

# OREGON'S DOUKHOBORS:

## *The Hidden History of a Russian Religious Sect's Attempts to Found Colonies in the Beaver State*

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We shall gather as a human family  
And form the brotherhood of man  
Toil and peaceful life shall be our foremost emblem  
Love shall reign supreme throughout the land  
– From a traditional Doukhor hymn<sup>1</sup>

WHEN AMERICAN LEGION commander George Love spoke to a gathering of concerned residents at Junction City, Oregon, in late August 1924, he warned of the imminent danger of allowing a group of Russian immigrants to establish a colony on the rich farmland along the Willamette River. Some of the local residents were so upset by Love's warning that they threatened to pick up the gun to rid the region of what the Legionnaire told them were

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\* I am indebted to several people for assisting with this paper, particularly Doukhor scholars Jonathan Kalmakoff, Jack McIntosh, Tom McGauley, and Greg Nesteroff; Scott Daniels at the Oregon Historical Society; and Leola Jewett-Verzuh for first taking me to Dukhobar Road and for everything else.

<sup>1</sup> Oregon Doukhobors would have carried these hymns with them from childhood in Russia. The phrase "Toil and Peaceful Life" appears in several Doukhor psalms and hymns, many of them part of *The Living Book*, an ever-changing collection of material signifying unity in the sect. See V.N. Pozdnyakov, *Razskaz dukhobortsy Vasi Pozdnyakova. S prilozheniem dokumentov ob izbieni i iznasilovanii dukhoborcheskikh zhenshchin kozakami* [A Doukhor's narrative: With appended documents on the beatings and rape of Doukhor women by the Cossacks], ed. with foreword and notes by Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich (Christchurch, UK: A. Tchertkoff, 1901); also see Bonch-Bruevich, *Materialy k istorii i izucheniiu russkago sektantsva* [Materials for the history and study of Russian sectarianism], vol. 3 (Christchurch, England: no publisher named, 1901). For a brief analysis of the book's meaning, see George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968). For a fuller musical analysis see Kenneth Peacock, *Songs of the Doukhobors: An Introductory Outline* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, Folklore Series 7), 1970.

communist “invaders.”<sup>2</sup> That Love wore a second hat as a leader of the Eugene, Oregon, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) seemed only to strengthen his hold on the crowd.<sup>3</sup> Continued public pronouncements on the evils that the newcomers might bring to the peaceful valley persisted, and Love doggedly pursued his mission to stop the Russian peasant sect known as the Doukhobors. It was not the first time that the troubled group had faced public repudiation and persecution in its long quest for what a traditional hymn called “Toil and Peaceful Life,”<sup>4</sup> nor was it the first time it had occurred in Oregon. In fact, during their first appearance, ten years earlier, the Klan had not yet found its full strength in Oregon, but the Doukhobors were to be confronted by another powerful social force in the form of the Supreme Court. In the end both the 1913 and 1924 attempts to establish an Oregon colony failed, but in some ways the experiments reflected a history of troubles that had followed the Doukhobors for centuries.

Students of that history will find no paucity of literature on the Doukhobors. Indeed, there have been many accounts of the sect from its early sufferings in czarist Russia to its first arrival in North America in 1899 to the present.<sup>5</sup> But the story of how the outcast Russian émigrés

<sup>2</sup> Eckard V. Toy, “Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene, Oregon,” in *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 177.

<sup>3</sup> Although Love was not referred to as the “Exalted Cyclops,” the title given to a leader of the KKK, he was openly leading the anti-Doukhobor charge in the Willamette Valley region.

<sup>4</sup> “Toil and Peaceful Life” signified the Doukhobor way of life for these “sons of the soil,” and “[w]orking the land was vital to, even synonymous with,” that way. Therefore, the word “toil” meant “toil on the land.” See Carl J. Tracie, “*Toil and Peaceful Life*”: *Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899–1918* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1996), 97–98.

<sup>5</sup> Early works include Tolstoyan scholar and British Quaker Aylmer Maude’s account of the sect published in 1904 and noted Philadelphia Quaker Joseph Elkinton’s history written a year earlier. Both men assisted the Doukhobor migrants and both wrote out of religious or political conviction. See Aylmer Maude, *A Peculiar People: The Doukhobors* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904); Joseph Elkinton, *The Doukhobors: Their History in Russia, Their Migration to Canada* (Philadelphia: Ferris and Leach, 1903). In 1905, Leo Tolstoy’s agent Leopold Sulerzhitsky was assigned to escort the Doukhobors to North America. His diary and the writings of V.D. Bonch-Bruевич (cited above), another escort, have been indispensable guides to future historians. See L.A. Sulerzhitsky, *To America with the Doukhobors* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1982). Magazines and newspapers from the early 1900s onward published often inflammatory accounts of the sect, and these created confusion, misunderstanding, and conflict. Official government reports from the 1912 Royal Commission and continuing through the next many decades, could be well intentioned but ultimately damaging. See William Blakemore, *Report of Royal Commission on Matters Relating to the Sect of Doukhobors in the Province of British Columbia, 1912*, available at <http://content.lib.sfu.ca/cdm/compoundobject/collection/dkb/id/391/rec/1>. Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 245–49, provide an account of Blakemore’s report, noting that he undid any good the report might have done by recommending that the Doukhobors’ exemption from military service be revoked. In 1940, James Wright published *Slava Bobu*, a first-hand

attempted to settle in Oregon seems largely to have escaped the notice of all but a few historians and curious journalists, and even then the wayward Oregon groups receive but cursory treatment. George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic's 1968 book *The Doukhobors*, perhaps the most respected of the British Columbia histories, devotes only a few lines to the Eugene colony and does not mention the earlier Peoria colony at all.<sup>6</sup> Historical geographer Susan Hardwick's *Russian Refuge*, a mapping of the migration of Russian religious groups to the Pacific Northwest, does not include any significant account of either colony.<sup>7</sup> With regard to the Oregon ККК activities in the 1920s, they have been the subject of several papers and a book or two,<sup>8</sup> but there has been no

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account of his time living among the Prairie Doukhobors. It is engaging but possibly too popular in style and at times resorts to fictionalization. See James F.C. Wright, *Slava Bobu: The Story of the Doukhobors* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1940). A 1952 government report from the Doukhobor Research Committee led to the publication of committee chair Professor Harry B. Hawthorn's informative history. See Harry B. Hawthorn, *The Doukhobors of British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia/J.M. Dent and Sons, 1955). More recent scholarship most notably comes from Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*. From within the Doukhobor community itself several scholars, often expressing strong critical opinions, have emerged. See William A. Soukoreff, [V.A. Sukhorev], *Dokumenty po istorii Dukhobortsev i kratkoe izlozhenie ikh veroisповедaniia* [Documents on the history of the Doukhobors and a brief exposition of their creed] (North Kildonan, MB: J. Regehr, 1944) (note the cover title: *Istoriia dukhobortsev* [History of the Doukhobors]); Peter N. Maloff, *Dukhobortsy: Ikh istoriia, zhizn i bor'ba* [The Doukhobors: Their history, life and struggle] (Thrusco, BC: self-published [printed by J. Regehr, North Kildonan, MB], 1948). See typescript draft translation on file in the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the University of British Columbia Library. See also S.F. Reibin, *Trud i mirnaia zhizn': Istoriia dukhobortsev bez maski* [Toil and a peaceful life: History of the Doukhobors unmasked] (San Francisco: Delo, 1952). Add to these Koozma Tarasoff, who is perhaps the best known of these writers today. See Koozma Tarasoff, *Plakun Trava: The Doukhobors* (Grand Forks, BC: Mir Publishing Society, 1982). The work of Russian Marxist scholar Aleksandr Ilich Klivanov also provides critical insight into Doukhobor behaviour. See Aleksandr Ilich Klivanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia, 1860s-1917* (New York: Pergamon, 1982). More recent still are the memoirs, oral histories, websites, fictional accounts, and doctoral dissertations that have emerged to examine every aspect of the sect's history, habits, and philosophy. The Doukhobor Genealogy Website, hosted by Jonathan Kalmakoff, is an invaluable source of information. Postings include the histories of the Popoff and Vereschagin families, who were among the Oregon colonists. Maloff's translated memoirs, in particular Chapter 5 on living in the Willamette Valley as a child, are invaluable (see above). Among the most recently available academic documents is Ashleigh Brienne Androsoff, "Spirit Wrestling: Identity Conflict and the Canadian 'Doukhobor Problem,' 1899-1999" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2011), which provides a thorough history and analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 255.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) contains sections on the history of Doukhobor settlement in the United States but largely excludes the colonies at Peoria and Eugene.

<sup>8</sup> David A. Horowitz, *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), provides a comprehensive look at the inside workings of the ККК klavern No. 14 at La Grande, Oregon, in the 1920s. See also David



Figure 1. Doukhobors attempted to recreate Russian communal life in Canada and eventually in the Willamette Valley. The original caption reads “Doukhobor village gathering, C.N. [Canadian Northern] Railway, July 1915. Yorkton [Saskatchewan].” Source: SFU Library Special Collections MSC121-DP-136-01.

thorough examination of the role played by Eugene’s klavern (or local chapter) No. 3 in attempting to oust the Doukhobors.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the resources on the topic are limited. Still, for those who study migrant groups in North America, the details of how these long-persecuted religious sectarians, sometimes also called “agrarian rebels,”<sup>10</sup> arrived on American soil – and how they abruptly abandoned their new-found colonies – will be of some interest. This topic is especially worthy of advanced exploration in that it promises to further enlighten us with regard to how North American communities responded to the “other” in the form of non-English-speaking sects like the Doukhobors, and, I hope, it will prove instructive in fathoming the collective behaviour of both the sect and the American public.

A. Horowitz, “Social Morality and Personal Revitalization: Oregon’s Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 90 (4) (Winter 1989): 365–84; Horowitz, “The Klansman as Outsider: Ethnocultural Solidarity and Antielitism in the Oregon Ku Klux Klan,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 80 (81) (January 1989): 12–20; William Toll, “Progress and Piety: The Ku Klux Klan and Social Change in Tillamook, Oregon,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 69 (2) (1978): 75–85; Toy, “Robe and Gown”; Eckard V. Toy, Jr., “The Ku Klux Klan in Tillamook, Oregon,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 53 (2) (1962): 60–64.

<sup>9</sup> Dane Bevan, “Portland kkk,” Oregon Historical Society, 2004, available at [http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical\\_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc\\_ID=417F3549-9486-7453-D7A35663D4DC0529](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc_ID=417F3549-9486-7453-D7A35663D4DC0529), provides a succinct history of the rise of the Klan in Oregon.

<sup>10</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 12.

Of course, as with all studies of the Doukhobors, confusion and puzzlement can impede full understanding, and questions abound. In the case of the first attempt at resettlement, why did the leaders choose Oregon? Were they once again escaping persecution? Were they forsaking their “divine” leader in seeking a leader-free community? Why couldn’t they sustain the fledgling Peoria colony? In the case of the second attempt, why did Peter Vasilievich (“Lordly”) Verigin, the man some Doukhobors believed was their divinely ordained leader, choose Oregon? Did he want to deliver his followers to an environment free of government hindrance? Was he feeling threatened and vulnerable as his followers initiated splits, some clearly having lost faith in his leadership? And, at the risk of asking the obvious, why was the local kkk so incensed by the presence of the Russians? This article attempts to unravel some of the many mysteries that have intrigued social scientists studying the history of this peripatetic religious group.

