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# Two Russian Molokan Agricultural Villages in the Intermountain West<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Agricultural villages established in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Russian Molokans in Glendale, Arizona, and Park Valley, Utah, bore striking similarities, with long, narrow house lots, dwellings aligned along a single village street, and outlying lands allocated for crop production. With the passage of time, the Glendale village lost much of its Russian flavor as families responded to individual opportunities, personal tragedies, and economic disaster by moving away. In contrast, the Park Valley village was struck down by drought and crop failure. Today, the Glendale village is inhabited entirely by non-Molokans, and is on the verge of being consumed by suburban sprawl, while the Park Valley village, abandoned almost 90 years ago, lies nearly hidden in a vast expanse of rangeland. But at each site it is still possible to find traces of a traditional Old World settlement pattern that was unable to survive in the face of new cultural, economic, and physical conditions that the villages' immigrant residents encountered in the American West.

## Introduction

MOST AGRICULTURAL VILLAGES in the Intermountain West are classic Mormon settlements laid out in the form of a grid, surrounded by open areas of cultivated land and pastures (Francaviglia 1970; Jackson and Layton 1976; Nelson 1952). Mormon country does contain some elongated villages where houses and lots are oriented to a single street (Bennion 1991, p. 121; Spencer 1940, p. 184), but these are much more common in lands settled by Mennonites, particularly in Canada's Prairie Provinces and in some parts of Kansas, where they are known as *strassendorfer* or street villages (Friesen 1977; McQuillen 1990, pp. 59–63; Warkentin 1959). It is not often that street villages resembling those of the Mennonites are found in the Intermountain West. But close examination of landscape remnants along a dead-

end street in Glendale, Arizona, and beside an unimproved road in Park Valley, Utah, reveals patterns that suggest that these two places may have common roots. Indeed, each is the site of a street village established in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Russian Molokans, who migrated from Transcaucasia to California shortly after 1900, and in many cases then made their way to more distant lands (Fig. 1). This paper describes the two villages and the lives of their residents, explains why they failed, and argues that the forces that brought about the demise of these traditional communities were not unlike those that continue to affect the region today.



Figure 1. Selected Russian Molokan Agricultural Villages: Early 1900s.

Molokans are one of several groups of fundamentalist dissenters whose origins can be traced to the emergence of nonconformist denominations that broke away from the Russian Orthodox church in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They were originally part of the Doukhobor sect, but separated from this group in the 1820s over doctrinal issues, particularly the role of the Bible in religious teachings. The Molokans' belief system is complex, but at its core is nonviolence, rejection of all sacraments and the worship of icons, refusal to swear oaths or obey civil laws that in their view are contrary to the law of God, reliance on the predictions of their prophets, and dietary regulations that adhere to Mosaic law and reject the fasting requirements of the Orthodox church. Their name is derived from the Russian word for milk drinkers, because they refused to refrain from consuming dairy products during Lent and at other times of fasting (Breyfogle 2005, pp. 10–11; Hardwick 1993a, pp. 28–30; Mohoff 2003, pp. 2–17; Young 1932, pp. 48–69).

Because of their non-conformist beliefs and opposition to military service, thousands of Molokans living in central Russia were sent into exile, initially to the Volga River region and then, from the 1830s onward, to Transcaucasia. Others, seeking to rejoin family and friends or to escape military conscription, moved voluntarily to this distant frontier, and by the early 1900s more than 20,000 Molokans were living in Transcaucasia. Here, some Molokans made their homes in cities and towns, but the majority were peasant farmers living in street villages whose form and function closely resembled the communities that they had left behind (Breyfogle 2005, pp. 49–83; Hardwick 1993b, pp. 131–134).

