

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

Introduction

My family history is of Frisian-Mennonite and French-Huguenot lineage. My Mennonite family came to Canada in 1905 from Russia and my Huguenot side came to Montreal before 1800 from Wales. For a while they were in Kansas, Rural Ontario and Quebec. My Huguenot side came to Canada before the Mohawk refugees of the war of 1812 immigrated to Canada under the protection of the British government.

My sister did detailed genealogical research going back many generations and from those documents and stories from my Father I am able to reconstruct our past. I know the information is historically accurate, but direct ties to some of it is lost in the fog of the past. My only connection to a Frisian History is the language of my grandparents, Plautdietsch which is Low German, a Dutch dialect of Frisian origin.¹

My father would talk about us as Frisian. His parents spoke low German a form of dutch but not dutch, They were Mennonite but we went to a United Church and that stopped after the death of my little sister in a Canadian residential school for children with Downs Syndrome.

For my grandchildren this is a story, be skeptical. If you go back 7 generations you have up to 128 different ancestors. We know 64 of them were from close knit communities on the Frisian coast, but who knows what happened when the Swiss Mennonites met the Frisian Mennonites in Gdansk by a warm fire bin the Prussian countryside 300 years ago.

What you can take away is the knowledge of your heritage. Like everyone on this planet we all belong here. Like everyone we migrated, fought over the ground we stand on, were enslaved, killed on mass by influenza, and other diseases from away and suffered environmental catastrophes, we lived in place for ten thousand years, were refugees, were warriors, tended cattle and forced to move on. **These universal archetypes are shared by all.** At some point we were all hunters and gatherers worshiping the sun. We are all aboriginal,² to deny that fact racism of the worst sort.

Our ancestors were in the modern sense ignorant people who thought rocks had souls. The miracle is that they progressed to be part of the reformation, the intellectual precursors to the enlightenment. Science and communications were radically reoriented by their thinking. To challenge traditional authority and

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embrace ideals such as “humanity could be improved through rational thought” was radical and our DNA was part of it.

The notion that everything in the universe could be rationally demystified was a spreading idea in the 1600's³. This is when my ancestors built the first clocks after the invention of the escapement by Galileo. Early engines that revolutionized life in the 1700's built in the same workshops as the clocks. They (the Frisian-Mennonite) were a factious part of the Protestant Reformation that liberated Catholic Europe, creating beliefs that would define the modern era and lead to the French Revolution, a vision of throwing out the old authorities to remake society along supposedly rational lines. This remarkable explosion of rationality can be found busting forth in Africa, Asia or the Indian subcontinent, constantly fighting against the forces of ignorance and entrenched wealth and power. The struggle continues today.

The Frisians of the North Sea Coast 12BC to 1000 AD

The Frisians were fierce warriors, their story is one of independent thinking and not submitting. It is not a surprise then that out of that heritage came a faith as revolutionary as the Mennonite faith was in the 1500's



The history is rich and spans centuries, in a time before the nation state they existed in a kingdom without a sovereign, they had a unique identity. The Frisians inhabited the historic region known as Frisia on the coasts of the North Sea.

Today, Frisia is partly in the Netherlands and partly in Germany, but the identity and the history of the Frisian people is intact.

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Earliest Origins of the Frisians

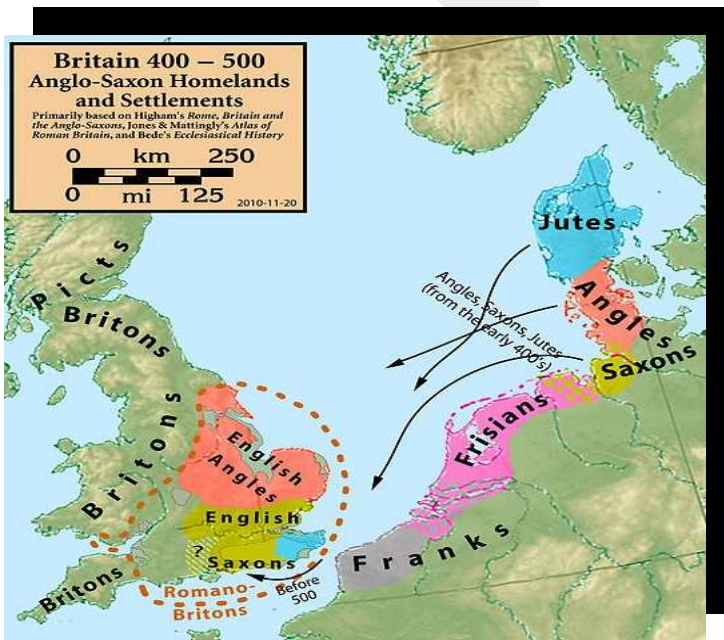
The earliest ancestors of modern Frisians were the Frisii - an ancient tribes that inhabited the shores of the North Sea in an area that is generally low lying with many islands. The Frisii shared the shores with their neighbors – the Chauci, Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.⁴ They are specifically mentioned for the first time around 12 BC, when the Roman commander Drusus the Elder mentions the Frisii as a tribe the Romans warred against. Unlike some other small Germanic tribes which were gradually assimilated by larger ones - like the Chauci who melded into the Saxons - the Frisii managed to maintain their identity both in the eyes of the Germanic peoples and the Romans as well.

28 AD The Battle of Baduhenna Wood.

The Frisii were subjugated by the Romans in 12 BC and were taxed moderately in order to prevent revolt. But taxation decimating their cattle herds and their women were taken into slavery, so the Frisii revolted.

In 28 AD, they besieged the roman forts and defeated them at the Battle of Baduhenna Wood. Similar to the circumstances of the legendary Roman defeat at the Teutoburg forest, the forest environment spelled doom for the Romans at Baduhenna as well. 1,300 Roman soldiers were slaughtered in Baduhenna's Wood.

From the 3rd to the 5th centuries AD, the coastal Frisian lands were subject to dramatically rising sea levels and the Frisii were forced to abandon the area. It is at this point that their historical thread gets thin and difficult to follow. What we do know is that two centuries later the conditions on the North Sea coast were improved and it was once again re-settled - mostly by Angles and Saxons, who were the largest tribes of the region.



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The ferryman of Solleveld rowing souls of the dead⁵

In 2004, a Frisian boat grave was discovered. The discovery reflects an account of Procopius, in 545 which he describes how the men of this same region ferried souls of the dead to Britain. According to Procopius, this land is under jurisdiction of the Franks, but the people rather than paying a tribute have to ferrying souls. Procopius' description fits very well the account in Beowulf of King Hygelac raiding Frisia in the year 516.

The course of business for ferrying the dead between Frisia and Britain was as follows. During the night, you were awakened by a knock on the door, You walked to the shore to find a boat prepared. They rowed a full night and day to reach Britain. The boats sit low in the water as souls are heavy with deeds of the life passed. Upon landfall on the coast of Britain. A voice called out the names of the souls, mentioning their title and honour. After the men hastily rowed back across the sea, but now with a light boat high on the water.

The whole story has many similarities with the Greek myth of the ferryman who ferried the dead across the river Styx. Procopius did not believe the story he just documented it because it was a persistent story among the Frisians.