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The Doukhobors trace their origins back to at least the early eighteenth century, when Christian peasants reacted negatively to what they viewed as the Russian Orthodox Church’s opulent excesses and its authoritarianism. Historical geographer Carl Tracie, among others, notes that the sect’s “basic tenets grew out of the spirit of peasant protest characterizing the *Raskol*, the Great Schism” in the church that severely modified traditional forms of worship. Among these modifications, for example, was an irrational edict about the number of fingers to be used to cross oneself. The changes infuriated the group that would come to be called the Doukhobors. The origin of the name can be traced back to 1786 when it was applied derisively to signify that the group was unwilling to accept the changes.<sup>11</sup> They were in effect wrestling with the spirit of Christ. “In a fashion which was to prove characteristic of the Doukhobors,” Tracie suggests, “they accepted the name but reversed its meaning: they indeed wrestled, but *in* and *for*, rather than against, the Spirit of Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Russian ethnographer Svetlana Inikova specified the year 1786 in a speech reproduced in A. Donskov, J. Woodsworth, and C. Gaffield, eds., *The Doukhobor Centenary in Canada: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective on their Unity and Diversity* (Ottawa: Slavic Research Group and Institute of Canadian Studies at the University of Ottawa, 2000). See also <http://www.doukhobor.org/Spiritual-Origins.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 1.



Figure 2. The “Agrarian Rebels:” Doukhobor families riding in a horse-drawn sleigh, Russia or Saskatchewan, undated. *Source:* SFU Library Special Collections MSC121-DP-170-01.

If their religious beliefs offended the Russian Orthodox Church, the pacifism of these “Spirit Wrestlers” incensed the czarist government of Nicholas II and his predecessors.<sup>13</sup> Historian Nicholas Breyfogle notes that Doukhobors “categorically refused military service” and that “those Dukhobors already in the army ceased fulfilling these obligations, refused to follow orders, and returned their weapons to their officers.”<sup>14</sup> Breyfogle specifies that their defiance of authority earned them “beatings, arrests, gang rapes, and sentences of imprisonment and exile.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, the growing concern over the anti-czarist Bolsheviks might have led to further persecution of the Doukhobors had it not been for Leo Tolstoy, the world-famous author of *War and Peace*, who came to the aid of these persecuted “spiritual Christians” in

<sup>13</sup> Maria Kolesnikova, “Spirit Wrestlers of Southern Russia,” available at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Kolesnikova.htm>, explains that the name “Doukhobors” was “bestowed on the sect – which had previously been known as Ikonobory (‘icon fighters’) – by a Russian Orthodox Church priest (originally, the epithet was Doukhobortsy – ‘wrestlers against the Holy Spirit’ – and intended as an insult, but members of the sect changed it to mean wrestling *with* and *for* the Holy Spirit).”

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia’s Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 217.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

1898-99,<sup>16</sup> with help from the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin,<sup>17</sup> and from the Quakers in Britain and the United States who would finally take up the sect's cause and help rescue it from Mother Russia.<sup>18</sup>

Praising their communal lifestyle, their pacifism, and their other habits, Tolstoy donated royalties from his book *Resurrection* to fund their migration to Canada.<sup>19</sup> Despite this moral and financial support, however, Verigin, considered a spiritual guide by his followers but referred to by some of his most ardent devotees as the "Czar in heaven"<sup>20</sup> and "the reincarnation of Christ,"<sup>21</sup> was unable to rejoin the group until four years later. The Russian government, with urging from the leaders of a rival faction that was challenging the Doukhobor leadership,<sup>22</sup> exiled him to the Russian north, first to Archangel Province and subsequently to frigid Siberia. They kept him there until 1902, when he was released to join the Canadian colony then numbering about seventy-five hundred Doukhobors,<sup>23</sup> almost a third of Russia's Doukhobor population at that time.<sup>24</sup>

While Tolstoy and others believed that Verigin would guide the sect along the right path, Marxist scholar Alexandr Klibanov does not share this view; instead, he argues that Verigin was leading the Doukhobors astray. He suggests that historically the sect's own leaders took over the czarist state's job and "committed every kind of repression on ordinary believers,"<sup>25</sup> instilling the notion of a Doukhobor dynasty that Verigin

<sup>16</sup> Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 45.

<sup>17</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 9 and 131, note that it was Kropotkin who travelled across the Canadian Prairies in 1897 and deemed the then North-West Territories suitable for Doukhobor habitation.

<sup>18</sup> Maude, *Peculiar People*, 69, describes the generosity of the Philadelphia Quakers towards the peasant sect.

<sup>19</sup> Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 293.

<sup>20</sup> Hawthorn, *Doukhobors*, 170, Hugh Herbison, Chapter VI - "Religion," 161-89.

<sup>21</sup> Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers*, 222.

<sup>22</sup> Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 126. In 1887, following the death of long-time Doukhobor leader Luker'ia Vasil'evna Kalmykova in December 1886, young Peter Verigin was set to assume the Doukhobor leadership and rule over the community's substantial property and money. Unfortunately for him, the Russian government prevented him from doing so. At the same time, Verigin's rise to the pinnacle of the Doukhobor dynasty was being challenged by Kalmykova's brother, whose followers had created a rival faction to fight for control of the Doukhobor fortunes. With the split into two Doukhobor camps – the so-called Large Party led by Verigin and the Small Party led by the rival faction – there began a long history of factionalism within the Doukhobor community, one that would eventually influence the founding of the Oregon colonies.

<sup>23</sup> Maude, *Peculiar People*, 211, cites the more exact number: 7,363. Maude's figure seems credible since he was instrumental in arranging passage for the migrants and spent much time with them as they settled in Saskatchewan. However, Hawthorn, *Doukhobors*, 7, puts the total at 7,427 with additional groups following later.

<sup>24</sup> Among others, Elkinton, *Doukhobors*, 147-49, offers a brief history of Verigin's banishment, along with other Doukhobors, to Archangel and eventually to Siberia.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

eventually headed.<sup>26</sup> Klibanov argues that the dynasty derived from the days when the wealthy Doukhobors had adopted “the most ordinary principles of capitalist domination,” adding that the property owners had gained their wealth through “the exploitation of hired and other economically dependent labor.”<sup>27</sup> For Klibanov, the Doukhobor leaders seemed no better than the czarist aristocracy. They ran the villages in patriarchal fashion and “under conditions of arbitrary rule which did not stop at the law of the fist.”<sup>28</sup> One observer portrayed Vasily Verigin, Lordly’s father, as a cruel despot “He never went anywhere away from home without a whip,” the observer remarked. “As soon as anyone said something he didn’t like, he got the whip across the forehead.”<sup>29</sup>

Although he had not adopted the cruel measures of his predecessors or his ruthless father, Peter had shaped the Russian Doukhobors in ways that would keep them beholden to him. Using what one critical writer calls “a blanket of secrecy and perjury,”<sup>30</sup> he reinforced and/or invented some of the strict tenets of their deeply held belief system, encouraging his followers to believe that he could work miracles.<sup>31</sup> Alas, they were not the kind of miracles that many of either the Doukhobor colonists on the Canadian Prairies or the first Doukhobors in Oregon would find useful. His leadership had been found wanting by some in the group, and some would come to question his authority, just as they had questioned the authority of others.

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Although the Doukhobors did not meet with physical violence as they had in their homeland, it was not long after their arrival in Canada that there was controversy over the communal villages they established on farmland around Yorkton, Saskatchewan<sup>32</sup> (Figures 1, 2, 3). Under the

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 117, referring to Peter Maloff’s history cited above.

<sup>27</sup> Klibanov, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., quoting V.N. Pozdniakov, “Pravda o dukhoborakh, [part 1]: Zhizn’ dukhoborov v Zakavkaz’i i v Sibiri” [The truth about the Doukhobors, (part 1): Their life in the Transcaucasus and Siberia], *Ezhemiesiachnyi zhurnal literatury, nauki i obshchestvennoi zhizni* [Monthly journal of literature, science and public life] (Petrograd) nos. 6 and 7 (1914): 103-9, 89-101; Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, quoting V.N. Pozdniakov, “Pravda o dukhoborakh, [part 2] Zhizn’ dukhoborov v Kanadie” [The truth about the Doukhobors, (part 2): Their life in Canada], nos. 8, 9, and 10 (1914): 145-54, 71-82, 108.

<sup>30</sup> Wright, *Slava Bohu*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 80.

<sup>32</sup> Eli Popoff, *Tanya* (Grand Forks, BC: Mir Publication Society, 1975), describes the hardships endured throughout Doukhobor history, including the initial period of settlement on the





Figure 3. “Doukhobors [sic] plowing.” Doukhobor women pulling a plough in the Yorkton area of Saskatchewan, c. 1902. Men and women provided motive power because horses were at first scarce and expensive. Postcard published by J.A. Stewart of Rosthern, Saskatchewan. *Source*: SFU Library Special Collections MSC121-DP-144-01.

Canadian Dominion Lands Act, a modified version of the American Homestead Act, the sect was provided with about a million acres (approximately 400,000 hectares) of homestead land.<sup>33</sup> As part of the efforts of Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton and the federal government to tame the western territories (partly out of fear that Americans might flow across the largely unguarded international boundary and claim the land),<sup>34</sup> the homesteads were free to settlers who promised to improve the land. However, there was a catch that threatened to undo this arrangement. The government insisted that the Doukhobors, like other homesteaders, individually register their land. Most refused to do so, finding that the “idea of each Doukhobor owning a plot of land individually was antagonistic to their belief in communal ownership of property.”<sup>35</sup>

The issue was more or less resolved when the sect conceded to a compromise proposed by Sifton in what is known as the “hamlet clause,” whereby Doukhobors were permitted to reside in villages or hamlets

Canadian Prairies.

<sup>33</sup> Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), among others, explains this fear.

<sup>35</sup> Tracie, *Toil and Peaceful Life*, 98.

and did not have to meet the individual occupancy requirements of the Homestead Act.<sup>36</sup> The hamlet clause might have worked, except that Dominion land agents, under a new minister of the interior, Frank Oliver, cancelled Doukhobor homestead grants and thus “stamped out communal competition in favour of free enterprise.”<sup>37</sup> This was viewed as a betrayal by many sect members, who, under Verigin, began to search for new land farther west. In 1908, nearly six thousand Doukhobors moved to British Columbia to farm, this time on privately purchased land.<sup>38</sup> The land question, as well as the government’s insistence that Doukhobors swear an oath of allegiance (something that was also anathema to them), led to splits in the Doukhobor community. Some stayed in Saskatchewan as individual farmers or “Independents,” others went to Alberta, and, in a few years, the first migration of Doukhobors to Oregon took place.

The majority of “Community Doukhobors” under Verigin’s leadership, unlike Independents, shared a belief in communal ownership and refused to swear oaths. These strongly held beliefs caused increasing controversy as the Doukhobors moved farther west. As historians Woodcock and Avakumovic note, “those in Western Canada particularly resented the Doukhobors, who insisted on keeping their own distinct culture,” and some locals “began to label the newcomers ‘Douks,’ while calling themselves ‘white men.’”<sup>39</sup> The racist backlash coupled with what the Doukhobors viewed as government betrayal exacerbated an already volatile situation. That they were an industrious, largely self-sufficient collective enterprise also wrought problems as they resettled along the Columbia River in the Kootenay-Boundary region of British Columbia around Castlegar and Grand Forks.

