

## Taking Dominion to End Dominion: The Mennonite Influence on the End of Russian Serfdom

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# Taking Dominion to End Dominion: The Mennonite Influence on the End of Russian Serfdom

## Abstract

Serfdom in Russia was abolished in 1861, only 76 years after the first Mennonites were invited into Russia by Catherine II. By examining the lifestyle of the Mennonites who settled in the agriculturally productive "New Russia" (modern-day Ukraine), as well as the impact that the Mennonites had on the Imperial family, peasantry, and government, it is evident that the Mennonites played a recognizable role in bringing about the abolition of serfdom across the empire.

## Keywords

Mennonite, Serf, Serfdom, Slavery, Abolition

## Cover Page Footnote

H. Michael Shultz Jr. (D.Min) is Associate Professor of Church History at Forge Theological Seminary, and also serves as Senior Pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Lewisburg, KY. I am indebted to both Leonard Friesen and James Urry, whose availability and cordiality in corresponding with me while researching for this manuscript was exemplary.

## Introduction and Historiographical Background

The quiet simplicity of Mennonite existence has contributed to a general ignorance of their historic influence on the world. The existing literature addressing the impact of these unique people is found in the deep recesses of academia, and even those pieces typically focus on changes within the Mennonite community rather than the impact they have historically played on the world around them. One result of this neglect is the failure to recognize the influence that Mennonites exerted on the liberation of millions of serfs in mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Imperial Russia. Certainly, the Tsar freed the serfs, but through a directed reading of the primary and pertinent secondary literature, one will recognize that the influx of Mennonite believers into Russia and Ukraine in the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries causally influenced the emancipation of the serfs.

The current state of scholarship on the topic of Russian-Mennonites is improving. Modern specialists include Leonard Friesen and Sergei Zhuk, as well as the longtime expert James Urry. Their works have elaborated greatly on the people and culture within the Russian-Mennonite communities. There are some scholars, such as Oksana Beznosova, who are critical of other specialists, specifically Urry, claiming that he has neglected to study the impact that the Mennonites played on Russia's evolution "especially... during the colonist period (1789-1871)."<sup>1</sup> This claim is probably overzealous, as several scholars have written on the changes brought about in-part by Mennonites. Not only has Urry himself expounded on the economic influence of the Mennonites, but the same thesis was further examined by Svetlana Bobyleva in the same volume that Beznosova published in.<sup>2</sup> Zhuk has also argued that the Mennonites influenced the Russian Orthodox Church and Heather Coleman has expanded this by showing that religious influence played a role in positively "modernizing Russian society" in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.<sup>3</sup>

However, none of these experts delve into the connection between Russian-Mennonites and Russian serfdom. In fact, Michael Bourdeaux, in his 1975 *Faith on Trial in Russia*, effectively denied any Mennonite influence over ending serfdom by claiming that the Mennonites (along with all other Protestants in Russia) established influential positions in Russia only after the end of serfdom.<sup>4</sup> While it would be untrue to claim that the Mennonites were exclusively or even chiefly responsible for the emancipation of the serfs, the bulk of scholars agree that the emancipation of the serfs was the result of social, political, and economic factors – all domains that the Mennonites recognizably influenced, as will be shown.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oksana Beznosova, "A Foreign Faith, but of What Sort? The Mennonite Church and the Russian Empire, 1789-1917" in *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789-1945*, Leonard Friesen, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 110.

<sup>2</sup> James Urry, "Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth and the Mennonite Experience in Imperial Russia", in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 3 (1985).; Svetlana Bobyleva, "'Land of Opportunity, Sites of Devastation': Notes on the History of the Borozenko Daughter Colony" in *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789-1945*, Leonard Friesen, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Sergei I. Zhuk, *Russia's Lost Reformation: Peasants, Millennialism, and Radical Sects in Southern Russia and Ukraine, 1830-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), xvi-xvii.; Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial in Russia* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 26.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 163. Pipes theorizes that the cause of the emancipation was either economic or political, but it seems reasonable to conclude that the social unrest also played a part.

