, 47 percent owned full allotments, 8 percent were tradesmen, and 45 percent were landless. Clearly, neither the size nor distribution of land allotments will serve to explain the parting of ways.

A second factor often offered in explanation of Mennonite economic success is that the state gave more aid to Mennonites when they arrived in the Molochna than it did to Orthodox peasants. This, too, is a misperception, probably rooted in the fact that aid to Mennonites is well documented, while aid to Orthodox immigrants has heretofore gone unnoticed. State policy toward Orthodox immigrants to New Russia explicitly recognised the need to treat them “with precisely the same care as are foreign immigrants.”

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settlers received subsidies, loans, and tax deferrals during their first years in the Molochna, just as Mennonites did. More importantly, whatever the role of subsidies in the early years, up until the 1830s, Orthodox settlers followed a developmental path closely paralleling the Mennonites, belying the suggestion state subsidies at the time of immigration account for later Mennonite successes.

Changes in state policy in the 1830s played an important role in the parting of ways, but the state took an increasingly active role in the Mennonite Colony as well as in Orthodox state peasant villages. Thus state backing was critical in the outcome of internal political disputes between Warkentin and Cornies in the 1830s and 1840s. While the increased role of the state helped make change possible, the state cannot take credit for the nature of the change. Even the Dukhobors could resist the state's efforts to convert them, albeit at the expense of accepting exile. Peasants, whether Dukhobor, Orthodox, or Mennonite, had substantial control over how state authority entered into local decisions.

This leads to the contradictory idea that, in the Molochna, the more sophisticated the mechanisms of community self-administration before the land shortage crisis, the less communitarian the outcome after the crisis. The most notable administrative difference between Mennonites and Orthodox peasants before the crisis was that Mennonites controlled their own surplus land. As a result, involvement in the public life of the community was critically important for Mennonite landowners. Perhaps the clearest sign of the importance Mennonites vested in involvement in the administration of the Colony was the constant inter-congregational disputes they engaged in. In a very important sense these disputes were political, revolving around who would decide how Mennonite resources would be used. The disputes should thus be viewed as evidence of a healthy Mennonite
political world, with functional problem-solving mechanisms, rather than as signs of instability. As Cornies insisted in 1840,

Here in our community there is a constant battle and this happens because the people here are alive. If they were dead, there would be no battles, but then nothing good would be achieved either, for that which is dead is not productive. What Parliament in England is on a large scale, that is what the Molochen Mennonites are on a small one.4

Although the state, by way of the Guardianship Committee, played a significant role in Mennonite disputes in the late 1830s and 1840s, the critical issue was which Mennonite faction would lead the Colony. There was never any question that the reins of control would stay in Mennonite hands. Indeed, contrary to conventional interpretations that Cornies represented a statist fifth column in the Molochna Colony, the relationship between the state and Cornies can be interpreted in quite the opposite light. Cornies conceived an administrative system completely outside of the Russian state’s experience, and the state tried to adopt it as a model for other state peasants. In a sense, this was a case of the state becoming “Corniest,” and not the other way around.

Cornies’ role in the development of Molochna Mennonite society demands special attention, for he was a remarkable figure, who left a permanent imprint on the settlement. The explanation for Mennonite development offered thus far in this conclusion suggests that developments in Mennonite society were based on objective economic conditions, an interpretation that leaves little room for Cornies’ personal contributions. There is some truth to this, for other Mennonite settlements in places outside of Cornies’ control shared in the Mennonite success story. Cornies was a product of a system that allowed brilliant men to shine, and had he not risen to the task, it seems likely someone else would have.

4Cornies to Wiebe, 20 January 1840, PjBRMA, file 647.
Still, the Molochna was the most progressive of Mennonite settlements in Russia, constantly attracting the praise of the state, and this leading position must be credited to Cornies.