Like the Willamette Valley, the Kootenay-Boundary region contained productive growing lands for the market gardens of the vegetarian sect members. This was also an excellent choice for starting Verigin-inspired cooperative ventures like the jam factory at Brilliant, British Columbia, which ran under the corporate name of the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood (CCUB). Nearby Grand Forks also seemed an excellent locale for a farm settlement, and land was purchased there as

<sup>36</sup> For more on the hamlet clause, see Marilyn Lewry, “Rural Settlement Patterns,” in *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, available at [http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/rural\\_settlement\\_patterns.html](http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/rural_settlement_patterns.html).

<sup>37</sup> Koozma J. Tarasoff, “Doukhobor Settlement,” *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*, [http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/doukhobor\\_settlement.html](http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/doukhobor_settlement.html).

<sup>38</sup> See Union of Christian Communities of Christ website, <http://www.usccdoukhobors.org/about.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 244.

well. But neither the local citizenry nor the business community was happy with the newcomers. Those “Canadians devoted to free enterprise” were unrelentingly hostile towards the Doukhobors, possibly because they viewed their collective approach to business (e.g., the lucrative jam factory) as a threat.<sup>40</sup>

When the mostly Anglo-Saxon population saw that Doukhobor religious and life practices were going to conflict with their own, they rejected them. Compared to the established ways of the mostly British and Western European communities in the region, the Doukhobors’ dress and habits were different – and different was unacceptable. Canadians with nativist sentiments deeply resented the influx of non-British immigrants. The Canadian government’s recognition of Doukhobor pacifism and its willingness to allow them to avoid military service during the First World War further incited racist comments among local nativists. Local businessmen wanted the Doukhobors expelled from the region and found that returning soldiers would serve their interests well. For example, “a meeting of returned soldiers in Nelson [BC] demanded that all Doukhobors be deported to Russia and their lands given to veterans.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, when, in the winter of 1913, a group of Independent Doukhobors from Saskatchewan and British Columbia bought a thousand acres (400 hectares) of farmland around Peoria, Oregon, near the larger centre of Eugene in the south-central part of the Beaver State,<sup>42</sup> race-based controversy seemed bound to follow them (Figure 4).

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As we shall see, in 1924 local hatred would be ably whipped up by George Love and his fellow Klansmen/Legionnaires; however, in 1913, the Doukhobors who arrived in Oregon were beset with a legal technicality concerning their newly purchased land. It should have come as no surprise to citizens of the Peoria area (who had read newspaper reports about what was happening in Canada) that Independent Doukhobor families who transplanted themselves to Oregon to begin farming in the pastoral Willamette Valley might be reluctant to mix with the surrounding community and, instead, much prefer to keep to themselves. Such avoidance was a long-time characteristic of sect

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>42</sup> The beaver is the official symbol of Oregon, commemorating the early trappers and pioneers who sought beaver pelts as they travelled the Oregon Trail in search of a new life.

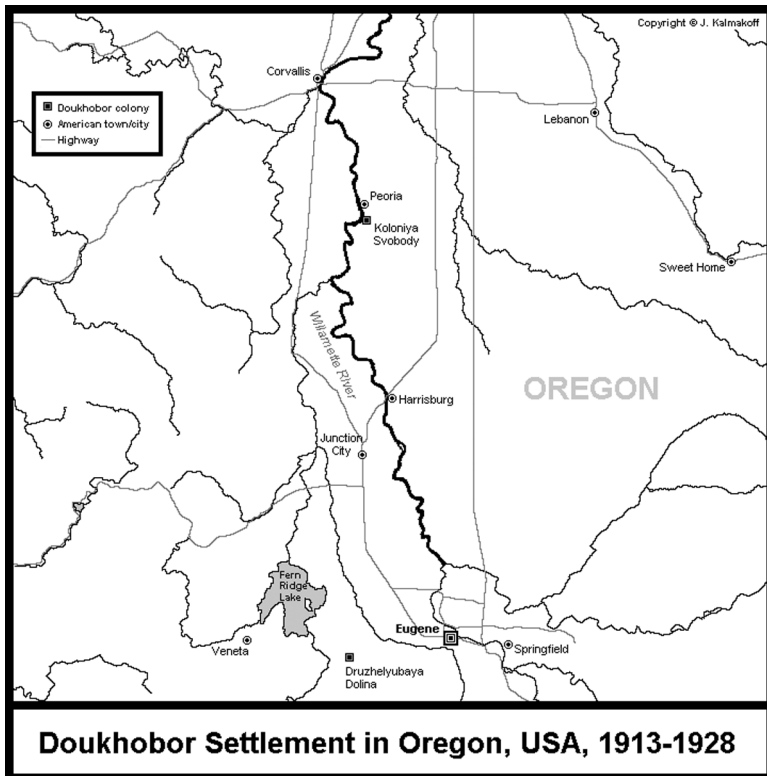


Figure 4. A portion of the Willamette Valley, Oregon, showing the attempted Doukhobor colonies of 1913 and 1924. *Source:* Courtesy of Jonathan Kalmakoff, [www.doukhobor.org](http://www.doukhobor.org).

members, but some non-Doukhobors mistakenly interpreted it as a sign of dishonesty.<sup>43</sup> Some even regarded the Doukhobors as “immoral, clannish, unreliable, hypocritical and antagonistic.”<sup>44</sup> Nor should it have shocked local agricultural interests when sect members proved to be hard workers and very good farmers. After all, they had been tilling the land for centuries and had, by the time of the first Oregon settlement, built sawmills, reservoirs, and irrigation systems, and had planted literally thousands of fruit trees, on their BC land.<sup>45</sup> However, despite the industrious nature of the Doukhobors, many Oregonians would

<sup>43</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 13, note that this behaviour stemmed from “a heritage of the deviousness that life under the tsars made a necessary self-protective device.”

<sup>44</sup> Hawthorn, *Doukhobors*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

eventually view their “Christian communism,”<sup>46</sup> and their history of “bizarre behaviour,”<sup>47</sup> as at best strange and at worst terrifying. Still, as one Oregon migrant recalled, at first some local farm families welcomed the Doukhobors, and things seemed to go smoothly.

Peter Nikolaevich Maloff, a “Doukhobor historian”<sup>48</sup> and “a respected Doukhobor philosopher,”<sup>49</sup> fondly remembers his family moving to relatively warm Peoria from frigid Saskatchewan. “In Oregon nature itself uplifts and strengthens towards a better life,” he writes of the area where his family would settle for the next five years. “The whole atmosphere seems tireless, fresh and always alive. The trees are enormous, the air invigorating, and the rustle of the leaves of oak, maple, and ash, as well as the other varieties of southern trees gave intimations of inexplicable mystery.”<sup>50</sup> Compared to Saskatchewan, he comments, “this was a heaven on earth.”<sup>51</sup> But Maloff also intimated that there was an overarching frustration motivating the colonists’ relocation.

The author of a well-respected and not uncritical history of the Doukhobors, Maloff describes some of the “initiators of our migration to Oregon” as “prominent public men” and Anton Savelievich Popoff as a “main initiator.”<sup>52</sup> In his family memoir, Popoff’s son John A. Popoff recalls his father being part of the original land search expedition that visited the Peoria area. He writes that his father as well as Michael F. Reibin and the Davidoffs (who were the family of one of Popoff Senior’s sisters) were part of the original settlement.<sup>53</sup> Vasili Vasilievich Vereschagin, his brother Alexey, Gregoria Fedorovich Vanin, Vasily S. Lapshinoff, and Nikolai Petrovich Maloff, Maloff’s father, were also part of the leadership group that Maloff contends “had come to the conclusion that the community founded by Peter Vasilievich Verigin was not completely satisfactory in that it curtailed individual freedom and resorted to boycotting.”<sup>54</sup> Maloff calls the Independent Doukhobors in Oregon “secessionists” from Verigin’s Community Doukhobors who, “with reckless confidence[,] sought a new abode as far as possible from

<sup>46</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked: Doukhobors, Public Policy and Conflict Resolution* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 9.

<sup>48</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 63.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 108 (English translation), 337 (original Russian).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 109 (English translation), 337 (original Russian).

<sup>53</sup> John A. Popoff, “History of the Anton S. and John A. Popoff Family,” available at [http://www.doukhobor.org/Popoff\\_Anton.htm](http://www.doukhobor.org/Popoff_Anton.htm), 12.

<sup>54</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 109 (English translation), 337 (original Russian).

the Doukhorbor leaders.”<sup>55</sup> In keeping with their view that Verigin’s leadership had become corrupt, the dissident Oregon leaders named their new community *Koloniya Svoboda*, or the “Colony of Freedom,” believing it to be “the first center of free Doukhorbor life, where ‘each had the full right to tell the truth and fear no one.’”<sup>56</sup>

The Peoria families were poor, recalls Ann J. Vereschagin, whose husband’s family was among the migrants. They had moved to California from Saskatchewan in 1907 to establish a short-lived colony near Shafter before joining the Peoria colony. They appreciated that colony families “helped each other to build living quarters, barns, tool sheds, and whatever was necessary for protection from the cold and rain in Oregon,”<sup>57</sup> Vereschagin explains in a family history. “They shared their produce and livestock as one big family.” The Vereschagins had welcomed the family of Vasil Semenovitch Dobrinin, members of another Russian peasant sect called the Molokans (see below), who came from California to live with them in their three-room home until they could acquire property of their own. “Imagine two families living in a three-room house, with no running water and no sanitary provisions in the house,” Vereschagin writes: “The eight children had to sleep on the floor.”<sup>58</sup> The colony itself was likely laid out in the *Strassendorf* (street village) pattern used in Saskatchewan and Russia.<sup>59</sup> It would have comprised two rows of single-family log dwellings facing each other across a wide central street. As many as twenty-three dwellings may have been constructed, one for each family. Behind each house would have been a large garden plot for use by the family as well as numerous outbuildings, including barns, stables, granaries, bathhouses, blacksmith’s shops, and outdoor clay ovens. It was organized along broad cooperative lines, although property was still held individually.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 338 (original Russian).

<sup>56</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 112 (English translation), 341 (original Russian). The quotation designated by single quotation marks is not attributed. Presumably it was from one or more of the leaders.

<sup>57</sup> Ann J. Vereschagin, “Peoria, Oregon,” in *Spanning the Years* [a family history], (No city: n.p., 1999). Excerpts available at Doukhorbor Genealogy website, <http://www.doukhorbor.org/Vereschagin-Spanning.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 111 (English translation), 337 and 340 (original Russian). Among the names mentioned are “Pavel Egorovich Popoff, Peter Zarikoff, the Chutskoffs, Alesha Popoff and his son Ivan (the ‘Lame’), two households of Davidoffs, Vasilii S. Popoff, the Drozdoffs, whose father was quite a comedian, Vasilii Ivanovich Bloodoff and others; however, they somehow took very little interest in community affairs.” English translation provided by Doukhorbor scholar Jack McIntosh at the University of British Columbia.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan J. Kalmakoff, correspondence to the author, 17 March 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Kalmakoff correspondence.