### Defending Against Bourdeaux's Contention

Before making the positive case for the Mennonite influence on emancipation, allow a defense against the claims of Bourdeaux. Bourdeaux posits that Protestants (including Mennonites) did not have fertile soil to grow and obtain a place of influence in Russia prior to “the publication of the Bible in the vernacular (1819)... the growth of literacy... the breakdown of the country in the Crimean War (1853-1856)... and the emancipation of the serfs (1861).”<sup>6</sup> To begin, the idea that the appearance of the Bible in the Russian vernacular produced an atmosphere in which Mennonites could gain a foothold is a difficult concept to argue.<sup>7</sup> Richard Pipes, commenting on the average Russian's piety in the late-19<sup>th</sup> Century, said, “He did not know the Bible or even the Lord's prayer.”<sup>8</sup> Vissarion Belinsky, the famed 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian literature critic, wrote of the Russian people in his Open Letter to Gogol, “According to you the Russian people is the most religious in the world. That is a lie!... Religiousness has not even taken root among the clergy.”<sup>9</sup>

Even if one ignores the general disinterest the Russian people showed in the Bible, it is improbable that anyone in Russia had a Bible in the vernacular when the serfs were freed in 1861. The Russian Bible Society was founded in 1812 but the first single-volume Russian Bible was not published until 1876.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, the publication of the Bible was not a factor in giving the Mennonites an influential position in Russia if it was not even published in the time-period.

Bourdeaux also notes growth of literacy as a factor. Perhaps the average Russian's literacy improved after the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but that is not obviously the case for the average Mennonite. Reports indicate that in 1872, “only ten percent of Russian school aged children received an education”, improving to only 17.4 percent by 1894.<sup>11</sup> Some have noted that “at least half of the nation's population had no educational facilities.”<sup>12</sup> Contemporary Aleksandr Nikitenko testifies of this, saying, “I had almost no formal education... We didn't have a teacher because they couldn't get one from anywhere,” and elsewhere, “[we] had not received a sound education because it did not exist in Russia in those days.”<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, the Mennonites had educational institutions that are noted as being “particularly well endowed” and having “high standards” that “contributed greatly to the continued prosperity of the colonies.”<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Gaeddert, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian-Mennonite, journaled of teachers'

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<sup>6</sup> Bourdeaux, *Faith on Trial*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> For the link between Mennonites and Protestantism (and/or Anabaptists), see Chapter 1 in Delbert Plett, *The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812-1849* (Steinback, Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 160.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph E. Matlaw, ed., *Belinsky, Chernyshensky, and Dobrolyubov: Selected Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1962), 86-87.

<sup>10</sup> Joshua Searle, “The Reformation in Ukraine and Russia and its Relevance for Today” in *European Journal of Theology* 26:1 (2017), 56.

<sup>11</sup> Delbert Plett, *The Golden Years*, 129.; Bobyleva, “Land of Opportunity”, 39 [quoted from S.V. Obelenskaia, *Narodnoe chtenie i narodnyi chitalal; v Rossii kontsa 19<sup>th</sup> veka* (Odisei, 1997 – Moscow 1998), 9.].

<sup>12</sup> Melvin C. Wren, *The Course of Russian History* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), 303.

<sup>13</sup> Aleksandr Nikitenko, *Up from Serfdom: My Childhood and Youth in Russia, 1804-1824*, Helen Jacobson, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 76, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Urry, “Through the Eye of a Needle”, 23.

conferences that met several times each year.<sup>15</sup> Even with these comparably-high educational standards among the Mennonites, David Epp (another contemporary Russian-Mennonite) wrote in his diary in 1841, “Praise God the school standards are rising.”<sup>16</sup> Evidently, if anyone was able to have an influence prior to the “growth of literacy” in Russia, it would have been the Mennonites who were striving for better educations while already above-average.