Thus there were three important factors in the development of the Molochna Mennonite community: a self-conscious religious identity, a land tenure system that permitted Mennonites to take control of their own public resources, and the guiding hand of Cornies. As important as religion and Cornies' genius were, arguably it was control over common resources that played the decisive role. Administration of the Settlement's surplus land encouraged Mennonites to develop a system of civil administration to parallel the congregational system. The civil administration system in turn took responsibility for the welfare of the entire Mennonite community. Mennonites created mechanisms to protect the interests of their poor without sacrificing the land tenure rights of individual community members. Wealthy, progressive Mennonites then led the way to agricultural innovations that served the whole community.

The Orthodox state peasant solution to land shortages was far different than the Mennonite one. Orthodox peasants arrived in the Molochna with a system of communal land administration already in place, for the Elders who came to inspect land allotments in advance of immigration took collective responsibility for the whole community. But in the Molochna, the function of such structures eroded because there was neither a shortage of land to necessitate communal administration, nor a surplus to encourage it. Meanwhile, the peasants' Orthodox faith provided no basis for developing a distinct community identity, for unlike Mennonites, Orthodox peasants were only passive participants in church affairs. The lack of corporate structures meant that when the land crisis came, Orthodox peasants lacked formal community problem-solving mechanisms to resolve them. In effect, theirs
was a community without politics. The “depredations” Popovka committed against Berestova in 1834 were the result of this lack of strong internal administrative structures. As a result of this shortcoming, when the crisis hit, peasants had no choice but to turn to outside authorities to resolve their problems. It must be emphasized that this was not a reflection of the peasants’ desire to have the state take control of their lives. Indeed, peasants in Bolshoi Tokmak resisted most of the reforms proposed by Bauman in 1844. Yet, they could not resolve their central problem for themselves, and in the end, they had no choice but to turn to the state. The result, repartition, amounted to the imposition of communalism as a cure for the lack of community.

Stepping back from local specifics, the Molochna story has important implications for broader questions regarding the Russian state peasantry. Clearly, in the Molochna the image of state peasants as “the state’s serfs” will not do, for foreign Colonists, Nogais, Dukhobors, and Orthodox peasants, with their widely differing experiences in the Molochna, were all formally designated as state peasants. Of course, the Molochna is not representative of the experience of all state peasants everywhere in the Empire. Yet, like the Molochna settlers, the majority of Russia’s state peasants lived on the peripheries of the Empire, and if the experiences of Siberian or Central Asian state peasants were not the same as those of New Russian state peasants, the Molochna story nevertheless forces us to recognize that it cannot be assumed that any state peasants fit neatly into a single socio-economic category. By 1858 state peasants made up half of Russia’s peasant population, and almost 40 percent of the total population of the Empire. They represented a vast, potentially innovative, productive human resource for Russia, and their role in Russia’s development demands far closer attention than it has heretofore received.
Finally, the Molochna story highlights the barriers that hindered the state from effectively administering its peasants. The oasis that the state imagined to exist in the Molochna was a gross simplification of an environmentally, economically, politically, socially and ethnically complex region. The state's inability to understand such complexities left it with little chance to effectively administer the Molochna. Instead of guiding regional development, it could only react when harvests failed, or whole communities sank into poverty and departed. Even when the state attempted to become more closely involved, it relied so heavily upon local administrators that its authority was reduced to little more than an unwieldy club, lent to whichever local figure or group was strong enough to swing it. Thus Dukhobors, although “among the best of the government's colonies” were needlessly exiled.