For decades, Molokans in Transcaucasia enjoyed considerable freedom and prosperity. But in the early 1900s hundreds of families, responding to prophecies that disasters awaited them if they remained in Russia and fearing that their young men would be forced into military service in the Russo-Japanese War, fled to the United States, with the vast majority eventually reaching California. Between 1904 and 1912, close to 1,000 Molokans moved to San Francisco, while about 3,500 men, women, and children, including the families that would establish villages in Arizona and Utah, settled in Los Angeles. At first, this latter group found places to live just west of the Los Angeles River on the fringes of the city's Central

Business District, but by 1910 the majority had crossed the river and established homes in an area of approximately a dozen city blocks that soon became known as Russian Town (Berokoff 1969, pp. 11–35 and 53; Hardwick 1993a, pp. 89–93; Los Angeles Directory 1908–1910; Mohoff and Valov 1996, pp. 3–9; Sokoloff 1918, pp. 1–4; U. S. Census of Population 1910; Young 1932, pp. 11–16).

Molokans living in Russian Town had little difficulty finding jobs, with lumber yards employing close to three-quarters of the men, while women and teenaged girls often found work in laundries or as domestics. Hardworking and frugal, many Molokans succeeded in purchasing modest bungalows within a few years of their arrival, and installed bake ovens and steam baths in their back yards. To help make ends meet, most householders occupied only small parts of their homes and leased the remaining space to other Molokan families, ordinarily relatives or friends who had lived in the same village in Transcaucasia, and to single men who had recently arrived in Los Angeles. In several of the larger houses, a room was set aside for church services, with village and kinship ties usually determining which families attended certain churches (Berokoff 1969, pp. 33–35 and 53–55; Mohoff and Valov 1996, pp. 10–25, 35–40, and 102; Sokoloff 1918, pp. 4–7; U. S. Census of Population 1910; Young 1932, pp. 16–19 and 30–31).

Despite this promising start, many residents of Russian Town were not satisfied with city life. Most Molokan men had been farmers for years and longed to return to the land, where they could resume familiar lifestyles and would not have to follow the orders of foremen or risk losing their jobs if they took time off to celebrate religious holidays. Parents were concerned that their children were being exposed to undesirable American values in the schools and on the streets, and many believed that the best way to preserve Molokan culture was to move to remote agricultural lands where they could live traditional lives, unaffected by outside forces. Childrens' brushes with the law, as well as difficulties reconciling Molokan marriage traditions with American civil regulations, did nothing to ease parents' concerns. Many would have agreed with the words of two Molokan authors, written years later, that "the biggest mistake the forefathers made upon arriving in America was settling in the city." It was not long before searches were underway to find sites

that would be suitable for agricultural colonies (Bender 1976, pp. 3–4; Berokoff 1969, pp. 38–39; Mohoff and Valov 1996, pp. 118–119; Wren 1991, p. 9; Young 1932, pp. 144–146).

The first step in this direction was taken in late 1905, when church elders obtained 13,000 acres in the Guadalupe Valley of Baja California, about 15 miles inland from the coastal town of Ensenada. This tract was initially leased and attracted only a handful of settlers, but once the property was purchased in 1907 the number of residents increased dramatically. By 1911, more than a hundred families had moved to the valley, where they established a traditional street village patterned after Molokan village plans in Transcaucasia, with long, narrow house lots and outlying fields and pastures (Dewey 1966, pp. 35–45; Mohoff and Conovaloff 1990; Mohoff 1992, pp. 10–18 and 56–59; Muranaka 1992, pp. 50–59; Schmieder 1928, pp. 415–422). As the Guadalupe Valley colony took shape, smaller groups of Molokans from Los Angeles acquired land near Ensenada and founded three additional farming settlements, each laid out in a similar manner (Mohoff 1992, pp. 18–28; Mohoff and Conovaloff 1990).

Other Molokans sought land within the United States. When it became known that these immigrants were in the market for places to farm, real estate agents, always on the lookout for prospective purchasers, targeted the Molokans and urged them to examine what they had to offer. Delegates from Los Angeles were shown properties in California and elsewhere, but concluded that some were of inferior quality and that others were too expensive. A small number of Molokans did acquire land near Shafter, in the Central Valley, but no serious effort was made here to establish a traditional village (Bender 1976, p. 4; Mohoff and Valov 1996, pp. 119–121; Wren 1991, pp. 9–10). It was not until 1911, when Molokans living in Los Angeles moved to Arizona, and 1914, when some of their former neighbors purchased land in Utah, that new farmers' villages would come into existence.