Bourdeaux’s Crimean War contention holds no more weight than his contention for the publication of the Bible or the increase in literacy.<sup>17</sup> Still, the removal of objections does not prove the argument. One must look for the positive connections between the Russian-Mennonites and the end of serfdom. This can be done by examining the mentality of the Imperial family from the Mennonite influx to emancipation, the transition of culture on the level of the average Russian, and the Mennonite influence on Russia nationally.

### **Mennonite Influence on the Imperial Family**

The mentality of the Imperial family is very interesting as it regards the Mennonites and serfdom. Will Durant theorized, based on Catherine’s admiration of western philosophers, that she intended to gradually emancipate the serfs when she printed her *Nakaz* in 1767.<sup>18</sup> However, other scholars of the era note that most of Catherine’s thoughts on serfdom are absent from the original *Nakaz*, and what observations do appear in the text “indicate that she did not contemplate emancipation” but that she instead wrote, “one should not suddenly and by legislative action create a large number of emancipated serfs.”<sup>19</sup> This might have been in line with her admiration of western philosophers, as Jean-Jacque Rousseau is noted as having “hoped that serfdom would one day be abolished, but he did not advocate its early end.”<sup>20</sup> Clearly, at some point between Catherine II (who invited the Mennonites into Russia in 1785) and Alexander II (who freed the serfs in 1861), the mentality of the Imperial family shifted. It is likely that the success of the Mennonites in the sight of the royals contributed to this shift.

This last statement is not a matter of mere speculation, but is the reasonable deduction of the actions of the Imperial family. It has been noted by Urry that when Catherine invited the German colonists, “the idea that [they] were to act as models to their neighbors was not spelled out...” But Urry goes on to note that “in time, however, both officials and certain Mennonites came to see that *this was their specific role*. This meant that *Mennonites were singled out for*

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<sup>15</sup> John B. Toews, “A Russian Mennonite: The Diary of Dietrich Gaeddert (1860-1876)” in *Mennonite Life* (Dec. 1978), 11.

<sup>16</sup> David Epp, *The Diaries of David Epp: 1837-1843*, John B. Toews, ed. (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 166.

<sup>17</sup> “Mennonites and other German colonists supplied the Russian army with the best transportation units, its closest and best hospitals, and with considerable food supplies. Their contribution in the Crimean War was far more significant than is usually thought.” G.K. Epp, “Mennonite-Ukrainian Relations (1789-1945)” in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7 (1989), 133.; For further studies on Mennonite contributions to the Crimean War, see James Urry and Lawrence Klippenstein, “Mennonites and the Crimean War, 1854-1856” in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7 (1989): 9-32; or, G.K. Epp, *Geschichte der Mennoniten in Russland. Band II. Die Gemeinschaft zwischen Fortschritt und Krise 1820-1874* (Lage: Historische Kommission, Logos Verlag, 1998), 83-112.

<sup>18</sup> Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization IX: Rousseau and Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 451. Durant cites Michael Florinsky’s *Russia: A History* in which he implies Catherine’s desires are linked to her love of western philosophers.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Florinsky, *Russia: A History and an Interpretation I* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1955), 546.

<sup>20</sup> Durant, *The Story of Civilization IX*, 885.

*special government attention.*”<sup>21</sup> Scholars have differed over which aspects of Mennonite life the government was attending to, one writing, “Catherine encouraged foreigners to settle... allowing them tax exemptions and freedom to practice their religion in the hope that they would set Russians an example of industry...”<sup>22</sup> Another notes that from the time of Catherine II to Alexander I, “the government hoped that [the Mennonites’] example would have an impact on Russian agriculture...”<sup>23</sup> Urry notes that the Mennonites were “singled out as an example of successful settlement and economic development” and that as such, “they were to act as leaders in the reform process.”<sup>24</sup> Crucially, Urry points out that this reform process, which the Mennonites served as models and leaders in, “began with the abolition of serfdom in 1861.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the areas of interest included industry, agriculture, and economics – or in other words, the entire Mennonite existence excepting their religion. The reason for the Imperial family taking such a vested interest in Mennonites seems very reasonable to have been reforming the serf system in Russia according to the Mennonite model.