The excavation of the boat grave took place at the early-medieval grave field of Solleveld, A grave field that is part of a dune landscape 700 meters to the

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seashore. During the Roman Period, the western coastline of the Netherlands still lay several kilometers more to the west. Over the years, in total forty-six graves have been identified at Solleveld. The grave field has been in use between approximately 550 and 650 (Waasdorp, 2008) and is within the Frisian cultural tradition, and in line with the excavation at Frankenslag in the city of The Hague

The seventh century site is rich with weaponry. The wooden coffin was oriented north-south, with the head south. Thanks to a few remains that included a molar, the age of the deceased could be estimated at about twenty-five years. The grave contained a sword with scabbard. These are long swords with a double-edged blade. A seax or Schmalsax was found, which is a large, single-edged knife. Another smaller knife, a spear, a shield and tinderbox consisting of three flints and a piece of iron was found. Then, finally, the five meters boat grave.

Of the skeleton only a silhouette in the soil remained. Some of the clothing attributes have been preserved. These are a bronze fibula, a bronze belt fitting, and five beads. The belt fittings can be dated third quarter of the seventh century. Lastly, an awl and two little knives have been found in the boat grave too.

The boat grave is interesting because it fits the existing views of a shared North Sea culture, of which Frisia was part during early-medieval times (Ijssennagger, 2017). Especially the southern Scandinavian influence during the mid-sixth century, was significant (Nicolay, 2005). Boat burials might have been part of that, although with less grandeur than their Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon neighbours

Comparable to Scandinavia, in Frisia boat burials were the exception, not the rule. Why make this exception is a big question mark. Some scholars see a parallel with the Nordic mythology of the god Freyr and his ship Skíðblaðnir, meaning 'assembled from thin pieces of wood'. Or, others say, it was a political statement.

From the Frisia Coast Trail⁶

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500 AD Frisian Paganism

In Frisia, each terp, (a raised settlement to avoid flooding), could have its own established rites or favorite gods. From the artifacts and inscriptions found in Friesland today it is apparent that they lived a unique religion.

Pagan are infinitely variable and incredibly monotonous, they all tend to believe items around them are inhabited by a spiritual presence. From the time of Constantine onward, a concerted effort was made to Christianize the various 'heathen' peoples that inhabited much of Western Europe. **Redbad**, the leader of Frisia from 679 – 719 AD, is a folk hero of the Frisians and a devoted heathen. Previous to his rule, Christian missionaries had been let into Frisia. He soon saw to their expulsion and burned their churches behind them.

The oral tradition of the Frisians were silenced by the killing of the bards who sang the epic poems of Frisia. In 793 AD there was only one bard left alive, **Bernlef**. When Charlemagne codified his laws sometime after 800 AD, the Frisians produced the Lex Frisonium along with a pagan legend accompanying its creation.

The **Lex Frisionium** detailed the laws of the Frisians, many of which were pagan tradition. Rites involving transitions such as birth, maturity, death or fertility, including those designed to increase crop yield, are the most common. The religious beliefs of the Frisians were a form of Odinism or Asatru. Odin occupied his pleasure palace at Valhalla for honoured warriors where they spent eternity with **Thor** swinging his mighty hammer.

In Frisia **Odin** went by the name of Wêda. The Frisians named the central day of the week after him, Wensdei. The god Tiwaz became Tiwesdei, our Tuesday. Donar was the 'thunderer' and was Thunresdei, the god Frîjaor Frigg became Friday (Frigendei) and Sunday and Monday were named after the cult of the sun god and the moon goddess respectively, (Snein en Moandei).

Moon God	Tiwaz	Wêda	Donar'	Frîjaor		Sun God
Moandei	Tiwesdei,	Wensdei.	Thunresdei,	Frigendei		Snein
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

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Heathenism did not impose moral principles, instead, an individual functioned according to a system of obligations based on his given word. Marriage, for example, was an oath that bound two people together and so led to certain obligations that would then help establish a working society. This is why the swearing of an oath was so important to the Frisians. **To break an oath almost certainly meant death.**

Despite the reorganization of their social structure from the 8th century onward, the Frisians adapted and retained their place as a unique group among the peoples of Western Europe. If the ancestor worshiping pagans were correct, Redbad is still with them in spirit.⁷ As well the other three major Frisian kings Radbod, Bubo, and Aldgisl.

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680 AD Hell with family rather than heaven with you!



Embroidery of Frisian king Radbod refusing baptism by Wulfram at the last moment.

Saint Wulfram was an early missionary who converted the son of a Frisian King "Radbod" and was allowed to preach. The Pagan custom was that people were sacrificed to local gods having been selected by a lottery. Wulfram asked Radbod to stop this custom but was told that he could not. Wulfram was invited to save them if he could.

The saint then waded into the sea to save two sacrificial children who had been tied to posts and left to drown as the tide rose. According to the story, the turning point came with the rescue of a man, Ovon, who had been chosen by lot to be sacrificed by hanging.

Wulfram again begged King Radbod to stop the killings, but the people were outraged at the sacrilege proposed. In the end, they agreed that Wulfram's God could have a chance to save Ovon's life, and if he did, Wulfram and the God could have him.

Ovon was hanged, and left for a couple of hours, while Wulfram prayed. When the Frisians decided to leave Ovon for dead, the rope broke, Ovon fell still alive. Ovon became Wulfram's slave, his follower, then a monk, and then a priest at Fontenelle Abbey. The faith of the missionaries and the miracle of Ovon awed the people, who were baptized and turned away from paganism.

Radbod was ready for conversion, but just before his baptism, he asked where his ancestors were. Wulfram told him that idolaters went to Hell. Rather than be apart from his ancestors, he chose to stay as he was and refused baptism.

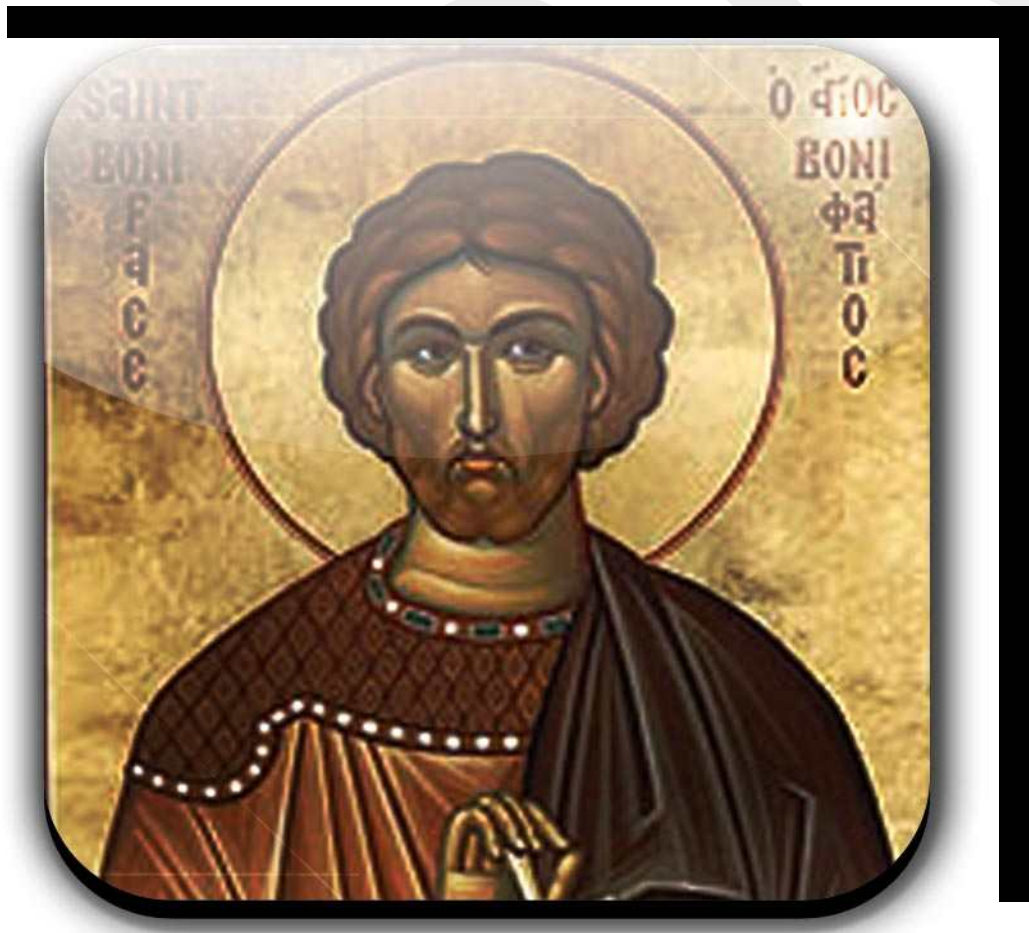
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698 Saint Willibrord, Anglo-Saxon missionary