### **Getting Started: Glendale**

Acquisition of land in Arizona was carried out under the direction of Michael P. Pivovarov, leader of a small congregation in Russian Town who had been unable to find suitable land for his people in California. When contacted by representatives of a Phoenix

real estate firm acting on behalf of a sugar company, which had built a mill in nearby Glendale in 1906 and needed farmers to grow beets for the plant, Pivovarovoff agreed to send a delegation to Arizona to investigate. The men visited Glendale in the summer of 1911 and found a piece of undeveloped but irrigable land, to be watered by the new Salt River Project, southwest of the town. Although Molokans had no experience with irrigation, the delegates agreed that they had found what they were seeking, and contracted to purchase 400 acres for \$125 an acre. This was an exorbitant price for raw land, but the men from Russian Town did not know this and were completely won over by the dealers' willingness to accept a very small down payment for the tract (Popoff 1971, p. 20; Wren 1991, pp. 9–10).

The initial party of settlers, consisting of approximately 170 individuals from 30 families, arrived in Glendale on the first day of September, 1911, after an overnight trip by rail from Los Angeles. Upon reaching the land that their representatives had purchased, many were disappointed to find that while ditches had been laid out and irrigation water was available, the property was still covered by cactus and other desert plants and was infested by snakes, tarantulas, and scorpions. With the assistance of a sugar company official who persuaded local merchants to extend them credit, the newcomers managed to purchase tents and cots, as well as tools needed to clear the land, and began hauling drinking water from the town pump in Glendale, some 2 miles distant (Arizona Gazette 1911a; Wren 1991, pp. 10–12).

The next order of business was to select a site for the settlers' homes. The son of one of the colonists has described the process in the following words:

The Elders, pursuing the customs of the native villages, laid out the settlement in the centre of their newly purchased land. Some 40 acres was set aside. In the centre was a street and lots were set aside for the use of each family as a homesite. Thus there were 40 plots in this new village and in the centre one plot was reserved for their [church]. The remaining 39 lots were available for settlement by each family and as there were only 30 families they had nine lots left over for any new members. All plots were numbered and each family drew out the number that would be their homesite (Wren 1991, p. 11).

At first, non-Molokans called this place Griffin Town after one of the real estate dealers who sold the land to the Molokans, or Davie Townsite after the sugar company official who had helped them get started, but in time the village became known as the Old Colony in order to distinguish it from other clusters of Molokans who moved to Glendale in the next few years and made their homes in close proximity to one another, but did not replicate the traditional form of this first site (Conovaloff 1983; Holmquist 1917; Popoff 1971, p. 21).

The families lived in tents for several months, when most energy was directed toward clearing and plowing the land. In the spring of 1912, the men started building houses, pooling their efforts late each afternoon after working in the fields to build one structure at a time. Each house was made of lumber, contained only two rooms, and like Molokan farmhouses in Guadalupe Valley and elsewhere, was built with the gable end facing the street so that houses sat lengthwise on the narrow lots. When time and finances permitted, cellars for food storage, bake ovens, and steam baths were constructed. During this formative period, several families, discouraged by the climate and harsh living conditions, gave up and returned to Los Angeles, reducing the number of original village lot holders to 20. As these events took place, several men acquired unallocated or vacated lots, with some of the more prominent residents taking control of five or six lots each (Conovaloff 1983; Bender 1976, pp. 10–12; Wren 1991, pp. 11–12).