Despite their poverty, Maloff recalls that the colony “captured the sympathy of the surrounding people by [its] industriousness and [its] rapid adaptation to the new circumstances,”<sup>61</sup> and life went on quietly and peaceably for about four years. He describes going to school and passing into Grade 10. The Vereschagin children also recall attending “a typical rural school with one teacher teaching all eight grades; most of the students were Russian.” They had to walk two miles (3.22 kilometres) to school over bad roads that flooded in winter; and, when that happened, in order to avoid getting soaking wet feet, they walked on the fence rails that lined the roads.<sup>62</sup>

That the children attended school at all was an indication that the Oregon Doukhobors, as Independents, had renounced some of the ways of Verigin's Community Doukhobors in Canada. The battle over school attendance in British Columbia had gone on since at least 1911, and much of the time children did not go to school. To some Community Doukhobors schooling meant a violation of one of the major tenets of their religion, possibly the most important one: their pacifism. War was immoral, went their reasoning, and school prepares children for military service. They further argued that school did not provide practical lessons that would create good workers who would follow the Doukhobor way of hard work and obedience. The school attendance question would again rear its head around the time of the second attempt at an Oregon colony, now on the part of Community Doukhobors, and might have precipitated the move. Meanwhile, the early Independent group was about to be confronted with more immediate problems for, in the winter of 1916-17, the arrangement to purchase the land started to sour.

The Oregon group had formed a legal corporation called the Society of Independent Doukhobors, a name later used by the much larger association of Independent Doukhobor farmers who officially formed the organization on the Canadian Prairies in 1916. The purpose was to preserve the sect's military exemption as, in open defiance of Verigin,<sup>63</sup> Canada looked for conscripts during the First World War.<sup>64</sup> The Oregon families apparently used that quasi-legal entity in purchasing farmland

<sup>61</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 112 (English translation).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Many historians agree with this view, including Koozma Tarasoff in his essay entitled “Doukhobors” in Paul Robert Magocsi, *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 425. Tarasoff notes that “a theocracy brought to Canada by the Verigin family ... resulted in splits between those who supported the Verigin's divine leadership (the community Doukhobors) and those who opposed it (the independent Doukhobors).”

<sup>64</sup> See Kalmakoff, <http://www.doukhobor.org/census.html>.

from B.J. “Barnie” Hecker and his wife Ada. The Oregon transplants were also undoubtedly aware of the actions of other Independent Doukhobors. For example, one group of BC Independents had sent a petition to the BC lieutenant-governor in July 1913 stating that Verigin ruled “with a rod of iron,” had kept all “the lands and capitals” in his name, and was “against education, against enlightening of the rising generation.”<sup>65</sup> It was a fierce indictment of the divine leader’s rule and one with which Oregon Doukhobor leaders would have agreed. Doukhobor distrust of authority, whether it was the Russian Orthodox Church, governments, or sect leadership, had a long history. Sect members in Canada remembered “the violent persecutions they underwent under the tsars,” and “this memory – reinforced by their many unfortunate encounters with officials and neighbours in Canada – ha[d] tended to freeze their attitude towards those in authority, or even towards non-Doukhobors of any kind, in the pattern of distrust and deception.”<sup>66</sup> The memory influenced all Doukhobor dealings with outsiders and would do so in Oregon after the land purchase agreement was signed on 8 May 1913 and families had begun to farm.<sup>67</sup>

As Maloff recalls above, life proceeded normally and quite tranquilly for the first three or four years; but, in late 1916, Hecker took advantage of the fact that the agreement contained a loophole that might allow him to renege on the sale. As Maloff explains “There were forty owners for a thousand acres. [But] the documents were drawn up inadequately: if any one of the settlers failed to pay his share, all the rest must lose their land too.”<sup>68</sup> The Oregon Doukhobors, as Independents, had rejected the theory of communal ownership prevalent among Verigin’s Community Doukhobors. However, in embracing private ownership, they still clung to the cooperative principles held by their ancestors in Russia regarding mutual assistance in time of need. Thus, in accepting the land-sale document, they were perhaps adhering to this earlier tradition of cooperativism. Now they would find themselves facing American authorities regarding land ownership rights.

When differences between the Society and Hecker could not be resolved, a trial took place in late January 1917 at the Supreme Court level to determine the rightful owners of the land, and, according to Maloff,

<sup>65</sup> “Petition of Independent Doukhobors,” to British Columbia lieutenant-governor, from Alex Sherstobetoff and John Koleenoff, Thrums, BC, 26 July 1913, available at <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/archives/privateletter/1618en.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> *Society of Independent Doukhobors v. Hecker*, Supreme Court of Oregon, 30 January 1917, from transcript of the court proceedings published in *Pacific Reporter*, 1917, n.p.

<sup>68</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 114 (English translation).



it created “quite a commotion.” He recalls that “neighboring farmers and others, hearing of it, came to help us in our misfortune.” One of the locals, a “Mrs. Osborne [*sic*],” was a journalist who had worked on the staff of the Portland *Oregonian*.<sup>69</sup> She had a long-standing concern for the plight of the sect and was admired and respected by the Oregon Doukhobors, who, according to Maloff, called her “our sister.” She often welcomed members of the colony to her “luxurious cafe” in Eugene, Maloff adds, and, when the trial took place in nearby Albany, she “took an active role in defense of the colonists against the claims of the landlords,” procuring a lawyer and a Russian interpreter from Portland.<sup>70</sup>

Maloff’s translator spelled her name incorrectly, but Rose Glason Osburn took an uncommonly keen interest in the sect from her first meeting with it in 1899 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she helped the Philadelphia Quakers provide assistance to the new settlers. At that time she was a member of the Theosophical Society of America, which had been started by another Russian émigré, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who has been called “the mother of modern spirituality.”<sup>71</sup> Though not a Doukhobor, Madame Blavatsky preached universal brotherhood, and the sect seemed to offer Osburn a living example of how this might look. As she wrote in the Toronto Theosophical Society journal, *The Lamp*:

These people have suffered for the cause that H.P.B. [Madame Blavatsky’s initials and how she preferred to be addressed by friends] has taught us to uphold and to spread. They are our elder brothers in the movement, and if we are under the impression that the theosophic movement died in the last century we are mistaken, for these people are the living witnesses of its perpetuity.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Rose Glason Osburn (1859–1937), “a pioneer Oregon newspaperwoman,” began her journalistic career at the *Oregonian* in 1900 where she met her future husband W.F. “Frank” Osburn. They were both type compositors and members of the local executive of the International Typographical Union where Rose Osburn served as secretary of the Portland local. She went on to the assistant editorship of the *Salem Capital Journal* before the couple moved to Eugene, eventually to build the impressive Osburn Hotel, which opened in May 1910, about three years before the Doukhobors arrived in Peoria. See “Mrs. Rose Osburn Dies Here Sunday,” *Eugene Register Guard*, 20 September 1937.

<sup>70</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 114–15 (English translation), 343–44 (original Russian). Note that spellings may not match the original Russian version.

<sup>71</sup> Blavatsky, a mystic of aristocratic birth, came to New York City in 1873 and founded her Theosophical Society in 1875. See Gary Lachman, *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> “The Doukhobors,” *The Lamp: A Theosophical Monthly*, 3 (33) (15 October 1899): 126–27.

She and her husband Frank Osburn owned the Osburn Hotel, mentioned by Maloff, and within it was the “luxurious cafe” known as the Oriental Room. But her enthusiasm for the group was not shared by others in the area, especially not by the Heckers.

The court case lasted several days, and the first decision went in favour of the nascent colony. According to the trial transcript, the Court found against the Heckers and ordered them to make reparations to the Society of Independent Doukhobors.<sup>73</sup> However, the Heckers appealed the decision, and this time they won. The Court found that the Doukhobor Society’s claim that there had been an attempt to bribe it did not hold up. While it was true that Hecker had offered to pay one of the Doukhobor leaders, M.F. Reibin, a one-hundred-dollar commission to induce the Society to purchase the land, no money had exchanged hands. Therefore, it was not supportable by law. The Court then declared that “All things considered, the corporation [i.e., the Society] may have made an improvident bargain which it has attempted to lay upon the shoulders of the other plaintiffs, but this does not present a situation which the court can relieve. Courts cannot make contracts.”<sup>74</sup>

“We were to vacate the land,” recalls Maloff, but before returning to Canada his father went to Colorado in the hope of finding new land on which to establish a colony. Interestingly, in 1914, as both the Canadian and BC governments persisted in trying to assimilate the sect, Verigin also began enquiring about a possible land purchase in Colorado for his Community Doukhobors.<sup>75</sup> This may have been intended as a threat as moving the community to the United States would have deprived Canada of a large contingent of able-bodied workers, but Verigin may also have been trying to send a message to the Independents who had left the Doukhobor community. In any event, he quickly abandoned the Colorado idea, and it appears that even the tenacious Maloff Sr. gave up on such a move when he failed to find an acceptable parcel of land. Soon afterwards, the first of the two Oregon Doukhobor colonies began to disband.<sup>76</sup>

When the Court found against them, wrote John A. Popoff, it “utterly demoralized the colony and members began to abandon it.” After the colony dissolved, Popoff’s father moved his family members first to Alberta, where they joined a colony of Doukhobors near Lundbreck, and then on to Yorkton, Saskatchewan, the city around which many

<sup>73</sup> *Doukhobors v. Hecker*.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 248.

<sup>76</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 115 (English translation), 344 (original Russian).

Doukhobors had originally settled: "Father's devotion to his convictions never abandoned him," wrote Popoff, "and, when the colony in Oregon was on the verge of collapse, he decided to at least approach the Doukhobor Community which he had earlier abandoned."<sup>77</sup> Over the next few years, some of the migrants returned to Canada to resume their farming activities as Independents, following the Doukhobor credo of "toil and peaceful life." Others went to other parts of the United States. The Maloffs and Vereschagins, for example, moved to California. As it happened, the Vereschagins permanently settled in Orland, California, where, for the next sixty years, they worked as "a cooperative family unit[,] becoming outstanding builders and innovators in the fruit growing and retail-wholesale industry."<sup>78</sup> Other families, including the Davidoffs and Anton Popoff's elderly father, remained temporarily in the disbanded colony.<sup>79</sup>

When most of the Oregon colonists returned to Canada they did so as Independents. At least one family, the Popoffs, temporarily rejoined the Verigin-led community before once again becoming Independents. It is not clear that any of the Peoria Doukhobors belonged to the violence-prone Freedomite group; however, Maloff recalls that the Peoria colony had been visited frequently and for weeks at a time by Sons of Freedom member Ivan Efimovich Vlasoff, who would "preach complete freedom of man on earth."<sup>80</sup> As far as Maloff was concerned he had nothing in common with Vlasoff; however, at some point he may have become an active member of the subject.<sup>81</sup> Maloff states in his memoirs that he was not enamoured of the Verigin leadership, and this view is shared by another Verigin critic, S.F. Reibin, who was Verigin's interpreter and secretary from 1902 to 1922. In his book on the Doukhobors, for example, his main objective "appears to be to expose the dictatorial traits in the character of P.V. Verigin."<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Popoff, "History of the Anton S. and John A. Popoff Family," 12.

<sup>78</sup> Jon Kalmakoff, Introduction to Ann J. Vereschagin, *Spanning the Years* [a family history] (No city: n.p., 1999), available at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Vereschagin-Spanning.htm>.

<sup>79</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 113 (English translation).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Cran, *Negotiating Buck Naked*, 61, notes that, although his wife denied that he had been a Freedomite in the 1920s and 1930s when she testified at the Expanded Kootenay Committee on Intergroup Relation (ЕКCІR) hearings in the early 1980s, there was a substantial body of evidence presented to those hearings to suggest otherwise.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander W. Wainman, in a review of S.F. Reibin's *Trud i mirnaia zhizn'* book (cited in note 6), published in the *BC Historical Quarterly*, January-April 1953, 155-56. Interestingly, Wainman, a UBC professor, noted that Reibin believed the Doukhobors would have been better off to have settled in Oregon. S.F. was a brother of M.F. Reibin, one of Maloff's Oregon "instigators." Both eventually lived together in Manteca County in the 1920s. S.F. Reibin was living in California when his book was published in 1952.