The government did not have to look far to examine the Mennonites, as several heads of Mennonite households were made members of the Russian nobility, and one is even noted as almost achieving hereditary nobility – an unthinkable dream for a peasant immigrant.<sup>26</sup> More directly related to government matters, Mennonites often served on district councils or as mayors of large cities while “two wealthy landowning Mennonites were elected to the Russian Duma.”<sup>27</sup>

Not only were the Mennonites making their way to the royals, but the royals were making their way to the Mennonites. Jacob Epp, a Russian-Mennonite of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, noted in his diary that important figures regularly visited the settlements.<sup>28</sup> He describes the October 1841 arrival of the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna and her daughter, who spoke with Heinrich Heese about his proposal for a new school.<sup>29</sup> Russian princes “visited them frequently”, and twice Alexander I visited their colonies.<sup>30</sup> Heinrich Heese recalls Alexander’s 1818 visit in his travel narrative as being one in which he expressed “goodwill toward the stately villages.”<sup>31</sup> To summarize the point, the Imperial family took a particular interest in the Mennonites from the moment they arrived in Russia, and their intention appears to have been duplicating the success that the Mennonites had across the Empire, beginning with the emancipation of the serfs.

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<sup>21</sup> James Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe – Russia – Canada, 1525-1980* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 92. Emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup> Wren, *The Course of Russian History*, 303.

<sup>23</sup> G.K. Epp, “Mennonite-Ukrainian Relations”, 130. Jacob Epp extends this further and claims that even Nicholas I was personally invested in the success of the Mennonites in Russia. Jacob Epp, *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880*, Harvey Dyck, trans. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 59.

<sup>24</sup> Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 92, 96.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>26</sup> Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* J.B. Toews, trans. (Fresno, CA: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), 1038, n.13.

<sup>27</sup> Urry, “Through the Eye of a Needle”, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Epp, *A Mennonite in Russia*, 63.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> G.K. Epp, “Mennonite-Ukrainian Relations”, 130.

<sup>31</sup> David Epp and Nikolai Regehr, *Heinrich Heese, Johann Philipp Wiebe: Zwei Vordermänner des sudrußlandischen Mennonitentums* (Echo Berlags: 1952), 23. [Author’s translation]

### Mennonite Influence on the Peasantry

This introduces a discussion on the peasant-level influence that the Mennonites played. The Mennonites were entitled to own serfs from the moment that Catherine II invited them to come to Russia.<sup>32</sup> Despite this entitlement, it does not appear that they took advantage of this right, choosing rather to hire their laborers.<sup>33</sup> Not only did they refuse to utilize slave labor, they are noted as having “laboured [sic] in the fields and yards, side by side, with their workers,” welcoming them inside to eat with the families, and sometimes even teaching them how to read or write.<sup>34</sup> Johann Claassen wrote in a private note on 22 October 1861 that he had taught a few of the servants they employed, as well as a maid, how to read the Gospel in Russian.<sup>35</sup>

These actions were not some sort of paternalistic endeavor, but a sign that the Mennonites viewed serfs as equal to free men. The Mennonites are noted as having often read the Bible with free Russians, and evidently saw serfs as equally deserving.<sup>36</sup> One contemporary German who was not a Mennonite visited a Russian-Mennonite village on 28 October 1852 and commented that “the host himself did not eat but served industriously, like a servant.”<sup>37</sup> Another contemporary, interviewed in 1948 at the age of 90, said that even after emancipation, many serfs went to work on Mennonite estates as these were the serfs’ “favorite places to work.”<sup>38</sup> When the serfs were emancipated, the Mennonites were noticed celebrating with them.<sup>39</sup>