In 1913, the village contained 10 occupied dwellings, some situated on single lots that were 4 rods (66 feet) wide and 40 rods (660 feet) deep, while others occupied larger consolidated properties (Fig. 2). A few dwellings housed single families, but most were shared by two or more families, with arrangements usually based on kinship. A modest church building stood near the center of the village on a parcel that had been carved from two adjoining lots, a slight reconfiguration of the original plan. A small number of grave markers stood just beyond the village's northwestern boundary, on land owned by a cooperative non-Russian neighbor that would not be purchased by church leaders until 1922. Although plans were made in 1911 to build a school house in the village, these had not materialized, and children from the village attended a one-room school located a half-mile to the north (Arizona Gazette 1911b; Church of

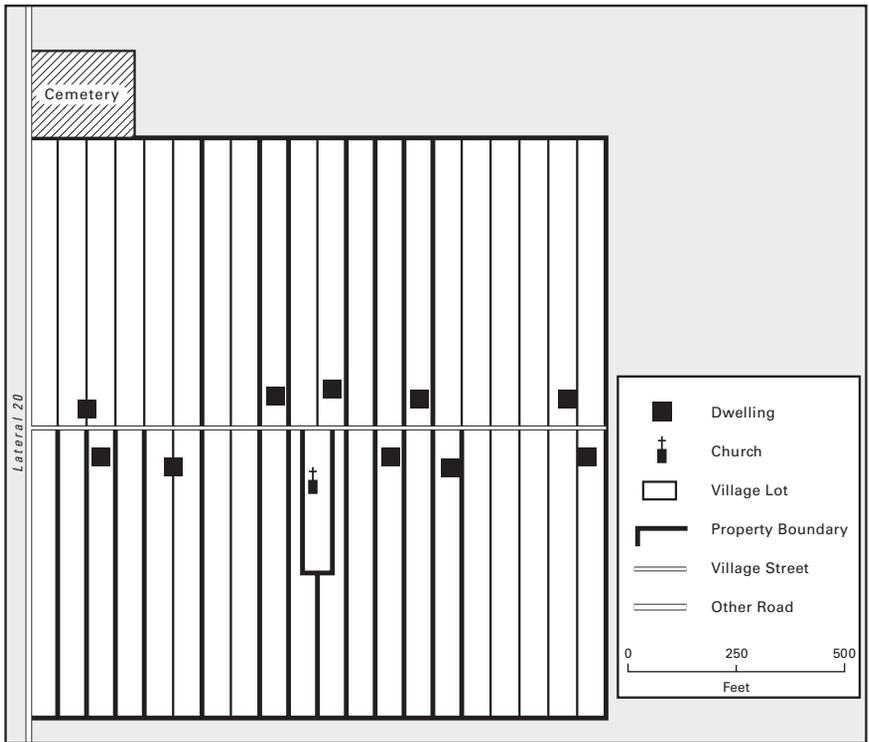


Figure 2. The Russian Molokan Village: Glendale, Arizona, c.1913.

the Spiritual Molokans of Arizona 1991; Conovaloff n.d.; Tompkins 1917, pp. 2–5; Veronin 1999, p. 12; Wren 1991, p. 14).

With the exception of gardens planted near the houses, all cropland lay beyond the village. The first settlers had purchased just 400 acres, including the village site, with individual parcels ranging from fewer than 10 acres to as many as 40. A half-dozen years later, the village lot holders had nearly doubled their ownership of outlying lands to 764 acres, all but a small fraction located within a mile of their homes (Fig. 3). Several men rented additional land from non-Molokans, often absentee owners who later sold their property to Molokans. Most rented land was situated close to the village, but one 80-acre parcel was 8 miles away, requiring people working this land to spend some nights away from home in tents or wagons (Conovaloff 1983; Holmquist 1917; Popoff 1971, p. 20; Veronin 1999, pp. 9–10).