While the desire for a warmer climate and greater economic opportunities was part of the attraction of Oregon, undoubtedly it was also the Peoria group's disagreements with the Doukhobor leadership, especially Verigin, that led to the move southward. Before the move to Canada, Verigin had revealed a dictatorial nature along with an aristocratic manner inherited from long traditional practice. Still, a majority of his followers willingly accepted his leadership as divinely given. Once in Canada, as we have seen, some Doukhobors rejected authority of any kind, including that of Verigin. In fact, by the time he led his faithful to British Columbia, there had already been several defections from his leadership, mostly in the Yorkton and Prince Albert area of Saskatchewan. The Independents retained their religious beliefs intact, especially their strong pacifism, "possibly the most durable of all Doukhobor beliefs," but rejected "the divinity of leaders, and they abandoned the communal way of living."<sup>83</sup> As suggested earlier, some of these Independents were behind the setting up of the Peoria colony, and they, too, maintained their pacifism during the First World War, with at least four colonists refusing to serve in the military.<sup>84</sup> But while such strong tenets held up, the Independents had moved away from Verigin's leadership in frustration, and he was "acutely aware of the danger." In fact, he was so aware of it that he took draconian steps to punish the unfaithful. To make them pay for their disobedience to him he went to the extreme of asking the Canadian government to lift their military exemption, thus making them eligible for war duty.<sup>85</sup> Might that vindictive gesture have added to the resolve of the Oregon colonists to make a success of their colony?

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Clearly, some of the migrants had found it difficult to coexist with the hostile society in south-central British Columbia, and they were keen to escape. But had anyone read accounts of the Doukhobor diaspora as

<sup>83</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 240.

<sup>84</sup> Kalmakoff names four of those who resisted the draft in 1917-18: Fred Antifaeff (b. 1889), Paul Drazdoff (b. 1896), Alex Kazakoff (b. 1893), and William Vereschagin (b. 1894). See <http://www.doukhobor.org/1917-1918-US-Draft.pdf>. Antifaeff and Vereschagin listed their residence as Eugene. For Doukhobor views on the Second World War, see Koozma J. Tarasoff, "Doukhobors in World War II," a paper presented at the "Conference on War and the Conscientious Objector: Historical Perspectives," Winnipeg, Manitoba, October 2006.

<sup>85</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 240. See also Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 241. Hence the creation of the Society of Independent Doukhobors in Saskatchewan in 1916.

those few families arrived on Oregon soil in 1913, especially those written in the early years of the twentieth century by Quakers Aylmer Maude and Joseph Elkinton, they might have concluded that Doukhobor beliefs, habits, and behaviour were totally incompatible with those of the Willamette Valley. Their standoffishness alone would have raised eyebrows and created suspicions that they were anti-American, but there were other factors as well that would contribute to the undoing of what could be seen as a highly utopian experiment.<sup>86</sup> Religion may have topped the list, but it was followed closely by the possibility that, as Russians, the Doukhobors could be communists.<sup>87</sup>

Given the Protestant majority of the time, Oregonians would have found the Doukhobors' modified Christian belief system particularly odd and at loggerheads with their own. Shrouded in mysticism, according to a highly respected 1952 study by Quaker scholar Hugh Herbison, the sect's religion relies heavily on "a belief in the unseen, mysterious forces, and possesses little thought-content."<sup>88</sup> In essence, he concludes that "they believe in the capacity of every man to know the spirit of God within him[self],"<sup>89</sup> and he notes that these beliefs have given some Doukhobors "release from bondage to [the] ordinary laws and customs of men."<sup>90</sup> They also made Doukhobors "ill at ease in the midst of a civilization based on materialism." In the past, Herbison finds, Doukhobors had denied themselves "citizenship in this world so [that] they ... [could] be free to adhere to the invisible, magical world."<sup>91</sup> Traditionally, they "disclaimed any hierarchy or contemporary leadership, repudiated all written codes, and scorned all outward symbols, sacraments and ceremonies." Instead, they submitted "to the directives of revelation, prophecy, religious leaders, and tradition."<sup>92</sup> Doukhobors, Herbison adds,

have blamed many of their ills on a three-headed ogre called government, church, and school system, and yet have consistently refused to apply their religious acumen to the human needs which are the

<sup>86</sup> The Doukhobor colonists were hardly the first group to seek utopia in the forests and valleys of Oregon. In 1883, a group of Russian Jews bought land in the Umqua Valley and founded the utopian farming community of New Odessa. See Joshua Binus, "New Odessa Colony," 2006, available at [http://ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical\\_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc\\_ID=07F38A5E-B06B-B65B-0320EC03EBE61D30](http://ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc_ID=07F38A5E-B06B-B65B-0320EC03EBE61D30).

<sup>87</sup> F. Saladin, *The Babylonian Code*, vol. 1: *The Unholy Scriptures* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2011), 188, calls the Doukhobors "Russian Gnostic communists."

<sup>88</sup> Herbison, "Religion" in Hawthorn, 161.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

concern of these institutions. By claiming they are not necessary, they put themselves in the position of self-righteous isolation, with martyrdom as the only approved technique of adjustment to a hostile environment.

In short, Herbison argues, Doukhoborism shows a “lack of adaptability and failure to come to grips with the real world.”<sup>93</sup>

V.D. Bonch-Bruevich, an earlier scholar sent by Tolstoy to live with the Doukhobors in Canada from 1899 to 1901, seems to agree with Herbison’s findings, stressing that sect members view “ritual as something absolutely essential, without which one cannot live, and for which one may sacrifice everything, including one’s life.” A Marxist who accompanied one of the four Doukhobor groups migrating to Canada,<sup>94</sup> Bonch-Bruevich further concurs with Herbison’s assessment of the failure to adapt, arguing that ritual is “an impenetrable Chinese wall between the external world and members of the Doukhobor community.”<sup>95</sup>

Such a religious belief system would have made them suspect to the people of Peoria, but other aspects of Doukhobor life – their dress, vegetarianism, non-smoking, inability to speak English – would also have been impediments to assimilation. The Doukhobors’ steadfast refusal to swear oaths or to register births, deaths, marriages, or land might have been particularly at issue. For a time, the Canadian government had accepted this rejection of the bureaucratic requirements of citizenship. But this was unlikely to happen south of the Canada-US border. Oregon, as a state in transition from western frontier to modern America, was keen to populate itself with white-only immigrants who were prepared to swear allegiance to the Stars and Stripes. Consequently, there was little sympathy with the Society’s cause, and the Supreme Court’s rather vaguely worded decision against the sect suggests that it, too, might have been influenced by reports of Doukhobor activities elsewhere.

When the decision came down in the Albany courtroom regarding the loss of Doukhobor farmland, it could hardly have come as a big surprise to sect members. After all, the Doukhobors were no strangers to religious persecution and social ostracism, having felt the iron rule of the czars in their homeland. For more than two centuries, as we have

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>94</sup> Kalmakoff, in an introduction to Vera Mikhailovna Velichkina, “With the Doukhobors to Canada,” available at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Velichkina.htm>.

<sup>95</sup> Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 110, citing V.D. Bonch-Bruevich, “Obriady dukhobortsev” [Rituals of the Doukhobors], *Zhivaia starina* (St. Petersburg) 3-4 (1905): 233-70, writing under the pseudonym Vladimir Ol’khovsky.

seen, Russian authorities had clamped down hard on them for their rigid adherence to a unique brand of spiritual Christianity in defiance of the Russian Orthodox Church. It was an all too familiar experience for the unwanted sect, as was political ostracism.

Although the Russian Revolution was still a few years away when the first Oregon migration occurred, communism was already dreaded, sometimes fanatically, as a threat to the American way of life. Given that fear, some Oregonians might easily have mistaken Doukhobor communalism for communism. After all, as Maude notes, “there were circumstances connected with the Doukhobor migration, which brought prominently to the front certain advantages communism undoubtedly possesses,”<sup>96</sup> adding that Tolstoy insisted that communism was the best path for the sect to follow. He also notes, however, that many of the villages in the Canadian colonies embraced individualism, possibly as a way of avoiding more ostracism. Elkinton notes that “Communism, which the Russian peasants generally favour, has become with the Doukhobors a religious principle.”<sup>97</sup> He adds that “A widespread religious awakening took place among them; they ceased to smoke, drink wine and eat flesh; they practiced communism, and resolved no longer to bear arms; even in self-defense.”<sup>98</sup> Both writers praise the industriousness of the sect and highlight the successes of its communal way of life. However, in the minds of Oregon’s largely conservative population, the peasants’ communistic tendencies could have been taken as a signal to vocally oppose their presence. Among others who had earlier observed these tendencies was the exiled Bolshevik leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who, through Bonch-Bruевич, had been introduced “to the chief tenets of these Gnostic communists.”<sup>99</sup>

Before they began their cross-continent migration from Russia, first in a brief attempt to establish a colony in Cyprus (which failed badly),<sup>100</sup> and then to Canada, religious dissidents like the Doukhobors were likely to get swept up in the ceaseless and ruthless harassment of the newly formed communist cadre led by Lenin.<sup>101</sup> The Russian secret

<sup>96</sup> Maude, *A Peculiar People*, 251.

<sup>97</sup> Elkinton, *Doukhobors*, 147.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>99</sup> Saladin, *Babylonian Code*, 187–88.

<sup>100</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, devote a chapter to the “Failure on Cyprus” and note that the Doukhobor group that tried to establish a colony there, with Quaker assistance, sailed for Canada on 27 April 1899 (129).

<sup>101</sup> Helen Rappaport, *Conspirator: Lenin in Exile* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), does not speak directly about the Doukhobors but she does give a detailed account of what the Bolsheviks faced in the 1890s from the Okhrana secret police agency.

police were especially watchful of the communist revolutionaries; however, interestingly, Lenin looked to peasant “sectarians” like the Doukhobors to join the working class in overthrowing the old regime. He and his party thought the Doukhobors set a good example by the way in which they protested through their religious sectarianism.<sup>102</sup> But young Verigin would not be joining any revolution. He had instituted a “reactionary-utopian” program that, from Klibanov’s point of view, eventually prevented the Doukhobors from engaging in class struggle.<sup>103</sup>

In what he calls a “social war,” pitting the sect’s poorer ranks against the combined forces of rich Doukhobors and the czar’s government, Klibanov contends that it was Verigin and his aides who were responsible for the failure of Doukhobor peasants to engage in revolutionary revolt, “having clouded the consciousness of the poor by teaching ‘non-resistance to evil.’”<sup>104</sup> In a final blow to revolution, Verigin called upon his followers to burn their weapons on 29 June 1895, his birthday, and they did so (Figure 5). To be sure, this was an anti-militarist gesture in keeping with Doukhobor pacifist commitments, but it also left sect members without any means of defending themselves against the czar’s forces or the mountain tribes of the Caucasus, which regularly invaded their villages.<sup>105</sup>

Clearly, Verigin was no revolutionary for, in his mind, “the revolution was senseless terror” against the wealthy members of the sect.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the newly christened leader was quick to distance himself from the Bolsheviks, and he ordered sect members to do the same. Whether or not the Doukhobors ever considered themselves members of the working class,<sup>107</sup> and therefore among the masses of Russian peasants that Lenin would seek to empower in 1917, their destiny pointed them elsewhere. And for a few it pointed once again to Oregon.

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<sup>102</sup> Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 1-5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>105</sup> For more detail of the Burning of the Arms ceremony and its significance to Doukhobor life, see, among other accounts, Koozma J. Tarasoff, “The Doukhobor Peace Day,” available at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Peace-Day.htm>.

