

1 **The Russian Mennonites**

2 **Starting in the 1760s, Russian ruler Catherine the Great invited Germans to settle in what is now Ukraine.**

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- Russia had just conquered this land in a war with the Turks, and wanted to secure its rule there by quickly establishing settlements.
- Mennonites from North Germany began moving to the Ukraine (as it was then called) in the 1780s.
 - Increasing pressure from the government and a lack of available land in Germany made the Ukraine very attractive to Mennonites.
 - The Russian government made settlement attractive by offering Mennonites complete religious freedom, including freedom from all military service, “forever.”

4 **Mennonites in the Ukraine established largely self-governing, self-sufficient communities usually referred to as colonies.**

- It was Russian government policy to keep foreign settlers separate from the native Russians and Ukrainians.
- Mennonites were glad for the opportunity to establish “pure” Christian communities.
- Great prosperity and even wealth followed after many years of hard work.

5 **The colony structure led to troubling compromises.**

- A type of Christendom developed.
- Mennonite/German culture became confused with Christian living.
- Mennonites largely failed to reach out to the surrounding Russians and Ukrainians.

6 **As the bulk of the church declined spiritually, new churches were formed in efforts to remain faithful to Christ and the Bible.**

- The *Kleine Gemeinde* (small church) was formed in 1812.
- The Mennonite Brethren Church, greatly influenced by pietism, was formed in 1860.
- The main body of Mennonites experienced revival in the late 1800s.
 - A new emphasis on evangelism sometimes led to imprisonment for Mennonites, who were not allowed to evangelize among the Russian Orthodox.
 - Educational and charitable efforts were increased.

7 **Russian Mennonites began migrating to North America in the 1870s.**

- The government began pressuring Mennonites to become more integrated into Russian society.
- New laws seemed to threaten Mennonite exemption from military service.
- Most Russian Mennonite immigrants settled in Kansas, Nebraska, Manitoba, and other parts of the Great Plains, while large communities were established in

California soon after.

- Immigrants were greatly assisted by American Mennonites.

8 **The Mennonite Brethren and *Kleine Gemeinde* churches remained separate in America, while other Russian Mennonites joined American Mennonite groups.**

- Most joined the Mennonite General Conference.
- Many others joined the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.

9 **Many Mennonites were still in Russia when the Bolshevik Revolution established the Communist Soviet government in 1917.**

- Mennonites suffered greatly.
 - Civil war brought devastation to their land.
 - Mennonites were especially vulnerable because of resentments caused by their wealth and aloofness from society.
 - Communists seized private property and persecuted all religious people.

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- Through the 1940s, many Mennonites fled Russia, settling mostly in Canada, Paraguay, and Mexico.
- Under 10,000 Mennonites were still in the Soviet Union when that country dissolved in 1991.