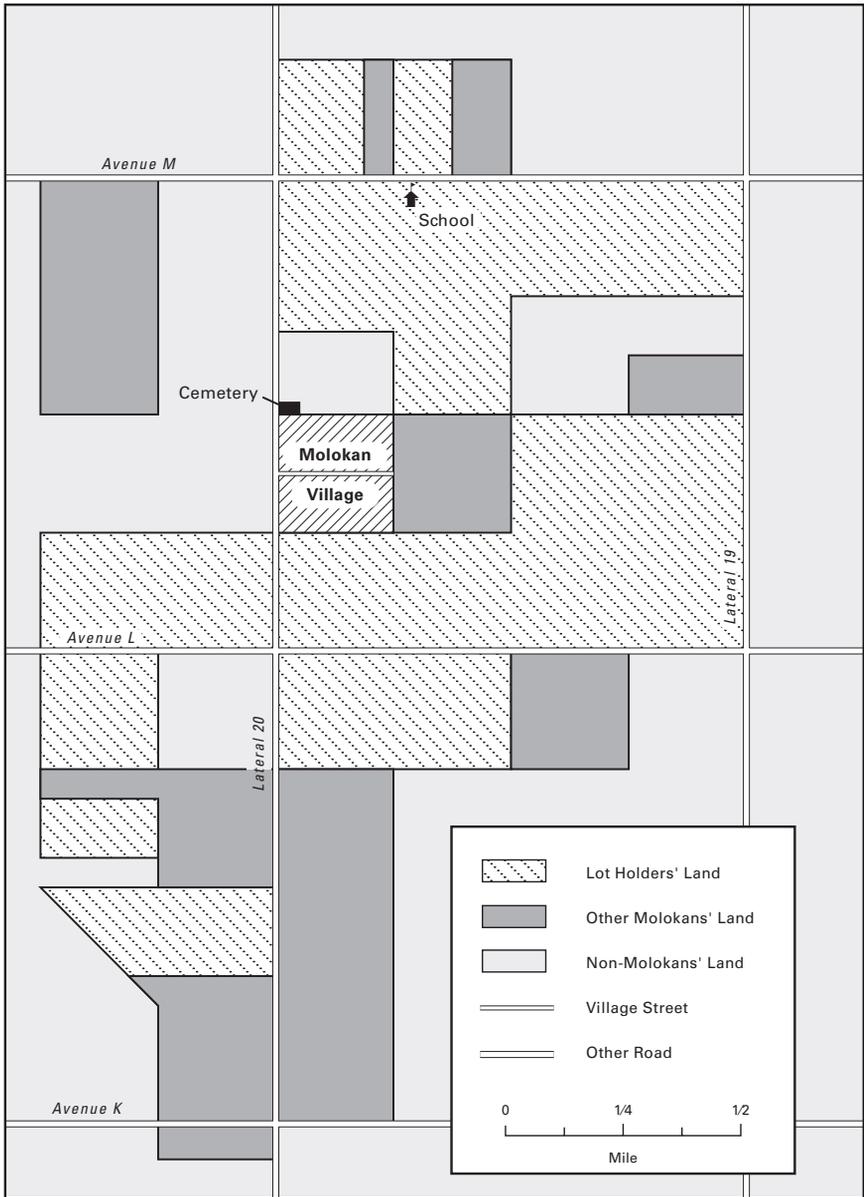


Figure 3. Land Controlled by Molokan Village Lot Holders: Glendale, Arizona, 1916–1917.

All cropland had to be irrigated, which required Molokans to learn farming techniques with which they were completely unfamiliar. Fortunately, some of the villagers' non-Russian neighbors provided sorely needed assistance in the first years, "giving them advice," as one man put it, "and showing them how to do things" (Wren 1991, p. 12). As planned, the Molokans began by planting sugar beets, but crop failures and closure of the sugar factory in 1913 forced them to turn to other types of farming, particularly dairying. Then, with the beginning of the First World War, cotton prices rose dramatically and the Molokans, like other farmers in central Arizona, switched their attention to this crop, bringing unprecedented prosperity to the entire community (Bender 1976, pp. 15–16; Berokoff 1969, pp. 57–58).