Saint Willibrord was from Northumberland, he established the Abbey of Echternach on the site of a Roman villa in Echternach. He is remembered as the "Apostle to the Frisians"

In 716 the pagan Radbod, king of the Frisians, retook possession of Frisia, burning churches and killing many missionaries.[6] Willibrord and his monks were forced to flee.

After the death of Radbod in 719, Willibrord returned to resume his work, Saint Boniface, joined Willibrord and stayed for three years, before traveling on to preach in Frankish territory.



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719, Pope Gregory commissioned Boniface

Pope Gregory commissioned Boniface to continue the task of ridding the German tribes of their pagan beliefs and saving their souls.

As with the Jesuit Missionaries to the Huron-Wendat in the Georgian Bay area of Central Ontario the Frisians were often reluctant. Huronia was massacred by the Iroquois in the same way the Frisians were attacked by the Franks. The Huron, like the Frisians were farmers, fishermen and traders who lived in villages surrounded by defensive wooden palisades for protection.

Almost 900 years after the conversion of the Germanic tribes the Jesuits were still at work on the Huron. In 1640 the Jesuits were considered shamans who brought death so in a perceived act of inspired self defense the Huron killed the talkative immigrants, specifically 9 Jesuits were cut up, burned and eaten.

722, Just don't chop down that tree



In Rome Boniface conferred with the pope and was made a bishop. His first offensive on the Frisians was with the Bortharian tribe, who worshiped an ancient tree at Geismar, the Thunder Oak, sacred to the god Woden. While the Frisians were familiar with Christianity there was a merging of Pagan beliefs with Christian beliefs. Magic amulets, meat sacrifices, human sacrifice continued. At one point in an effort to curb paganism

Boniface took an ax to the Thunder Oak and the astonished people watched in horror as the oak was destroyed.

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734 Battle of the Boarn

The Frisians were defeated and the Franks annexed much of the Frisian lands. Only the East Frisians east remained independent. The wars ended with the last uprising of the Frisians in 793

743 Assembly of the church

Boniface, accomplished much in establishing the church in the lowlands and held an assembly of church delegates, a pivotal conference that among other things forbade the clergy to indulge in fornication, go to war, hunt, and adopted the Benedictine Rule for monasteries. They returned church lands and revenues that had been seized and continued to finance expanding Christian endeavors in Germania.

755 Frisian Warriors kill Boniface

Near Dokkum, Frisian warriors got their revenge. Saint Boniface, an Anglo-Saxon, had converted a hundred thousand German tribesman to Christ. The seventy-five year old Bishop led his fifty clergy deep into the swampy flat-lands beside the North Sea. As he planned to baptize the latest newcomers to his flock a large reception was planned. Shortly after dawn, the encampment was charged. The religious invaders were hacked to death and died quickly.



The entire party was slaughtered, a Frisian sword cleaving Boniface's head. So died the foremost Christian apostle to the German tribes.⁸

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785 The Frisians' Karelsprivilege,

The Pagan Frisians worshiped their gods – Woden, Thor, Tiwes , Frîja (Frigg), and others. Anglo-Irish Christian missionaries infiltrated Frisia to convert the heathen populace, which they eventually accomplished. After a series of clashes and conflicts, the Christian Frankish Empire gained the upper hand and Frisia was conquered by the Franks. The last remnants of paganism were also slowly snuffed out.

In the late 700s, the Frankish king Charlemagne imposed a tax on the Frisians. In the process stratifying Frisian society into the feudal structure of nobility, freemen and serfs. Charlemagne used an army of 700 Frisians to attack Rome and the Vatican. After Charlemagne was crowned the leader of the Holy Roman Emperor he offered the Frisian Leadership a position of nobility. Rather than accepting the position they requested freedom for all Frisians; which Charlemagne granted in the **Karelsprivilege**.

809 Magnus Forteman

Magnus Forteman was the first potestaat or magistrate governor and commander of Frisia. He is documented in the writings of the sages. He was the first of the 17 potestates of Frisia.

The saga relates that Magnus was the leader of the army of Frisians in the conquest of Rome. The eyes of Pope Leo III were pulled out and he was expelled from Rome by a group of nobles who did not accept his authority.

With 700 Frisians, Magnus reconquered Rome from these nobles. They entered Rome at night by a small port that had become visible through low water level in the Tiber. Through the Flavian gardens, they went to St. Peter's and when they were discovered there a battle ensued. Magnus flew his banner clearly visible on top of the church, creating confusion. There were no prisoners, and the Frisians were in Saint Peter's Square up to their ankles in blood. When asked by the emperor, Magnus requested no payment by way of nobility, but instead requested the right to freedom and free speech forever for all Frisians. Their courage was rewarded with the Karelsprivilege, Friezenprivilege, Vrijheidsprivilege, libertas Frisonica or Previlegii Frisiorum Caroli Magni.⁹



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800 AD The Carolingian Renaissance

Charlemagne ruled from 768 to 814 and granted the Friesian their freedom for their assistance in removing the Lombards from papal power, and leading an incursion into Muslim Spain. He campaigned against the Saxons to his east. He was crowned "Emperor of the Romans" in 800 by Pope Leo III.

Charlemagne reversed the cultural decay of the Dark Ages and laid the foundation for the rise of the Western civilization. As the sworn protector of the Church, Charlemagne felt that it was his duty to improve education of the clergy and to teach the faith to a "rowdy" church.

He saw the church as a tool, thru the network of churches as a tool to help him govern and carrying out the administrative tasks of his state. Charlemagne's educational reform required development of standardized Latin and more legible script. His court created a medieval Latin which became the standard form and was adopted as the language of the Roman Catholic Church as well as the language of literature, science, law and administration.

Charlemagne fostered a network of cathedral and monastic schools throughout the Carolingian Empire where the seven Liberal Arts (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) were taught. Revival of learning and the rising number of schools and libraries resulted in increased copying of the books. Many ancient works would have been lost forever as the oldest preserved classical works are copies from the period of the Carolingian Renaissance.



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888 - 1500 What was the Friesian Freedom?