<sup>106</sup> Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism*, 145.

<sup>107</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 247, quote the Blakemore report as identifying the Doukhobors as working class. Whether they designated themselves in class terms is unclear, but Klibanov’s history certainly uses a class analysis in describing them.





Figure 5. Doukhobor pacifism is firmly associated with the Burning of the Arms ceremony that celebrates the destruction of all rifles and other weapons in protest at Doukhobor participation in the Russian military. The ceremony originated in Slavyanka in northwest Azerbaijan in 1895. Here, Doukhobor spiritual leader Peter “Lordly” Verigin tosses a rifle into a fire, c. 1921, in a symbolic acting out of the 1895 event. *Source:* SFU Library Special Collections MSC121-DP-049-01

In January 1924, seven years after the first Oregon Doukhobor colonists had abandoned Freedom Colony, a second attempt was made to resettle in the hilly lands of the Willamette Valley. In fact, some families – possibly the Drozdoffs, Gretchens, Holoboffs, and Kazakoffs – may have made the move in the late summer of 1923, followed by the Nichovlodoffs and Popoffs in April 1924.<sup>108</sup> This time it was closer to Eugene, Oregon. With their long history of violent repression, religious persecution, and forced migration always in the back of their minds, the move might have been part of a continuing search for a better place to practise their distinct religion and farming lifestyle. This time, though, the circumstances differed from those of the 1913 flight to the south, starting with the fact that this would be a voyage steered by Verigin himself. Also, the reasons behind his decision were complicated by the challenges to his leadership that were being generated by the zealous and often fanatical Sons of Freedom, which, since the end of the first

<sup>108</sup> Even as the Freedom Colony at Peoria was disbanding, seventy-five Doukhobors crossed the Canada-US border between 1918 and 1924, indicating a Eugene destination. See Kalmakoff, “Doukhobor Border Crossings in Washington and Idaho, 1917-1924,” available at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Border-Washington-Idaho.pdf>.



Figure 6. A Sons of Freedom protest in Nelson, British Columbia, undated. The radical Sons of Freedom, or *Svobodniki*, originated in the Doukhobor communities of Saskatchewan in 1902. Source: SFU Library Special Collections MSC130-2634-01.

colony, had grown into a vocal and sometimes violent force within the sect<sup>109</sup> (Figure 6). The move would be even further complicated by a challenge from the Oregon KKK.

Verigin, whom earlier colonists (e.g., the Maloffs and the Popoffs) had criticized, now announced to the local press that he had purchased about 875 acres (350 hectares) of land from Edward and Susanna Graf,<sup>110</sup> and that he intended to lead his flock to what he hoped would be a less antagonistic community, a new Eden.<sup>111</sup> However, it was not to turn out as he had hoped. In fact, Verigin was under intense pressure. Crops had failed in British Columbia in 1921, and he had ordered austerity measures that drew complaints from some Doukhobors. Some said they did not

<sup>109</sup> “Canada: Taming the Spirit Wrestlers,” *Time*, 11 February 1966, referred to them as “a fanatical sect of some 3,000 religious anarchists.”

<sup>110</sup> Born in 1875, Graf was an ethnic German from Odessa, Russia, who immigrated to Canada via the port of New York in 1891, according to information on border crossing cards acquired by Jonathan Kalamakoff. He farmed in Swolwell, Alberta, until 1921, when he moved to Monroe, Oregon. He likely spoke Russian, which would undoubtedly have assisted him as Verigin’s business manager. Elsewhere, Graf is referred to as Verigin’s “business representative.” See “Doukhobor Chief in City,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, 15 August 1924.

<sup>111</sup> A warranty deed filed with Lane County clerk R.S. Bryson on 6 February 1924 shows that the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood Ltd. bought about 520 acres (210 hectares) of land from Edward and Susanna Graf on the periphery of Eugene on 19 January 1924. The warranty deed was notarized by Charles A. Hardy and deposited with the Lane County Deeds and Records Office at Eugene, Oregon. It is possible that Verigin bought other parcels of land totalling 875 acres (350 hectares), but no additional deeds have been uncovered thus far.

have enough to eat. He argued that the Doukhobor community had been over-taxed, and, in his search for ways to push back against the Canadian and BC governments, he called for a public inquiry. Most problematic of all was the BC government's decision to force about seven hundred Doukhobor children to attend school under the provisions of the anti-Doukhobor Community Regulation Act.<sup>112</sup>

On the surface this refusal to allow their children to attend school may seem incomprehensible, but Doukhobors were adamant that schools were places that taught children to kill. Eventually, Verigin relented, and Doukhobor children began to attend, but the peace was only momentary. The Freedomites would not agree to send their children to school and began to burn down schools in protest. Faced with this type of pressure, Verigin's purchase of land in Eugene was quite possibly another move to force the BC government and the Canadian government to relent, the idea being that the authorities would not want to see thousands of productive workers leave the country. He might also have hoped that, with the move, he would maintain some of his dwindling power over a group that was becoming increasingly discontent with his leadership and his failure to address the sect's financial woes.<sup>113</sup>

In the spring and summer of 1924, as Doukhobor families began to prepare for the growing season in the Willamette Valley, some Oregonians might have assumed that they comprised a group of anarchists out to destroy the American way of life. After all, the newspapers had been filled with stories of the long battle surrounding the trial of Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, and its prominence might have prompted some citizens to label the sect as anarchist since its members had exhibited some of the same traits associated with the two Italians. But the Verigin-led settlers would find themselves involved in a politically charged drama of another kind when their renewed presence in Oregon grabbed the local headlines in the anti-radical, racialized atmosphere that pervaded much of the state at the time.

"Lane County residents reacted with shock" upon learning of the Verigin land purchase, writes Eckard V. Toy, a University of Oregon professor, in a 1992 essay that alludes to the Doukhobor arrival. "When a small contingent of Doukhobors arrived in March 1924," Toy continues, "the Eugene post of the American Legion, whose commander, George Love, was also a Klansman, adopted a resolution condemning the

<sup>112</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 245, explain that the authorities took the action following the simplistic reasoning that "the law must be obeyed."

<sup>113</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 254, discuss the discontent that was building in the BC Doukhobor community.

‘invasion.’”<sup>114</sup> Others also reacted negatively and showed a willingness to support Love’s angry stand against the new arrivals. Legionnaire Calvin T. Funk went on record “as opposing the settlement of a major part of the northern portion of Lane county by Doukhobors, a large colony of whom ... [were thought] to be planning to move to ... [the United States] from Canada. The principal objection to the sect is that they do not become citizens and have peculiar ideas about obeying the laws of the land.”<sup>115</sup> The *Oregon Daily Journal*, in a less negative tone, also reported on the Verigin visit to the Eugene area “Any fears that a colony of naked savages will leap out from behind the big trees of Lane county to amaze the inhabitants,” the newspaper said, “were dispelled today by Peter Verigan [*sic*].” The daily also noted that the Doukhobor leader denied that his sect was moving to the United States: “The rumor that the Doukhobors were going to give up their Canadian colony to settle here, it is thought, grew out of the purchase, six months ago, of 875 acres [354 hectares] of land in Lane county.” The paper added that “Verigan bought the land, he said, partly as an investment and partly as an agricultural experiment, for he thought his people would be able to raise crops on it. He settled a family of five persons on it, and that family is the extent of the Oregon ‘colonization.’” The newspaper also asked Verigin about other unsettling rumours regarding the group. In response, he told the *Journal* that “We work industriously and know how to make our work bring forth crops.” He continued:

Our children go to the Canadian public schools. We have no schools of our own. We are Christians, the same as you are. We are only different from other people in that we do not believe in eating meat. We are vegetarians. We believe it wrong to kill – to kill any living thing. We do not use whiskey. Neither do we use tobacco.”<sup>116</sup>

That was certainly what Tolstoy and other prominent Doukhobor supporters believed, but not everyone agreed. Clearly, the local Legion, urging rejection of the sect, would have thought the opposite was true if it had listened to Grand Forks mayor George H. Hull. In a letter to the BC attorney general, dated 16 April 1923, he was quick to condemn the group as a “menace” and as consisting of “fanatics.” He further stated that, “from a human and Christian aspect, these people [are] of insane tendencies and with childish minds” and “it would appear that the only way of effectively dealing with the problem, would be to

<sup>114</sup> Toy, “Robe and Gown,” 175.

<sup>115</sup> “Doukhobors Colony Opposed,” *Morning Oregonian*, 25 April 1924.

<sup>116</sup> “Doukhobor Chief in City: Colonization Not Planned,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, 15 August 1924.

have those members of pronounced fanatical tendency committed to an asylum for the insane.”<sup>117</sup>

Hull was likely referring to the Sons of Freedom, the subject mentioned earlier, as his letter includes a photograph of a group of men and women standing naked outside a large building, an act of protest practised often by the Freedomites. The Sons of Freedom held far more radical views than did the much larger “Orthodox” group, which today forms the core of the sect and is headquartered in Grand Forks under the official name of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ (USCC). Still, the language the mayor used to describe the enmity that existed in the community towards the sect must have helped confirm the Eugene Legion’s views and prompted it to try to stop the influx of unwanted colonists.

The Eugene Lions Club was also concerned about a possible Doukhobor settlement in the area, and it, too, might have been aware of criticisms such as those of Mayor Hull. In a letter to the Canadian Department of Immigration, club secretary J.H. McKinley asked for “some direct and truthful information regarding the desirability of these people.” “We have heard some very adverse criticism of this Colony,” the letter concludes, “and if they are the undesirables which rumors indicate, we certainly do not care to have them in our community.”<sup>118</sup> Enter George Love, who seemed to have made it both his passion and his duty to rid Lane County of the sect. During the spring of 1924 he made speeches up and down the county opposing the feared colony of assumed radicals and drumming up hysteria. As mentioned, at one meeting in Junction City, about twelve miles (20 kilometres) from Eugene, Love’s speech so enraged “over 100 citizens and businessmen” that, according to the Eugene *Morning Register*, the group took a “unanimous standing vote’ ... against the proposed colonization.”<sup>119</sup> Some were said to be ready to take up arms against the invaders,<sup>120</sup> and, although it never came to that, Love managed to create enough concern to make things even more difficult for the small colony of newcomers, many of whom may not have been aware of the backlash as they could not fully understand English.

<sup>117</sup> George H. Hull, Mayor of Grand Forks, to Attorney General, 16 April 1923, in “Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History website. <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/archives/privateletter/1632en.html>

<sup>118</sup> J.H. McKinley, Lions Club of Eugene, Oregon, to Department of Immigration, 29 March 1924, Library and Archives Canada, RG 76, vol. 185, file 65101 pt. 11, reel C-7340.

<sup>119</sup> Glen Gibbons, “When Oregon Shut the Doukhobor Door,” *Northwest Magazine*, 13 November 1983, 6.

<sup>120</sup> Toy, “Robe and Gown,” 177.