### **Getting Started: Park Valley**

Another real estate purchase that would lead to the creation of an agricultural village took place in 1914, when an agent of a Salt Lake City firm visited Los Angeles to drum up business for its property in northwestern Utah, and was put in touch with a group of Molokans. Some men thought that Utah was too far from Russian Town and spoke out against obtaining land in such a remote place, but there was enough interest to justify taking a look. A party of Molokans visited the area in the early spring of 1914, when runoff from nearby mountains made "everything [appear] quite green," and recommended acquisition of some of the company's property. With the assistance of a Los Angeles attorney who spoke Russian, 20 men entered into an agreement to buy 4 square miles of sagebrush-covered land in the southern part of Park Valley. A man who discussed this arrangement with Molokans in Los Angeles several years later declared that the buyers paid \$100 an acre, but this seems too high, since at the time of purchase the company was advertising the availability of its best Park Valley lands for between \$17.50 and \$25 an acre (Pivovarovoff 1989, p. 107; Salt Lake Tribune 1914a; Speek 1921, p. 29; Young 1932, p. 161).

The men who purchased land in Park Valley were no strangers to residents of the Old Colony village in Glendale. Most had lived in the same or neighboring villages in Transcaucasia, many were related by birth or marriage, and almost all of them knew one

another in Los Angeles. For example, Steve Bolderoff, who moved to Park Valley, was a brother of Willie Bolderoff, one of the original lot holders in Glendale. The family of Alex P. Karyakin, who would become a leader of the Utah community, had formerly shared a house in Russian Town with Alex Volkoff and his family, who went to Glendale in 1911, while Moses Slevin, a Park Valley settler, had rented space in his home to Mike Volkoff and his bride, who came from the same village as Slevin, before the young couple relocated to Arizona (Aldacushion n.d.; Boldroff n.d.; Conovaloff 2003; Los Angeles Directory 1908–1910; U.S. Census of Population 1910; Veronin 1999, p. 36). These and numerous other personal linkages make it understandable why the two groups, sharing common traditions and common values, would create similar patterns of residence and land tenure.

Settlers going to Park Valley left Los Angeles by train on the evening of April 6, 1914. The passengers, numbering about 125, were members of 15 families who had been living in Los Angeles for periods of 3 to 9 years, and 5 who had recently returned from Mexico. They arrived on April 8 at a small town 12 miles southeast of their destination, where they were met by a land company employee and transported by wagons to the property they had purchased (Barlow 2002; Los Angeles Times 1914; Salt Lake Tribune 1914b; Yates 1999, pp. 14–15). Like their fellow Molokans who had gone to Glendale 3 years earlier, one of the group's first tasks was to select a village site. Unlike the Glendale settlers, they rejected locations near the middle of their purchase and opted instead to situate the village along the property's southern margins, near the foot of a low hill that became known as Russian Knoll. Why the men chose such a peripheral location is not entirely certain, but two factors, both related to access to water, were apparently involved. First, the site lies less than a half-mile from Dove Creek, where they may have hoped to water their livestock. Dove Creek rarely carries water except during the spring runoff, but the men might not have known this because the party sent to examine the area, as well as the full body of colonists, arrived when snow was melting and streams were flowing. Furthermore, they may have heard from land dealers or local ranchers that ground water is closer to the surface here than a mile or two to the north, an important consideration for men who would have to

dig their domestic wells by hand (Barlow 2002; Palmer 1980; Young 1932, p. 161).

The village that they laid out was similar to other traditional Molokan villages, including the Old Colony site in Glendale, but it differed in several details. Instead of occupying 40 acres, it covered 60, and it contained 20 house lots, one for each family, rather than 40 (Fig. 4). Each lot was a 3-acre strip, 12 rods (198 feet) wide and 40 rods (660 feet) deep. Construction of houses began almost immediately, and within a few months 13 dwellings had been completed. All were built with rough lumber sawed at a company mill several miles to the north, but they varied considerably in size and shape. Some were little more than shacks, but others were more substantial gabled structures, often with large porches. Most were oriented in the traditional manner, with their narrow ends facing the street, but photographs and foundation remnants indicate that this was not always the case, perhaps because some buildings were intended to be only temporary residences or because of the greater flexibility that was