One must understand what serfdom was like to grasp the striking contrast between the Russian and Mennonite cultures. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, half of Russia’s citizenry (20-30 million people) were serfs.<sup>40</sup> Reports exist of landlords torturing dozens to death or demanding their serfs to plough entire farms “one inch more deeply” for no apparent reason.<sup>41</sup> Many chose marital partners for their serfs, marrying them before marital age; some raped their serfs or made them form harems.<sup>42</sup> Serfs working in factories were often under the age of 12 and were paid half the wage of free men. They could expect sixteen-hour days, with punishments for insufficient production ranging from being “flogged, sometimes to death, to exile in Siberia, or enrollment in the Army.”<sup>43</sup> They were banned from attending universities and received no effective legal protection against extortion.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is striking that the relationship of Mennonites with serfs was one in which they treated them not only as equal with other Russians, but equal with

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<sup>32</sup> David Rempel and Cornelia R. Carlson, *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, 1789-1923* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 263.

<sup>33</sup> Harry Loewen, “The German-Russian Tensions Among the Mennonites in Russia” in *P.M. Friesen & His History: Understanding Mennonite Brethren Beginnings*, Abraham Friesen, ed. (Fresno, CA: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), 138.

<sup>34</sup> Urry, “Through the Eye of a Needle”, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 1010.

<sup>36</sup> Aaron Toews, *Mennonitische Martyrer der juengsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart I* (Winnipeg, 1949), 58.

<sup>37</sup> Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> G.K. Epp, “Mennonite-Ukrainian Relations”, 135.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Jacob Epp, *A Mennonite in Russia*, 63.; Plett, *The Golden Years*, 129.; Wren, *The Course of Russian History*, 409. These numbers are denied by Pipes in *Russia Under the Old Regime* (p. 144). He estimates it at 37.7 percent of the population (7-9 million individuals) instead.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 152.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>43</sup> Wren, *The Course of Russian History*, 387.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 418, 385.

themselves. August von Haxthausen, a German official, commented on an 1843 visit to Russia, “nowhere is the complete equality of men... more evident than among the Mennonites.”<sup>45</sup>

While many might assume Mennonites to be quiet or withdrawn, especially when considering government policies, it should be noted that the first public protest against slavery in the American context came from the recently immigrated German Mennonites (many of whom came from the same families that a century later would move to Russia).<sup>46</sup> Arriving in America in 1663, they publicized their complaints against American slavery in 1669. Their complaints were primarily threefold. First, they considered it abominable that a Christian would enslave someone, for this practice was primarily associated with Turkish Muslims – the implication being that slaveholding and/or slave-trading brought contempt on the name of Christ. Second, they considered it impermissible that owners would “commit adultery in others” by marrying their slaves off against their will.<sup>47</sup> Finally, they expected that the practice of slavery would invariably lead to slave rebellions in which slaves would “fight for their freedom” forcing their masters to “take the sword at hand and war against these poor slaves.”<sup>48</sup> One striking note is that each of these concerns could have been said in the Russian-serf context just as easily as they were in the American-slave context. Russians claimed to be Christian people, land-owners married off their serfs, and serf retaliations in the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> centuries were commonplace, including arson or murder.<sup>49</sup> There was one particular wave of peasant revolts in Southern Russia (notably where the Mennonites were concentrated) that is said to have “frightened the government and the privileged classes out of all complacency.”<sup>50</sup> It is, then, very likely that the outlook held by Mennonites was publicly voiced, and influenced the serf’s view of themselves, as well as the thinking of free Russians towards them.

### **Mennonite Influence on National Russia**

While it is true that Russians did not wish to adopt the Mennonite religion, it is equally true that the Mennonites did not want to become like the Russians at all.<sup>51</sup> One commentator has said that the Mennonites’ attitude was that “in Russia, there could only be a cultural debasement.”<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the Russian culture found its way into the Mennonite communities. Urry notes that the Mennonites transformed their way of life “by abandoning many of the ideas, values, and practices their ancestors had staunchly maintained for centuries.”<sup>53</sup> Even their music changed because of things they “absorbed... from their Russian neighbors.”<sup>54</sup> It is therefore reasonable to conclude that if the Russians influenced the Mennonites (who generally disdained their culture and

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<sup>45</sup> August von Haxthausen, *Studies on the Interior of Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 167.