The Friese Vrijheid was the absence of feudalism and serfdom in Frisia. During the period of Frisian freedom the area did **not** have a sovereign lord who owned the land and serfs that lived upon it and paid a tithe to a local lord supporting a knight. The freedom of the Frisians developed when local nobility was given the respect they deserved, with a slit throat.

This was a unique period of development. All Frisians were granted the title of 'freemen', and given the right to elect their own potestaat (magistrate-governor), a person that acted as a representative of the emperor who could organize the defense of Frisia, but whom held no executive power of their own.

800 AD Vikings attack

Around 800, the Scandinavian Vikings first attacked Frisia, which was still under Carolingian rule, the Frisians were released from military service on foreign territory in order to be able to defend themselves against the Vikings.

884 AD The East Frisians Freedom

In 884 they were able to drive the Vikings permanently out of East Frisia, although it remained under constant threat. Over the centuries, whilst feudal lords reigned in the rest of Europe, no aristocratic structures emerged in Frisia. This freedom was represented abroad by redjeven who were elected from among the farmers or from elected representatives of the autonomous rural municipalities. Originally the redjeven were all judges, so-called Asega, who were appointed by the territorial lords.

993 AD Freedom of the Frisians

The killing of the Count Arnulf of Holland in 993 was a Friesian response to Arnulf's attempt to compel obedience from his "subjects". The murder of another Count in 1101 is regarded as the defacto beginning of the Frisian freedom as repeated attempts to rule the Frisians by the dutch failed. This freedom was recognized by the Holy Roman Emperor in 1248. Later, Emperor Louis IV repealed these rights and granted Friesland to a new Count of Holland .

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1066 The Strain of the Norman Yoke

To put the Frisian Freedom in context The Norman Conquest of England was the 1066 invasion and occupation of England by an army made up of men from the French provinces, all led by the Duke of Normandy later styled William the Conqueror. William's claim to the English throne derived from his familial relationship with the childless Anglo-Saxon king Edward the Confessor. The medieval chronicler Orderic Vitalis believed that the Normans had imposed a yoke on the English: "And so the English groaned aloud for their lost liberty and plotted ceaselessly to find some way of shaking off a yoke that was so intolerable and unaccustomed"

Monarchist apologist, the sycophants that surround a hereditary ruler, are critical of the Frisian Freedom as it contradicts their narrative of the need for Royal Leeches sucking at the life of a society. (Editorial rant at no additional cost)

1101 AD Count Henri de Gras

The killing of Count Henri de Gras left no doubt in anyone's mind that the Frisians had an authority problem and is regarded even by the most ardent monarchy lover as the point when they cannot deny the Frisians were not subject to Royal rule and were in fact a people free of serfdom.

AD 1248 Affirming of the Freedoms

The freedom was affirmed in AD 1248 when William II, count of Holland, was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Aachen, in the presence of Frisians. Two days after his coronation he re-affirmed the freedom privileges. The second event was in AD 1417 when Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund gave the Frisians their freedom, based on the Frisians freedom claim. This charter has been preserved.

1256 to 1422 Wars of Independence

The independence lasted for several centuries. By 1256 the Counts of Holland were a prominent regional power and wanted to once again become masters over Frisia. A series of wars were fought between Frisia and Holland.

- 1256 to 1289 it was the West Frisian War.

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1319 Records of the Freedoms

During the conflicts the stories were inscribed on the wall of churches in Almenum, Ferwâld and Aldeboarn. In 1319, more than five hundred years after the death of Charlemagne, a copy was entered in the register of William III of Holland. In the Church of the Frisians in Rome an eleventh-century AD inscription referring to Frisians fighting for the Holy Roman Empire against the Saracens in the south of Italy in the mid ninth century AD. The purpose of the inscription is to explain how Saint Magnus, an Italian bishop from the Roman Period, became patron of the church.

- 1345 and 1422 is known as the Friso-Hollandic War,
- 1413 to 1422 with the Great Frisian War.

This lengthy period was a period of strife, until the conquest of Western Frisia when it lost its independence and became a part of the Dutch provinces.

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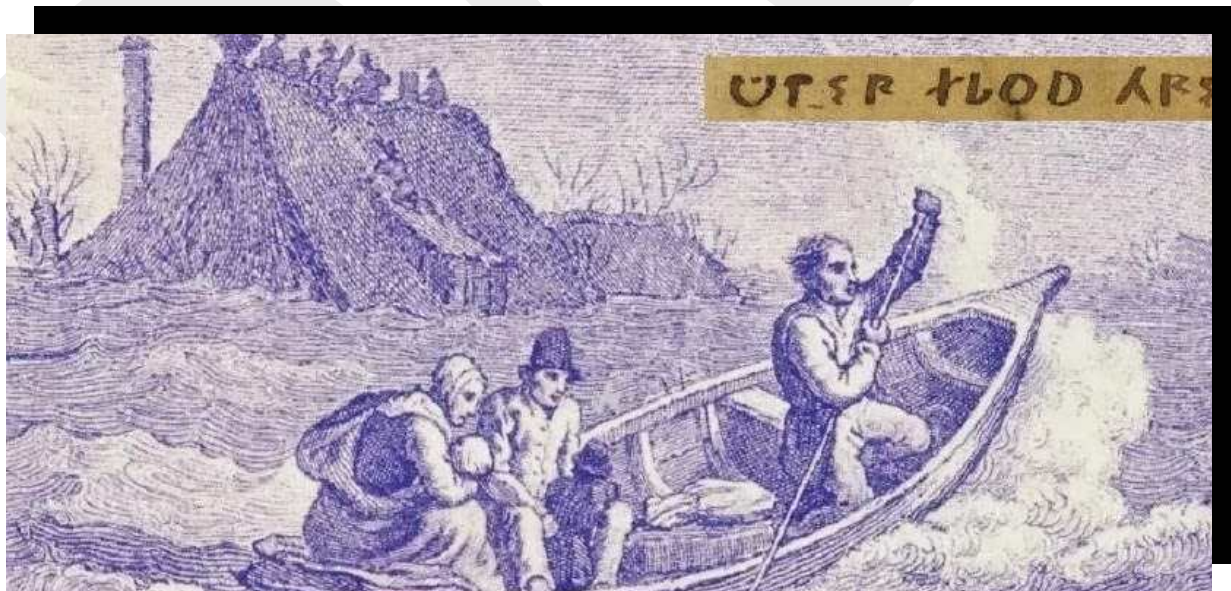
Massive Floods 1282 to 1362 The Grote Mandrenke

Over time the the Frisian coast has undergone massive changes. Large bays today were once rivers surrounded by miles of land that has since been eroded. During the early Middle Ages rising sea levels and storms ate away at the peat coast. A disastrous flood in 1282 gave seagoing access to Amsterdam.

The even more massive St. Lucia's flood of 1287 broke seawalls killing up to 80,000 people and was the fifth largest flood in recorded history. The name "Zuiderzee" inlet came into general usage around this period.

The Grote Mandrenke of 1362 was the result of a vicious North Sea storm. The effects were first felt in England, where "a strong gale blew from the north so violently for a day and night that it flattened trees, mills, houses and a great many church towers." The Netherlands experienced a storm surge that overran every dike in its path. An estimated 100,000 people drowned. Elsewhere in the Low Countries, erosion from the flood permanently transformed the coastline. This storm played a role in forming the North Sea bay known as the Zuiderzee.

