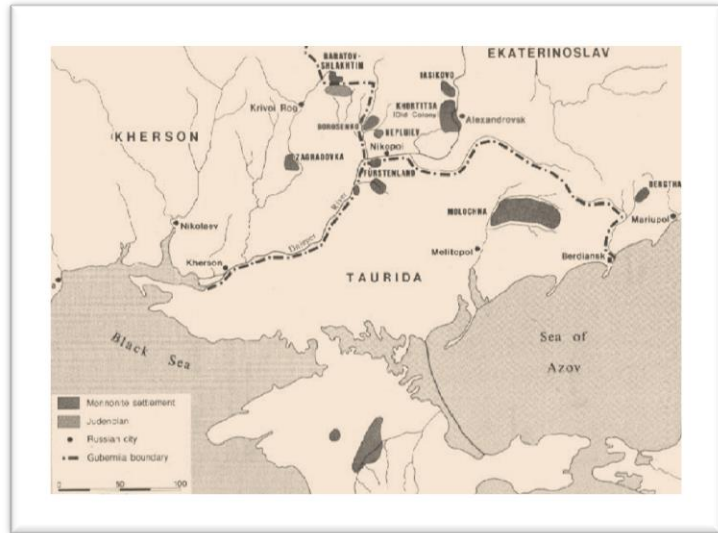


# Three Strikes and You're Out!

## Alta Mills Harvey County, Kansas, 1876-1949

Alta Mills is a story of Swiss Anabaptists, French Amish farmers, church elders, Russian-born Mennonite farmers making an epic ocean voyage to a better life. The first occupants of the land around Alta Township were the Indians of the Wichita tribe, making camp along the Little Arkansas River. The first European settlers to come were 10 French pioneers, creating a small town in 1869. In 1880s, a flood of Mennonites came from the Ukraine bringing with them knowledge of wheat and milling. It was these people who made Alta Mills what it was, a center for local Mennonites. Here, they could mill their wheat at a fair price and converse with other farmers, Mennonite or not. Alta Mills was more than just a mill: it was a community center hosting a store, blacksmith shop, and a picnic area. A dam was built in the creek just next to the mill to provide more water both for milling and recreational use. Sadly, as often with the new immigrants to America, Mennonite values and traditions clashed with local values causing tension and prejudice.



Alta Mills experienced such anger and violence throughout its life. The Anti-Mennonite town of Burton often served as the center for this harassment. When WWI began, Mennonites refused to buy war bonds to support the war effort, believing that this violated their pacifistic beliefs. According to Brian Stucky, the historian of Alta Mills, this was the third and last strike. “They already had two strikes against them. They were pacifist and they were German.” One such story was of John Jay Schrag. He had repeatedly refused to buy war bonds to support the war from the salesman from Burton. He was given one last chance before the war ended on November 11, 1918. He once again refused. So the salesman and others took him on a trip to town. They said “You are going to give us a parade!” and forced him to march down Main Street with an American flag in his hand. Somehow, the flag was knocked out of his hand and fell on the ground. Cries of “He stepped on the flag!” were heard, and the mob turned ugly. A noose was put over his neck and the other end strung over a light pole. Only at the last second was he saved by the town deputy, who said “To kill him, you’ll have to kill me.” Such events are often forgotten about in America, having happened so long ago. But one can hope that they stay in the past where they belong.<sup>1</sup> Alta Mills may be in the past but the people who remember are here and now.

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Interview with Brian Stucky by Grant Peters, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2013

The Mennonites, <http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/PAA/Mennonites.htm>

Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/g/ge008.htm>