The oasis was a mirage, and the government in far-off St. Petersburg, thirsty for control of its peripheries, was only too eager to be deceived by it. The real Molochna combined the “dry cracked ground” of Gnadenfeld and the lush orchards of Iushanlee, the Byzantine complexities of Mennonite inter-congregational disputes and the crude expropriations of Orthodox peasant “depredations.” Isolated from the state, constrained by the environment, pressured by demographic growth and changing markets, settlers had no choice but to draw upon their own traditions, experiences, and conceptions of justice and equity, as they fled, or formed communes, or create commonwealths on the rolling steppes of the Molochna River basin.
In early October 1995, I set out by train from Moscow to Simferopol to start my research, guided by a vague notion that the study of regional history ought to begin in regional, not central, archives. Despite the fact that, in the final product, information from central archives outweighs the often fragmentary material unearthed in Ukrainian regional state archives in Simferopol (GAKO), Zaporozhe (GAZO), Dnepropetrovsk (GADO), Kherson (GAKhO), and Odessa (GADO), my original, vague notion has now become a firmly held principle. The scattered regional records, taken together, reveal a pattern of regional development that did not — indeed, could not — conform to the expectations of central decision-makers. And, without first seeing the Molochna through the eyes of the administrators who experienced New Russia first-hand, it would have been impossible for me to request the right files, and ask the right questions, when faced with the massive collections of documents housed in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGLA) in St. Petersburg. The select bibliography that follows this overview provides a conventional summary of my sources, but this dissertation is based, first and foremost, on archival records, and so the present essay offers a brief summary of my archival journey, not least as a justification of my “regional archives first” methodological dictum.

The three months I spent in Simferopol were my first experience with both the constant frustrations and the extraordinary delights of working in post-Soviet archives. GAKO includes in its holdings two large pre-revolutionary collections, the records of the guberniia administration (fond 27), and the records of the office of the governor of Tavrida
guberniia (fond 26). Combined, they hold over 80,000 files, often catalogued in near-illegible handwriting in the most cursory fashion. Harvest records and reports on human and livestock populations are scattered, apparently at random, amidst reports and decrees from the Senate in St. Petersburg, reports of district and city police, and so on. Particularly enlightening are the detailed volost-level reports of food and commodity prices, wage rates, and annual harvests. However, the survival of such volost-level data is hit-and-miss, and there is a particularly notable — and inexplicable — lacuna in regional records for the period 1828-1842.

Given my predisposition toward quantitative analysis, the fragmentary nature of statistical data in GAKO (and the rest of the regional archives) posed the first serious obstacle to my pre-conceived research program. However, I soon learned that the real treasure in these archives was the attitudes and policies of local and regional administrators, as revealed in their correspondence and reports. Such materials alerted me to the vital role that regional administrators, and settlers themselves, played in shaping settlement patterns and economic development. As importantly, the fact that such local experience so seldom found its way into the aggregated statistical summaries and annual reports that I later examined in central archives was my first clue to the basic administrative disjunction between periphery and centre.

By comparison to GAKO, the Zaporozhe (GAZO) and Kherson (GAKhO) archives hold little direct information on the Molochna region before 1861, and consequently my stays in both were brief. Yet GAZO played a critical role in my growing understanding of Orthodox state peasant settlement strategies, for it was there that I had the opportunity to study village and district maps. These remarkably detailed water-colour maps vividly record
the way peasants organized their own lives. The unique arrangement of common pasture and arable, discussed in chapters three and six, at first puzzled me, and forced me to question my own preconceptions about how peasants rationally ought to have used their land. I travelled to Kherson in hopes that the early records of the New Russian land survey department (fond 14), would allow me to compare settlement patterns as they were originally planned by the state to the reality revealed in the Zaporozhe maps. As it turned out, the records in Kherson do not extend to Tavride guberniia, and their value to me was limited. However, GAKbo provided an unexpected bonus, for misplaced in its collection is the 1824 land survey of the Molochna Dukhobors (which ought to be housed in Simferopol), accompanied by records of the dispute that prompted the survey (see chapter four). Because most central records of the Dukhobor stay in the Molochna dissapeared sometime before 1881, such previously-unknown regional records are invaluable for reconstructing the early history of the sect.