The size of this inland sea remained stable from the 15th century due to improvements in dikes, but when storms pushed North Sea water into the inlet, the Zuiderzee becomes a volatile cauldron. In 1421, a seawall at the Zuiderzee dike broke, flooded 72 villages and killed about 10,000 people.



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1417 Freedom reaffirmed by Sigismund.

In 1396, Sigismund led the Crusade of Nicopolis, but was decisively defeated by the Ottoman Empire. Afterwards, he founded the Order of the Dragon to fight the Turks and secured the thrones of Croatia, Germany and Bohemia. Sigismund was one of the driving forces behind the Council of Constance (1414–1418) that ended the Papal Schism, but which also led to the Hussite Wars that dominated the later period of his life. In 1433, Sigismund was crowned Holy Roman Emperor reaffirmed the Frisians' Freedom and ruled until his death in 1437.



1480 to 1520 Grutte Pier, the Frisian Folk Hero

(Big Pier), lived from 1480 to 1520 and was prominent Frisian rebel. He was well-known for his enormous stature and strength. He assembled a company called the Zwarte Hoop (Black Gang) and chose the sea as his base of operation.

In 1515 and 1517, Grutte Pier captured the Holland fleets and plundered Dutch towns. When one of his lieutenants was executed, Grutte Pier sought vengeance and returned to once again raze the same city in the winter of 1518-1519.

He became known for his practice of testing his captives - if a captured man could not speak a tricky Frisian sentence - he was thrown overboard, since all Frisians can speak it easily.

In time, his deeds became legendary after a string of victories over the Dutch on the sea he retired and died peacefully in his bed in 1520 in the Frisian city of Sneek.

Today, visitors of the Frisian Museum in Leeuwarden can see the gigantic sword of Pier Gerlofs Donia exhibited. It is 212.5 centimeters (83.66 inches) long and weighs 6.6 kg (14.55 lbs.).

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The first Anabaptist 1525

On January 21, 1525, the first re-baptism of believers took place. This was clearly the most revolutionary act of the Reformation. No other event so completely symbolized the break with Rome. Here, for the first time a group of Christians dared to form a church after what was conceived to be the New Testament pattern.

Within a decade everyone in this group had been martyred by the Roman Catholic Church. An execution if quick could be drowning, beheading, being burned in your home or being lead to the square and cutting off of your tongue, then chained to a wagon, burned with red hot tongs multiple time until dead, then finally, the body was burned.

Radical Anabaptists

The first Anabaptists embraced violent revolution and are the precursors to today's peaceful Mennonites. The Anabaptist message was radical enough to elicit persecution but the effort to develop an Anabaptist state in the German city of Münster lead to violent repression.

While the term Mennonite stands as a legacy to the peaceful teachings of Menno

Simons, there are steel cages still hanging from St. Lambert's church which are the legacy of Anabaptists who desired violent revolutionary means.



To understand the violence you need to understand the 16th century, by the 1530's plague had been in Europe for 200 years killing half the population and also killing most animals leading to widespread famines.

People had lost faith in the Roman Catholic Church.

Columbus had discovered a

world new to Europe and the Slavery of a Feudal society was ending as Martin Luther publicly challenged the Catholic Church.

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1483 - 1546 Martin Luther



Martin Luther was a German professor of theology and priest. He came to reject the Roman Catholic Church; in particular the view on indulgences. Luther proposed an academic discussion of the practice and efficacy of indulgences in his Ninety-five Theses of 1517. His refusal to renounce all of his writings this resulted in his excommunication by the pope and condemnation as an outlaw by the Holy Roman Emperor.

Luther taught that salvation and, consequently, eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God's grace through the believer's faith in Jesus as redeemer from

sin. His theology challenged the authority and office of the pope by teaching that the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed knowledge.

The Anabaptist Reformation was begun by individuals who believed Martin Luther had not gone far enough. At the same time a Peasants Revolt led to 100,000 peasants demanding an end to feudal slavery were massacred in Germany by the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually the Vatican was sacked and in an effort to squelch the unrest in Europe, Charles V ordered all Anabaptists exterminated.

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1528 Persecution of the Anabaptists and Mennonites

Persecution began in Zurich soon after the Brethren had organized a congregation. Imprisonment was of varying severity and was followed by executions.

- Emperor Charles V of Germany issued a general mandate against the Anabaptists on January 4, 1528, read from the pulpits of all cities and villages, was a death warrant to all Anabaptists to be executed by fire.
- King Ferdinand of Austria in the first week of lent 1528 sent out one thousand mounted soldiers to kill all Anabaptists on whom they could lay hands.
- The duke of Bavaria, in 1527, gave orders that the imprisoned Anabaptists should be burned at the stake, unless they recanted, in which case beheading.
- All of the 39 early leaders in Zürich all were executed. In a forest near Lengbach seventeen were put to death. Seventeen burned Christmas day, 1531, near Aalen in Württemberg
- Three hundred and fifty executed near Palatinate by 1530.
- The Count of Alzey, was heard to exclaim: "What shall I do? The more I kill, the greater becomes their number."
- Six hundred At Ensisheim, "the slaughterhouse of Alsace," in 1529.
- Thirty-seven burned or beheaded at Linz, in Austria over a 3 week period. Sixty were executed in one year in Kitzbüchl in the Tyrol. Two hundred and ten burned in the valley of the Inn River.
- One thousand in the Tyrol and Görz by the end of the year 1531.
- 2,330 total represents a small fraction of the total 6 ,000+ Anabaptists murdered by the Holy Roman Empire under orders of the Roman Catholic Church
- The last martyr died in the Netherlands in 1574,

It was comparatively easy to ascertain who was and who was not an Anabaptist. They simply put the question; A true Anabaptist would not burden his conscience by telling an untruth and denying his faith.

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

1530's Burning Mennonite Anabaptists

All Mennonites are Anabaptists but not all Anabaptists are Mennonites: Menno Simons joined the movement in 1536, when resistance to the Anabaptist movement was high. The violence ended in a crescendo in 1533 with a theocratic revolution in Munster.

Radicalized Anabaptists in Münster gained power, drove out the Catholics and Protestants in bitterly cold conditions. The established churches were plundered. Anabaptist converts accused of "uncertain devotion" were subject to execution, crimes punishable by death included blasphemy, impurity, idle conversation, anger, envy and disobedience to the elders. Executions were common. Polygamy was instituted and all women older than 15 were required to be married. Women who refused marriage could be executed. The Holy Roman Empire lay siege for a year and forced surrender. After the leaders were tried, tortured and then executed. Their bodies were placed in iron cages hung from the church towers as an example to others of what would happen if they participated in such efforts.



Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890



Why Burn Anabaptists?

Anabaptists were burned because of books, with books came awareness of what the bible actually said. Not only were they burned, some were thrown into the Danube with a stone tied around their neck.