<sup>46</sup> “We Are Against This Traffic of Men” in *Our Nation’s Archive: The History of the United States in Documents*, Erik Bruun and Jay Crosby, eds. (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 1999), 62.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>49</sup> Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 153.

<sup>50</sup> Wren, *The Course of Russian History*, 305.

<sup>51</sup> For the attitude of Russians on Anabaptist/Mennonite religious conversion, see Heather Coleman, “Baptist Beginnings in Russia and Ukraine” in *Baptist History and Heritage* 42:1 (2007).; Loewen, “The German Russian Tensions”, 136.

<sup>52</sup> Harry Loewen, “The German-Russian Tensions”, 137. [Quoted from Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, 178.]

<sup>53</sup> Urry, “Through the Eye of a Needle”, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Wesley Berg, “Die Lieder der Russlanddeutschen. Aus der Perspektive der alten Mennoniten” in *Lied und populäre Kulture* 47 (2002), 70.



had every incentive to avoid cultural integration), then the Russians (who admired much about the Mennonites) likely were influenced in reciprocation. To expand on the position of Beznosova, a narrow conception of cultural influence when regarding the Mennonites in Russia “hinders our ability to account for the dramatic shifts in government policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”, particularly the emancipation of the serfs.<sup>55</sup>

The Mennonites impacted the Russian economic system in such a way that some refer to their economic success as the “Mennonite economic miracle.”<sup>56</sup> Haxthausen claimed that “if all of southern Russia were as advanced agriculturally and socially as [the Mennonite colonies], Moscow and Petersburg would no longer be the focal points and hubs of the empire.”<sup>57</sup> They so impacted agriculture that a Mennonite, Johann Cornies, was chosen to oversee the newly developed Russian Agricultural Society to produce agricultural improvements.<sup>58</sup> It is highly unlikely that a people could influence national economics, agriculture, and social standards without influencing politics.<sup>59</sup> One may look to 1837 when Nicholas I developed the Ministry of State Domains, whose purpose it was to create a plan to reform the situation of state peasants (serfs).<sup>60</sup> This ministry is known to have focused primarily on modeling its reforms after the example of the Mennonites.<sup>61</sup>

### Conclusion

The influence of the Russian-Mennonites on Russian economics, society, and agriculture is virtually undeniable. Connections between the Russian-Mennonites and the Imperial family can be clearly drawn, the favor of the royals on the Mennonites is evident, and the desire on the part of the Imperial family to model the peasant class in Russia after the Mennonite example is recognizable. The rejection of serfdom in the Mennonite culture is certain from both a localized and worldwide examination of their publications and practices. When considering a people who impacted an entire nation, factoring in their disdain for serfdom and unrelenting public success without it, and eliminating alternative views from detractors like Bourdeaux, one is left with a compelling case that the Russian-Mennonite immigrants of the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries causally influenced the end of Russian serfdom across the empire.

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<sup>55</sup> Beznosova, “A Foreign Faith”, 110.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 111.; Robert Kreider, “The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment” in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 25 (Jan. 1951), 22. [17-33]

<sup>57</sup> Haxthausen, *Studies on the Interior*, 173.

<sup>58</sup> Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 92.

<sup>59</sup> Beznosova, “A Foreign Faith”, 111. “The idea that Mennonites could be economically integrated but still culturally and politically removed has been interrogated with doubt since the release of previously inaccessible documents in Russian and Ukrainian archives.”

<sup>60</sup> Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, 146, 154.

<sup>61</sup> Urry, *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood*, 92.; Robert Sawatzky, “A Comparison of the Mennonite and Doukhobor Emigrations from Russia to Canada, 1870-1920” (Master’s Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1998), 49.

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