The Dnepropetrovsk (GADO) and Odessa (GAOO) archives are uniquely important for the study of foreign Colonists in New Russia, because they hold the records of the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers (GADO fond 134 and GAOO fond 6). These collections were particularly important to my research due to the information they contain about non-Mennonite Colonists in the Molochna. Mennonites are extraordinarily well documented in the Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive (PBRMA), discussed below, but the lives of their Colonist neighbours are at best poorly recorded. Although it was impossible to fully correct this imbalance, the records of these two collections permitted me to assert with confidence that the German Colonists shared many of the characteristics of their better-known Mennonite neighbours.
Turning to the central archives, the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) is widely regarded as the most efficiently run and hospitable archive in Russia. Yet, the sheer, overwhelming quantity of records housed in RGIA presents its own special problems. The massive statistical compendiums submitted annually to the Senate by Tavrida governors (fond 1281), with their pages upon pages of statistical tables, provide essential background for much of my work. Yet these records are deceptive, for they aggregate records from the lush Dnieper lowlands, the sub-tropical south shore of the Crimea, and the arid Molochna. Likewise, the central records of the Ministry of State Domains (fond 383) are essential to my understanding of the economic development of the Molochna, yet without the context provided by the regional archives, it would often have been impossible to separate the vitally important from the utterly misleading. In addition to RGIA, I also spent several days in Moscow at the Russian State Military-Historical Archive (RGVIA), which holds several of the earliest Russian maps of the Black Sea littoral.

I turn finally to my single most important source of information regarding the Molochna, the PBRMA. Originally assembled by Mennonite school teacher Peter Braun, the archive was seized by Soviet officials in 1929 and subsequently disappeared, only to be rediscovered in GAOO (fond 81) by Harvey Dyck in 1990. It was my good fortune to be able to make use of the microfilm copy of the archive now housed at the University of Toronto. The PBRMA consists of approximately 150,000 pages of documents covering topics as varied as the school grades of individual children, the correspondence of the Molochna Agricultural Society, records of Mennonite alternative service brigades, and a complete 1835 census of the Molochna Mennonite Settlement. Although the majority of the documents in the PBRMA focus on Mennonites, it also contains unique information on other groups,
such as the record of the investigation of Dukhobor crimes that informs chapter four, and
the accounts and records of Nogai Tatars that are employed in chapters two, five and seven.

The Mennonite perspective of this material is both its greatest strength, and its
greatest challenge to the historian. The vast collection of Johann Cornies' personal and
business correspondence provides a unique window onto the life of this most important of
all nineteenth-century Russian Mennonite figures, shedding new light on his personal
motives, and on the workings of such institutions as the controversial Agricultural Society.

Cornies, too, provides unique and invaluable accounts of his non-Mennonite
neighbours, but here the difficulty posed by the material is most apparent. Ever-confident
of the moral superiority of Mennonite society, Cornies frequently describes his neighbours
in condescending terms, highlighting their short-comings, and dismissing their traditions
and culture as expressions of ignorance. Non-Mennonites in the Molochna have left few
records of their own to supplement Mennonite accounts, and it seems doubtful if, given
their choice, they would have selected Cornies, or the other Mennonites whose accounts
 survive in the PJBRMA, as their spokesmen for posterity. Still, Cornies was a meticulous
record-keeper, and if his prejudices sometimes colour the record, the material he gathered
and preserved, both statistical and anecdotal, provides a level of information about all
Molochna society that is perhaps unmatched for any other region in Russia in this period.

Together, the information from these seven archives permits a detailed portrait of
the Molochna. The portrait is, to be sure, unevenly painted, most detailed where it pictures
Mennonites, more blurred where it portrays their Russian Sectarian, Ukrainian Orthodox,
Nogai, and German neighbours. Based as it is on the view from the region, it is a painting
that asks important questions about broader issues of centre-periphery relations, and the
general subject of Russian peasant society. The answer it offers is that there is no one answer; that specific regional characteristics bred specific peasant responses. But the richness of the archival record for the Molochna holds out the promise that, by working in other archives in other regions, a fuller, richer rendering of all Russian society is possible.
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**Dissertations**