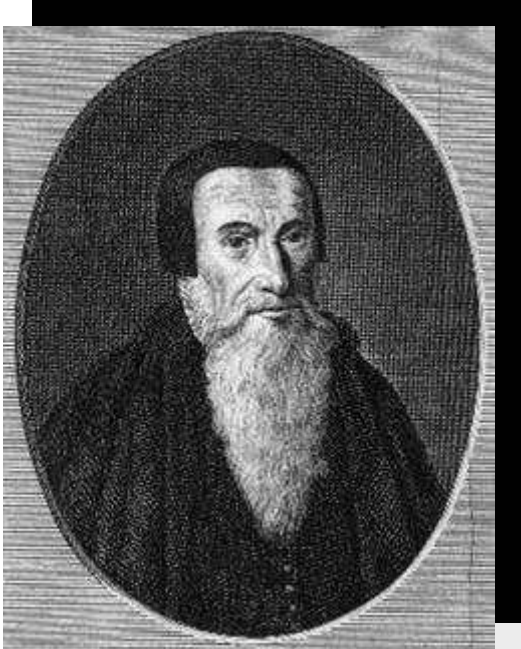
A Fascist mindset only understands violence, then and today. The early Reformers; like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli were breaking free from the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic's interpretation of the world was unscriptural. Along with the false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church it suffered from widespread corruption. The new teachings of the Anabaptists and others sparked not just theological turmoil but political too; there were revolts against feudal oppression like the German Peasants' War of 1525 and political rulers took sides for and against the Reformation.

Anabaptists means 're-baptism' and key to their theology is the belief that the Church is to be made up of people who have chosen to be disciples of Christ, rather than those who are born in a particular role as a serf. If you could choose to believe or not, could you choose to be free of the slavery of serfdom?

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

The idea of pacifism always gets war mongers upset, it just will not do if you don't join in the fight. The very thought of making a choice of who you kill, let alone obeying the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" made the Amish and Mennonites ideologies subversive. Even today you can take part in almost any form of inane sexual, gender, or popular belief. But do not challenge the sacred defense budget.

1536 Menno Simon



Menno Simons rejected the Catholic Church and the priesthood on 12 January 1536, casting his lot with the Anabaptists.

Menno and his followers would not take up arms against others and repudiated the Münster rebellion. Menno led those seeking peace away from the violence promoted by the radicalized Anabaptists.⁷

Menno Simons' influence on Anabaptism in the Low Countries was great. Menno is especially significant because of his coming to the Anabaptist movement in the north in its most troublesome days, and helping not only to sustain it, but also to establish it as a viable Reformation movement.

For true evangelical faith is of such a nature that it cannot lie dormant; but manifests itself in all righteousness and works of love; it dies unto flesh and blood; destroys all forbidden lusts and desires; cordially seeks, serves and fears God; clothes the naked; feeds the hungry;

consoles the afflicted; shelters the miserable; aids and consoles all the oppressed; returns good for evil; serves those that injure it; prays for those that persecute it; teaches, admonishes and reproves with the Word of the Lord; seeks that which is lost; binds up that which is wounded; heals that which is diseased and saves that which is sound.

The persecution, suffering and anxiety which befalls it for the sake of the truth of the Lord, is to it a glorious joy and consolation.

— Menno Simons, Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing, 1539—

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

Issues of Contention in 1580

With the end of the Munster rebellion, the persecution of the “moderates” by Calvinists and Roman Catholics continued. Issues of contention included;

1. rejection of infant baptism, non-swearing of oaths, refusal to bear arms,
2. refusal to serve in government, the separation of church and state
3. use of shunning and the concept of a church separate from society
4. rejecting false doctrines such as the Trinity, combined with anticlerical views
5. The belief that when Jesus spoke the words “This is My body, This is My blood” (Matthew 26:26-27) he was pointing, not at the bread and wine, but at his own human body

Dirk Willems

Dirk Willems was caught, tried and convicted as an Anabaptist under the Spanish rule of the Duke of Alva in The Netherlands. He escaped from a prison dropping onto the ice that covered the castle moat.

Guards pursued him as he fled. Dirk crossed the thin ice of a pond, his own weight had been reduced by prison rations, but the heavier pursuer broke through.

Dirk rescued them. The less-than-grateful guards then seized Dirk and led him back to captivity where he was later burned to death.¹⁰



Compassion For The Enemy Dirk Willems, Asperen, 156912

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

1530 Vistula delta Mennonites Origins

1526-1552 Frisian Mennonites moved to Gdansk in Prussia. Menno Simons visited in 1549 and 1569. Soon about 1000 Mennonites lived in the city. The Danzig city council allowed Mennonites but refused to grant formal status of a Citizen.

1582-1583 Local guilds' complained about Mennonite linen weavers and put limits on the number of Mennonite weavers to one per abbey. Guilds unsuccessfully requested the Polish King to dislodge the Mennonites who were considered a "**human plague**" inside the city.

Plautdietsch, a mixture of Frisian Dutch and the Low Prussian dialect of the Vistula Delta, became the language of the Mennonites in this region. Friesland Mennonites were joined by Mennonites from Switzerland and Saxony.

1772, 12,000 Mennonites lived in the Prussian territory. Their faith was tolerated, but they became subject to extra taxes. Only men who had served in the Prussian Army were allowed to purchase land, conscientious objectors were subject to special charges.

1786, Georg von Trappe, a colonization agent of the Russian government, sought settlers for regions conquered from the Ottoman Empire. About 6000 Mennonites from the delta settlements left, forming the roots of the Russian Mennonites.

1789 The first Mennonite settlement in Russia, Chortitza Colony was founded.¹⁰

1859 A church of many faces

The Mennonite movement had a design flaw. In a church with home services, the habit of shunning non conformers lead to those non conformers starting their own churches. Also as the church was influenced by the Methodist revival that was spreading around the world. New ideas alienated many and shunning increased.

Like any good church group they gathered to discuss problems. The discussion centered on not being Mennonite enough, with church members who were living in a way that seemed unholy or some aspect of baptism. The Mennonite Brethren Church was the result. They felt the Mennonites had grown cold and formal, and were seeking greater emphasis on prayer and Bible study and a more personal relationship with Christ.

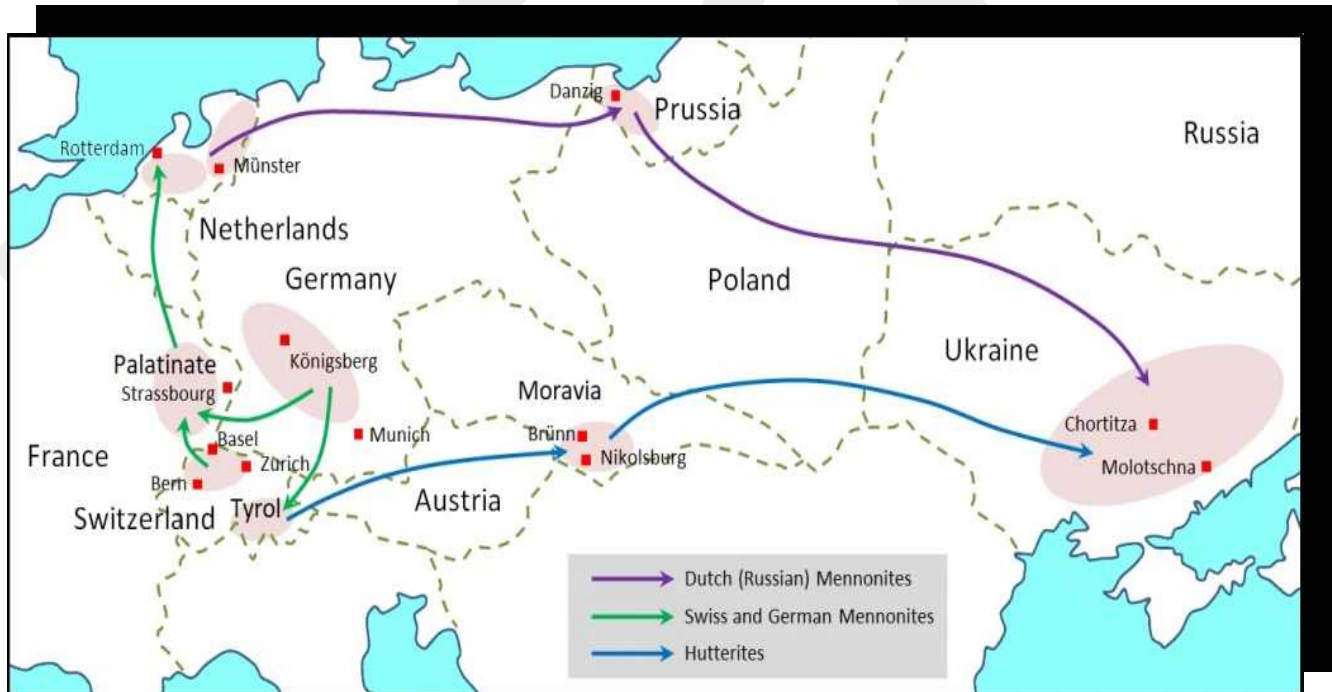
Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