Love and his fellow Legionnaires were adamantly opposed to the sect, with all 125 Eugene members voting to express their unanimous “disapproval of the new settlers.” According to an item in the *Eugene Daily Guard* “Alleged opposition of the Dukhobors to education of their children, their apparent lack of patriotism and their system of colonizing to the detriment of the district in which they settle were deplored by the Legion men.” The article further asserts that the Doukhobors “make themselves troublesome for everyone” and “do nothing for a community in which they live.”<sup>121</sup> A second article, placed side by side with the damning Legion commentary, states that the sect planned to “convert some of the timbered and bush lands of the county into beautiful walnut and filbert orchards.” Quoting Andrew Gretchin, a spokesman for the group, the article might have laid to rest any concerns about radical Russian hordes taking over the countryside. “It is so pretty here,” he told the *Guard* “I know we shall all like it in this valley. It is wonderful.”<sup>122</sup> Two weeks later, the same paper noted that Lane County Post 3 of the Legion had passed a resolution “protesting against the coming of the Doukhobor colony” after having received a letter from Canadian civic booster organizations confirming that the Doukhobors were “undesirable.”<sup>123</sup> George Love’s relentless campaign against the migrants fit well with his other role in the city. Like many public officials of the day in Oregon, he actively pursued his role as a local KKK leader in Eugene’s klavern No. 3.<sup>124</sup> Love and the klavern’s obsession with getting rid of the Doukhobors coincided with a significant rise in the popularity of the KKK in the state.

Oregon Klan membership was running at between fourteen and twenty thousand when the Doukhobor leader was planning his land purchase in the early 1920s, but he was apparently unaware of how effective the KKK had become with regard to rousing rabidly pro-white nativist sentiments against groups like the Russian sect. Perhaps Verigin was also unaware that the arrival of his colonists would coincide with intense Klan electoral activity. Toll, in his study of the Tillamook Klan (klavern No. 8), notes that “In local elections ... membership in the klavern seemed to be a desirable – though not a necessary – political asset.”<sup>125</sup> Any local hysteria that could be created over unwanted Russians could only have assisted Klan members who coveted political office.

<sup>121</sup> *Eugene Daily Guard*, 14 March 1924.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *Eugene Daily Guard*, 28 March 1924.

<sup>124</sup> Toy, “Robe and Gown,” 177.

<sup>125</sup> Toll, “Progress and Piety,” 79.

Not that they needed help. As one historian notes: “KKK leaders were in the public spotlight in the early 1920s,” and for a short time at least civic governments happily “indulged” them.<sup>126</sup> According to historian Eckard V. Toy: “The fears motivated by the Bolshevik Revolution, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the apparent moral disintegration of society were probably equally obvious and meaningful to the righteous and chauvinistic who were drawn to the ‘fiery cross.’”<sup>127</sup> Historian David Horowitz adds: “Oregonians were particularly ripe for such appeals because of a strong identification with a pioneer past that celebrated individual virtues, American nationalism, and Protestantism.”<sup>128</sup> Doukhobors, with their reputation for communalism and their loyalty to a religion that seemed odd to Americans, would have been ideal targets for Klan bigotry, racism, and vigilantism. “Racial and ethnic antipathies against all nonwhites and immigrants, anti-Jewish attitudes, and ultrapatriotic notions were implicit in the movement,”<sup>129</sup> Toy explains.

Fanning the flames of racial hatred even further was growing concern over the dissident Sons of Freedom, the subject that was increasingly seen as a public nuisance in British Columbia for displays of nudity and a tendency towards arson and bombing. The school burnings of the early 1920s are a prime example, and such violence would continue for the next forty years.<sup>130</sup> Much of the concern surrounding the subject was justified, but hysteria of the type Love was breeding, assisted by sensational media reports and photographs of nude protesters, generated an unhelpful and racist overreaction. The misunderstandings that such media treatment engendered were unfair, and the inability of many of the Russians to speak English must have hindered their attempts to undo the damage to their public image or, at least, to shed some light on their anti-mainstream social behaviour.

<sup>126</sup> Amy E. Platt, “KKK Meets with Portland Leaders, 1921,” Oregon Historical Society, 2009, [http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical\\_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc\\_ID=6BC64F73-1C23-B9D3-6844072A4F31B6AA](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc_ID=6BC64F73-1C23-B9D3-6844072A4F31B6AA), offers a brief explanation for the political appeal of the Klan to Oregonians.

<sup>127</sup> Toy, “Tillamook,” 60.

<sup>128</sup> Horowitz, “Social Morality,” 379.

<sup>129</sup> Toy, “Tillamook,” 60.

<sup>130</sup> Steven Azzi refers to the 1923 school burnings as “likely Canada’s first domestic terrorist campaign.” See *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/terrorism>. Azzi further notes that the violent activity reached a climax with the 1962 bombing of a power transmission tower that provided energy to Sullivan mine in Kimberley, British Columbia. The mine may have been a target because it supplied the giant metal refinery in nearby Trail, which had served as a key munitions factory during the war. The arrest and conviction of thirty-six Freedomites brought an end to any accelerated bombing campaigns in future.

As though the fiery political climate in British Columbia (with the Sons of Freedom) and in Oregon (with the Klan) was not intense enough, Verigin, anxious to salvage his empire, at least in part, by setting up a new colony, created even more potential for Klan backlash by inviting a colony of Molokans from California to form a united community in Eugene to be called *Druzhelyubaya Dolina*, or “Friendly Valley.”<sup>131</sup> The Molokans (milk drinkers), as the local Klansmen would have discovered had they taken the time to research them, were also a Russian religious sect with habits that the citizens of Oregon were likely to view as peculiar and undesirable. Like the Doukhobors, they were pacifists, rejecting war and all official authority, but they were also religious rivals in that the Molokans accepted the Bible as “an authoritative guide to moral and spiritual life.”<sup>132</sup> Molokan families had often visited the Peoria colony years before, and debates about the different belief systems had occurred without mishap.<sup>133</sup> However, clearly Molokan habits and customs were hardly more palatable to Oregon citizens of the mid-1920s than were those of the Doukhobors. As noted, there were compatible elements in Molokan and Doukhobor philosophy and lifestyle, but the merging of the communities into one Oregon colony was not to be.

It is possible that Verigin had other plans to sustain the colony of Friendly Valley, but, like the first attempt to establish a new Doukhobor home outside Canada, this second attempt was also doomed to failure. In fact, its demise was spurred by yet another devastating event in the history of the sect. On 29 October 1924, a mere six months after the first Doukhobor colonists had arrived on the farmland he had purchased around Eugene, Peter “Lordly” Verigin was killed in a train explosion on the Kettle Valley Line of the Canadian Pacific Railway near Farron, British Columbia.

No one is certain who was responsible for the deadly blast that killed the Doukhobor leader and no one has ever been brought to justice. However, speculations on who committed the murder are numerous, and one theory puts the Oregon Klan on the long list of suspects.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Kalmakoff, <http://www.doukhobor.org/pn-details.html?rec=258>.

<sup>132</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 30.

<sup>133</sup> Maloff, *Dukhobortsy*, 112 (English translation).

<sup>134</sup> Adrian Barnes, “Out There: The Columbia and Western Trail from the Paulson Bridge to Bulldog Tunnel,” *Nelson Daily*, 6 September 2011 (available at <http://thenelsondaily.com/news/out-there-columbia-and-western-trail-paulson-bridge-bulldog-tunnel-13462>) repeats the contention that the Klan could have been involved: “Verigin, for example, had recently bought land in Oregon and may have been contemplating moving his people down there. Such a plan would have aroused the ire of the commune-hating KKK.” See <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/kkk/indexen.html>.



Possible motive: to stop the further migration of Doukhobors to the Eugene area.<sup>135</sup> Adding some credibility to this speculation, Oregon king klegle<sup>136</sup> Luther Ivan Powell was reported to have been seeking new recruits in British Columbia in the mid-1920s.<sup>137</sup> A letter to the provincial police warned of his presence and the damage he might cause. "I see by our paper that one L. Powell, Esq., a Klan Organiser, is attempting his work in British Columbia. This rascal is well known in Oregon," writes Dr. Marvin G. Dunlevy of Portland "Powell is devoid of common decency and can do nothing but harm in the place of my birth, BC."<sup>138</sup> Another letter, this one from BC attorney general A.M. Manson the following February, confirms that Powell "came into this Province to undertake the organization of both a men's and a women's Ku Klux Klan." Manson describes the Klan literature as of "a type that we in this country have little use for," and he adds that "Powell was of a very doubtful character."<sup>139</sup>

So the king klegle's brief presence in the province, however unsuccessful as a recruitment drive, has led some historians to speculate that the Klan could have been implicated in the Verigin killing or at least have influenced locals to engage in such an act.<sup>140</sup> A March 1925 news article from Grand Forks declares that "Citizens are talking of Klan methods following school fires that were linked to Doukhobors." And, according to a website dedicated to tracking unsolved mysteries, British Columbians were "angry enough to threaten 'Klan' methods."<sup>141</sup> For the

<sup>135</sup> Koozma J. Tarasoff, "The Mysterious Death of Doukhobor Leader Peter V. Verigin in 1924," available at <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/kkk/indexen.html> and reposted at [http://www.spirit-wrestlers.com/excerpts/2006\\_Verigin\\_1924\\_Death](http://www.spirit-wrestlers.com/excerpts/2006_Verigin_1924_Death).

<sup>136</sup> In kkk vernacular, a "klegle" is a local recruiter and a "king klegle" recruits for an entire region.

<sup>137</sup> For a full discussion of Powell's Klan organizing activities in the 1920s, see Trevor Griffey, *The Washington State Klan in the 1920s*, chap. 2: "Luther I. Powell, Northwest kkk Organizer," Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, available at [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk\\_powell.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk_powell.htm).

<sup>138</sup> Dr. Marvin G. Dunlevy to Superintendent of Provincial Police regarding kkk, 13 November 1925, Selkirk College, KCIR Cabinet, BC Attorney General, GR 1323, file P-130-38-1925, Ku Klux Klan, reel B 2213.

<sup>139</sup> A.M. Manson to Thomas Mulvey regarding kkk, 4 February 1926, Selkirk College, KCIR Cabinet, BC Attorney General, file P-130-38-1925, Ku Klux Klan, Reel B 2213.

<sup>140</sup> Griffey, "Washington State Klan."

<sup>141</sup> "Explosion on the Kettle Valley Line: The Death of Peter Verigin," available at <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/suspects/kkk/indexen.html>. For further speculation on the kkk link to the killing, see Larry Hannant, "The Mysterious Death of Peter Verigin," *Beaver*, 84-85, November 2004, 26-28. See also <http://www.doukhobor.org/Hannant.htm>.

Oregon colony, the angry public responses that followed the bombing ended forever its dream of Friendly Valley.<sup>142</sup>

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Court records suggest that the Oregon Doukhobors retained ownership of the Eugene area land but were having difficulty meeting their mortgage payments during the 1930s.<sup>143</sup> “Finally, in 1939, an individual Doukhobor, Wasily Gleboff of Brilliant, British Columbia, bought the land from the community,” notes freelance writer Glen Gibbons in a lengthy and largely accurate account of the sect. “Gleboff sold part of the property in 1941, and by 1947 the remainder had returned to local ownership.”<sup>144</sup> The same year that Gleboff bought the Oregon land, after a tumultuous and questionable period of leadership, Peter Petrovich “Chistiakov” (the Purger) Verigin died of cancer. From the start of his takeover of his father’s leadership in fall 1927 he had shown virtually no interest in the Oregon colony, focusing instead on the financial difficulties of the BC community. By 1928, Eugene area Doukhobors had mostly returned to Canada or moved to another, perhaps more friendly, state. Meanwhile, Chistiakov’s death threw the Canadian Doukhobor community into disarray for, in his wake, he left massive debts hanging over the sect’s properties, and it stood to lose them. As well, the government was pressing to have Doukhobors register for wartime service, a measure that many people, including non-Doukhobors, believed was the beginning of conscription.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>142</sup> In August 1923, nineteen Doukhobors crossed the Canada-US border on their way to Eugene, followed in April 1924 by twelve Doukhobors. Presumably, they came to establish Verigin’s Friendly Valley colony. Some of them may have resettled around Eugene for a time. See Kalmakoff, “Doukhobor Border Crossings in Washington and Idaho, 1917-1924,” available at <http://www.doukhobor.org/Border-Washington-Idaho.pdf>. As further proof of continued residency, two Doukhobor draft resisters listed their residence as Eugene in 1917-18. See Kalmakoff, <http://www.doukhobor.org/1917-1918-US-Draft.pdf>.