The Mennonite Brethren movement spread throughout the Prussian Mennonite colonies. It was the Mennonite Brethren movement also commissioned the first missionaries to travel from Southern Russia (Ukraine) to India in 1887,

Because of growing pressure by the Czarist government and later because of the political turmoil of the Russian Revolution, these same Mennonites are the ones that moved to Canada. In the Soviet Union their organizational structures ceased to exist by 1930 due to Communist persecution.

Trivia fact filed under racist prejudices and stereotypes: There are more South East Asian and Black Mennonites than European Mennonites.

- Mennonite Brethren Membership 500,000
- Brethren congregations in India 212,000 members
- Brethren congregations in Congo 102,082 members.
- Brethren congregations in Thailand 42,000 members
- Total 357,000 of 500,000
- Canada and the United States 66,000 members
- Mexico and South America 95,000 members



Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

Chortitza Colony

1763 Catherine the Great of Russia issued a manifesto inviting Europeans to settle the Volga region. Mennonites from the Vistula delta region of Prussia 1789 responded.

1789 Their settlement territory was northwest of the Sea of Azov establishing Chortitza on the Dnieper River as their first colony in

1803 A second larger colony, Molotschna, was founded. Mennonites lived alongside the Nogai Tatars. Mennonites provided agricultural jobs to Nogai and rented pasture from them. Nogai raids on Mennonite herds were a constant problem in the first two decades of settlement.

1853 to 1861 The Prussian government eliminated exemption from military service on religious grounds, the remaining Mennonites emigrate to Russia.

1865 As wheat farming expanded, the demand for mills and farm equipment grew. The first large foundry was established in Chortitza

1870 a total of 9000 individuals had immigrated to Russia, mostly to Chortitza and Molotschna which numbered about 45,000. Russia announced a Russification plan that would end all special privileges by 1880. Mennonites were alarmed at the possibility of losing their exemption from military service and their right for schools to use their language.

1871 Delegates were sent to Petersburg to meet with the czar and appeal for relief on religious grounds. They failed to meet the czar. A similar attempt the next year was also unsuccessful.

The community leaders sought immigration options. The more conservative groups—those from Bergthal and Chortitza—chose Canada, which promised privileges equal to those previously held in Russia and a large tract of land to reestablish colonies in Manitoba (East Reserve and West Reserve). The more liberal groups—those from Molotschna—and the Hutterites chose the United States.

1874 Realizing that 40,000 of Russia's most industrious farmers were preparing to leave for North America, the Russian government offered an alternative national service that would not be connected in any way to the military. His intervention convinced the more liberal Mennonites to stay.

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

1874- 1880, 18,000 of 45,000 Mennonites in South Russia, ten thousand departed for the United States and eight thousand for Manitoba.

1875-1876 Manitoba Settlement the West Reserve

Seven thousand Russian Mennonites who arrived in 1870-1880 constituted the largest single newcomer group to enter Manitoba. They headed for a “reserve” of eight townships of bush, swamp, and some dry prairie land located east of the Red River. Our grandfather Peter Giesbrecht (1843-1922) arrived in Canada in 1879 in this group.

The influx of Mennonite settlers peaked in the following year, amounting to fully twelve per cent of the total immigration to Canada in 1875. They would have preferred wooded lands or river lots, but native residents of the province, had staked out most of the prime land already. So they were led to consider the grassy, and to a degree, swampy, open prairie region just north of the International Border, as one-time residents of a similar terrain in south Russia, the Mennonites saw the opportunities of the area.

The lodged a request with the Canadian government to open another “reserve” for them here. When an Order-in-Council of 1876 finally set this land aside for exclusive use by the Mennonites from Russia, it brought the total acreage of the two reserves to just over 500,000 acres, or about 6% of the total area of Manitoba as constituted in 1881.

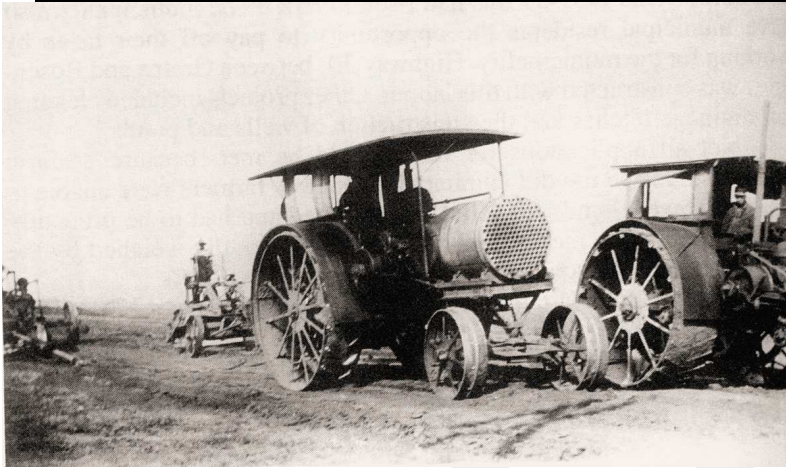
Almost overnight the bare prairie became dotted with villages—the pattern of settlement the Mennonites had known in south Russia back home. It is known that a number of these farmhome clusters were begun that very fall; others sprang up quickly the following spring and summer—eventually fifty or more in all. Building a home and farm was demanding work, home amenities were few.

Light came from a candle wick. Wooden-soled slippers for the family were made at home, as were fur coats, mittens, socks and other clothing which members of the family wore. Bread was baked out-of-doors in a special oven heated with flax straw and the meat supply came from the animals of the farm. The nearest doctors and dentists were fifty miles away in Emerson so bone-setters and mid-wives were drawn from the midst of the villagers themselves.

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

Circa 1900 Grader Toews building Manitoba roads

This picture shows Johann Toews 1877-1926 with his son Johann Toews 1901-1987 operating Grader equipment building roads around Morris Manitoba. The name "Grader Toews" was the way my father Bruno referred to his father John G Toews. Bruno was the son of Johann or John Giesbrecht Toews 1901-1987



The model of tractor used by "Grader Toews" was a Twin City Tractor.

Twin City Tractors have stood the tests of years of service

Twin City "60"
Twin City "40"
Twin City "25"

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Twin City Tractors are powerful, economical, durable, sturdy machines.

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1905 After the Russian Revolution they exercised their right to vote. Most aligned themselves with the Octobrist Party because of its guarantee of religious freedoms and freedom of the press for minority groups.

1911 The eight largest Mennonite-owned factories produced 6% of the total Russian output, shipped machinery globally employing 1744 workers. Mennonite colonies were self-governing with little intervention from the Russian authorities. The village was headed by an elected magistrate who controlled its own school, roads and cared for the poor. Male landowners decided local matters at village assemblies.

1914 Forty colonies occupying nearly 12,000 square kilometres, with a total population of 100,000.

1917 Abdication of Tsar Nicholas II leading to a Russian Provisional Government

Chaos followed the collapse of the Russian Provisional Government, devastating the Mennonite colonies in the Ukraine.

The Red and White armies moved through the region, confiscating food and livestock. Nestor Makhno's anarchist army generally targeted Mennonites because they were thought of as "Kulaks" or wealthy. The Mennonites' Germanic background also served to inflame negative sentiment during the period of revolution. Makhno himself had served on a Mennonite estate in childhood and harbored negative feelings based on treatment he received while employed there.

Mennonites were murdered, robbed, imprisoned and raped during this period and villages including Chortitza were destroyed. Many more lives were lost to typhus and cholera spread by the breakdown of society. Mennonites were dispossessed and ultimately their remaining properties and possessions were collectivization.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is formed to address the dire conditions of war-torn Ukraine. The MCC planned to provide aid to the Ukraine via existing Mennonite relief work in Istanbul. The Istanbul group's volunteers, entered Ukraine while it was being overrun by the red army. One of the volunteers **Clayton Kratz** was never heard from again.

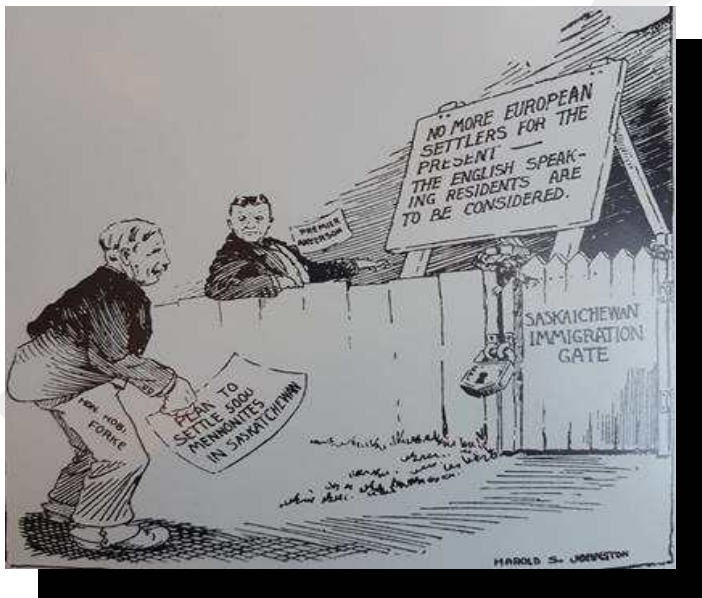
Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

1921 -1923 Russian famine

A year passed before the Soviet government allowed the MCC to do relief work among the villages of Ukraine. Kitchens provided 25,000 people a day with rations over a period of three years beginning in 1922. Fifty Fordson tractor and plow combinations were sent to Mennonite villages to replace horses that had been stolen and confiscated during the war. The cost of this relief effort was \$1.2 million.

1922 No Mennonites, Hutterites or other cattle allowed

In March 1922 a five-person delegation met Liberal Prime Minister, Mackenzie King to address his promise to rescind an Order in Council in June 1919 that barred landing in Canada of "...any immigrant of the Doukobor [sic], Hutterite or Mennonite class." [i] King kept his word and quietly rescinded the ban on these pacifist religious groups for entry to Canada.



This ban on immigration had been because of a negative attitude towards pacifist groups during World War I. John Wesley Edwards, Member of Parliament from the Kingston, Ontario area said "Whether they be called Mennonites, Hutterites, or any kind of 'ites,' we do not want them to come to Canada... if they are willing to allow others to do their fighting for them... We certainly do not want that kind of cattle in this country!"

The lifting of the ban cleared the way for 20,000 Mennonites to

Canada from the Soviet Union between 1923 and 1930, who faced famine, disease and violence as a result of the Russian Civil War. Through much of Canada's history, groups like the Mennonites have advocated for people to escape refugee-like conditions and settle in Canada.

Cartoon¹¹

Frisian-Mennonite History 12BC-1890

1932 to 1933 The Holodomor

The Holodomor was a famine in Soviet Ukraine that killed millions of Ukrainians and many of the remaining Russian Mennonites. The term Holodomor emphasises the famine's man-made and intentional aspects such as rejection of outside aid, confiscation of all household foodstuffs and restriction of population movement. millions died of starvation in an unprecedented peacetime catastrophe.

A United Nations joint statement signed by 25 countries in 2003 declared that 7–10 million perished. Research has since narrowed the estimates to between 3.3 and 7.5 million. According to the findings of the Court of Appeal of Kyiv in 2010, the demographic losses due to the famine amounted to 10 million, with 3.9 million direct famine deaths, and a further 6.1 million birth deficits.

Some scholars believe that the famine was planned by Joseph Stalin to eliminate a Ukrainian independence movement.

Effect of Mennonite immigration to War refugees

Mennonites are part of a shift in thinking among many Christian groups after World War II regarding our response to not just our own refugees, but all fleeing war and persecution. “Our faith compels us to offer our resources to whom ever needs help.”¹²

European Mennonites after WW2

Remaining Mennonites in Poland were expelled after World War II to remaining parts of Germany, many of them moving on to North and South America¹³

At that time some remaining Mennonite Brethren moved from Ukraine to the republics of the Soviet Central Asia. After World War II several Mennonite Brethren churches emerged in that region. In 1966 they joined the Evangelical-Baptist Union, —an umbrella organization tightly controlled by the Soviet government.

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1 Plautdietsch, a Germanic language related to Dutch and Frisian, spoken in Siberia

<https://www.mercator-research.eu/en/projects/endangered-languages-and-archives/plautdietsch-a-germanic-language-related-to-dutch-and-frisian-spoken-in-siberia/>

2 Aboriginal; Origin from the word aborigine

First recorded usage in 1540–50; from the Latin Aborīginēs relating to “the pre-Roman inhabitants of Italy,” probably alteration of an earlier ethnology by association with ab origin e

Modern Usage of the term aboriginal

- a) 1 : being the first or earliest known of its kind present in a region
aboriginal forests aboriginal rocks
- b) 2 : of or relating to the people who have been in a region from the earliest time : of or relating to aborigines aboriginal languages aboriginal tribes/customs/art specifically, often capitalized : of or relating to the indigenous peoples of Australia

adverb Latin. from the very beginning; from the source or origin.

Dictionary.com Unabridged Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2021

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aboriginal>

3 Rationalism was found in a few places in the 1600's, greece, europe, northern Africa in Ethiopia

4 Early Frisian History site

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6 Ibid

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- 7 Frisian Paganism paraphrased from <https://alkman1.blogspot.com/2007/03/pagan-frisia.html>
- 8 Paraphrased from a very christian historic site, the tone changed from one of reverence to St Boniface to my opinion of St Boniface. <http://www.christianhistoryproject.org/the-quest-for-the-city/charlemagne/st-boniface/>
- 9 From Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnus_Forteman
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