<sup>143</sup> There was at least one lien against the property, and several other legal transactions were recorded at the Lane County Deeds and Records Office. None indicated the involvement of Edward and Susanna Graf, the couple who sold Verigin the land in January 1924. In fact, the Grafs attended Verigin’s funeral on 2 November 1924, joining about seven thousand mourners. Graf addressed the gathering and “spoke of the royal honor paid the dead man and the community by the great concourse of visitors present, an honor paid by the Anglo-Saxons to the Slavs.” The Graf family were also among those who sent flowers. See “Thousands See Peter Verigin Laid in Hill Top,” available at <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/aftermath/doukhoborresponse/1210en.html>. Source cited as *Nelson Daily News*, 3 November 1924.

<sup>144</sup> Gibbons, “Doukhobor Door,” 6.

<sup>145</sup> Woodcock and Avakumovic, *Doukhobors*, 285, explain the debt and Chistiakov’s attempts to lead the Doukhobors out of it.

In 1940, Lordly's great grandson John J. Verigin became leader of the Union of Spiritual Communities of Christ, the successor organization to Lordly's Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood. In 1943, in response to government seizures of their former communally owned properties, the Sons of Freedom dynamited them, including the highly profitable Brilliant jam factory. After the war, the Freedomites, numbering about two thousand members, battled over who would lead them. In 1950, the matter was finally settled when Stefan S. Sorokin, a one-time Baptist lay preacher from Kharkov, Ukraine, took over as leader of the subject.<sup>146</sup> While Sorokin is said to have "encouraged his followers to abandon their more controversial practices," Freedomites continued to bomb and burn, creating ever more sensational headlines and widening the fissures in the Doukhobor sect.<sup>147</sup>

Significantly, as Sorokin was assuming his new role as Freedomite leader, the increasing violence brought Oregon, by then almost forgotten, back among the Doukhobors when Emmett Gulley, an Oregonian from the Willamette Valley, arrived in British Columbia to "help solve the Doukhobor problem."<sup>148</sup> Gulley was initially sponsored by the Quakers but then was hired by the BC government, causing much consternation in Quaker circles, especially regarding the issue of forced school attendance, which Gulley supported. Freedomite families strenuously objected to the new Social Credit government's rigid enforcement of the compulsory attendance law, and they displayed their displeasure by mounting nude protests. Gulley and his wife Zoe also faced at least two attempts to burn down their house, and he was once attacked in the street by "a bunch of foolish [Doukhobor] women."<sup>149</sup> Witnessing such actions led Gulley to conclude that the Freedomites were like adult children, in some cases insane children, who "created a destructive rebellion."<sup>150</sup> His autobiography reveals his paternalistic attitude towards the sect and his readiness to use police authority to enforce his program. As historian Robynne Rogers Healey explains, Sons of Freedom believed that Gulley and the government had "con-

<sup>146</sup> According to one account, available at <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/verigin/context/timeline/indexen.html>: "Within two years he ... left Canada for Uruguay with close to one hundred thousand dollars collected from his supporters." Sorokin's quick exit to South America, with plenty of Freedomite cash in hand, might suggest to some that he was a charlatan.

<sup>147</sup> See <http://www.doukhobor.org/pn-details.html?rec=1124>.

<sup>148</sup> Emmett W. Gulley, *Tall Tales of a Tall Quaker* (No city: n.p., 1973), 97.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

spired to destroy [their] sect.”<sup>151</sup> Gulley’s fellow Quaker Hugh Herbison also came under attack, perhaps unfairly, for he had abandoned the government committee after disapproving of the forced attendance policy Gulley so rigorously defended.

The *Trail Daily Times* announced Gulley’s arrival on its front page. It was common in the late 1940s and early 1950s for the daily to accord such prominence to any story about the Freedomites. Every local fire or explosion was reputed to involve them, and proposals for their forced relocation were regularly published from at least 1945 onward. Nudity, too, continued as a bizarre form of protest, and it added to the negative media attention. And the *Times* was not alone in pursuing its aggressive anti-Doukhobor line. *Vancouver Sun* reporter Simma Holt is perhaps the most extreme example.<sup>152</sup> As usual, the sensational stories exacerbated the Doukhobor problem by failing to provide any historical understanding of why the Freedomites behaved as they did. Like the media in Oregon back in 1924, they seemed intent on feeding local hatred against the Doukhobors. In spite of the continuing media frenzy, not everyone was in lockstep with such negativity. American folksinger Pete Seeger was among those who took a different view. To support US social and anti-war protesters he recorded a 1962 song written after Doukhobor women disrobed in front of then prime minister John G. Diefenbaker in their attempt to appeal to him to change Doukhobor-unfriendly federal policies. The event inspired these lyrics:

Way up in Canada, Doukhobor lads,  
 Were sent to public schools disapproved of by their dads,  
 So the Doukhobor mamas said “That’s enough”  
 And they went to the meeting in the buff.<sup>153</sup>

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As we have seen, Oregon seemed to hold great promise for the Doukhobors; ultimately, however, that promise was unfulfilled. Today, all

<sup>151</sup> Robynne Rogers Healey, “Wrestling with the Lesser Evil: Quakers and the Sons of Freedom in Mid-Twentieth-Century British Columbia,” *Historical Papers*, 2006, Canadian Society of Church History, Trinity Western University, 55-69.

<sup>152</sup> Holt’s 1964 book, *Terror in the Name of God*, offers a highly sensationalized account of the radical subject based on a biased culling of police reports. As one reviewer notes, she was “inclined to exaggerate and sensationalize,” referring to Doukhobor leaders as “naked nomads.” See C. Frantz, book review, *American Anthropologist* (new series) 67, 5 (1965): 1309-10.

<sup>153</sup> “Do as the Doukhobors Do,” words and music by Malvina Reynolds, copyright 1962, available at <http://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/MALVINA/mr213.htm>.



Figure 7. A typical Doukhobor house in British Columbia, undated. In the Kootenay-Boundary region, the Doukhobors built communal houses, or “doms,” in a style they extended to their rural settlements in Oregon. The one remaining dom in the Eugene area has been so modified that its Doukhobor origins are unrecognizable. *Source:* SFU Library Special Collections MSC130-3587-01.

that remains as a subtle reminder of the sect’s Oregon adventure is a misspelled road sign on the bucolic outskirts of Eugene that reads “Dukhobar Road.” A mile or so down the dirt road stands an original Doukhobor house that is almost unrecognizable as one of the typical two-storey communal homes that the sect once built (Figure 7). In fact, it went unrecognized even to its owners for many years, until Bill John Androsoff, a Grand Forks Doukhobor, stumbled upon it and noticed “the unmistakable outline of a Doukhobor village.”

The owners welcomed Androsoff as “the first Doukhobor we have met after living here for twenty-five years.”<sup>154</sup> Androsoff found the land similar to that around his Grand Forks home, “with fruit and nut trees as well as open hay fields.” Like Peter Maloff long before him, Androsoff found it a “serene and private” spot, and the “soil must have been excellent.” As he recalls, “I closed my eyes half way [down Dukhobar Road] and could faintly hear Doukhobor singing in the fields.”<sup>155</sup> Perhaps they were engaging in the “potent and gorgeous process of psalm-singing” of old, which had for so long guided the sect.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Unrecorded telephone interview with Rommie Walker, former owner, 16 May 2010.

<sup>155</sup> Bill John Androsoff, “The Story of the Dukhobar (sic) Road,” author’s copy of a printout from a Doukhobor newsletter, neither place nor date of publication is indicated.

<sup>156</sup> Mark F. Mealing, “Introduction,” *Doukhobor Psalms: Adornment to the Soul*, 47. Available at [www.doukhobor-museum.org/wp-content/uploads/doukhobor-psalms-mealing.pdf](http://www.doukhobor-museum.org/wp-content/uploads/doukhobor-psalms-mealing.pdf). For a

Perhaps they were singing some of the hymns that, as always, would “affirm unity in the Doukhobor community.”<sup>157</sup> The young family that now lives in the house has transformed what Androsoff calls “the last *dom*” into a modern dwelling.<sup>158</sup> However, you can still see the familiar four-gabled roof structure that characterized such houses and that can still be seen in the Kootenays. In this one, only the original wooden front door has been preserved, but the new owners say that there were once four bedrooms that contained some evidence to suggest that more than one family lived there, as was the sect’s communal practice.

Aside from the house, the road sign, and brief references in relatively uncirculated autobiographies, dated histories, and a few academic texts, there is little evidence that would connect the Doukhobors to Eugene and less still to show that they were a momentary presence in Peoria. “The Doukhobors survived their first century in Canada,” writes historian Ashleigh Androsoff, “but only barely.” However, they did not survive in Oregon’s Willamette Valley. As she points out, the sect members endured many hardships from the moment they stepped off the ships in Halifax harbour in 1899, and they carried with them a powerful collective memory

of a long struggle with church and state authorities, of physical abuse which had scarred their bodies and minds, and of repeated exile, all incurred for their refusal to conform to Russia’s social, cultural, political, and religious conventions. This collective memory of religious oppression and assimilative pressure strengthened the Doukhobors’ spiritual resolve.<sup>159</sup>

That same resolve served them well in Canada, where they faced less ferocious but still damaging abuse at the hands of authorities and citizens who were unwilling to accept their differences, but it was not strong enough to withstand the pressures applied in Oregon in the early twentieth century. In fact, few if any Oregon Doukhobors remain to recount the events of those early years, when a sect of persecuted Russian

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full analysis of Doukhobor songs, see Peacock, *Songs of the Doukhobors*; Mark F. Mealing, “Our People’s Way: A Study of Doukhobor Hymnody and Folklife” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972); Mark Mealing, *Doukhobor Life: A Survey of Doukhobor Religion, History, and Folklore* (Castlegar, BC: Cotinneh Books/Kootenay Doukhobor Historical Society, 1975); and, more recently, Stephanie Landucci, “Song Traditions of the Doukhobors: Commemorating the Past, Constructing the Future” (senior thesis, Bachelor of Music, University of Victoria, 2005).

<sup>157</sup> Mealing, “Introduction,” in *Doukhobor Psalms*, 49.

<sup>158</sup> “Dom” means “house” in standard Russian.

<sup>159</sup> Androsoff, “Spirit Wrestling...,” 59.

peasants was confronted by greedy landowners and then suffered the racist taunts of George Love and his fellow Klansmen. Indeed, those brief episodes in North American history seem to be all but forgotten.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> While the Eugene and Peoria colonies were short-lived, they had an impact on the migratory patterns of other Russians. Hardwick, *Russian Refuge*, 149, notes that Russian religious groups later followed the Doukhobors to the Willamette Valley. By 1991, for example, Russian Pentecostals were “the state’s largest incoming refugee group,” and “by early 1992, new arrivals had settled in widely scattered neighborhoods in Portland, as well as in Woodburn, Hubbard, Salem, and Eugene.”