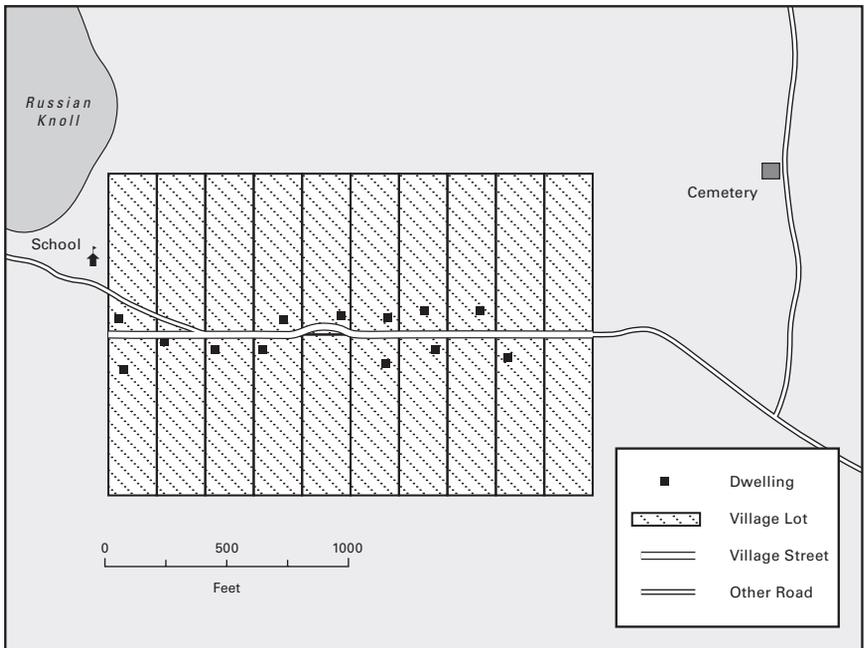


Figure 4. The Russian Molokan Village: Park Valley, Utah, 1915.

possible on lots that were almost 200 feet wide. Food storage cellars were dug near almost every house, and some properties contained sheds and small barns to protect horses and other livestock from the cruel Utah winters. No church structure was built, so services were held in the larger houses, usually one of two dwellings near the center of the village (Barlow 2002; Box Elder County 1916–1919; Reibin 2002; Yates 1999, pp. 15–17).

Since the village contained 20 families and only 13 houses, some families shared their homes with others, with kinship the principal factor in determining specific arrangements, just as it was in Glendale. Children living here went for more than a year without any formal education, but in 1915, when the number of school-age youngsters had reached 40, the county built and staffed a one-room school house near the foot of Russian Knoll. No provision was made for a cemetery in the original village plan, so when Anna Kalpakoff was accidentally shot and killed by her husband just a month after their arrival, she was buried in the Mormon cemetery near the town of Park Valley, six miles to the north. But when Anna's sister-in-law died in childbirth less than a year later, she was laid to rest on land east of the village that the family set aside for a gravesite, and Anna's body was brought from Park Valley and placed beside her (Box Elder News 1914; 1915a; 1915b; 1915c; Yates 1999, pp. 15–17).

Although the men had purchased more than 2,600 acres and allocated 80 acres outside the village to each family, they made little use of these outlying lands (Fig. 5). Instead, most farming activity took place on their 3-acre house lots, where there was enough room for gardens and small plots of hay or grain. The company had said that it would provide irrigation wells and pumps, but it failed to follow through on its promise, leaving the Molokans to choose between cultivating the outlying property by dry farming methods or concentrating on their house lots, which they could irrigate from domestic wells. Most chose the latter. The only sustained attempt to raise crops beyond the village took place on an 80-acre parcel belonging to Alex P. Karyakin, where several men farmed together, creating scars that are still in evidence nearly a century later. With one possible exception, all families made their homes in the village during their entire stay in Park Valley. Some evidence suggests that the family of Moses Slevin, or perhaps Slevin's sister-in-law, who

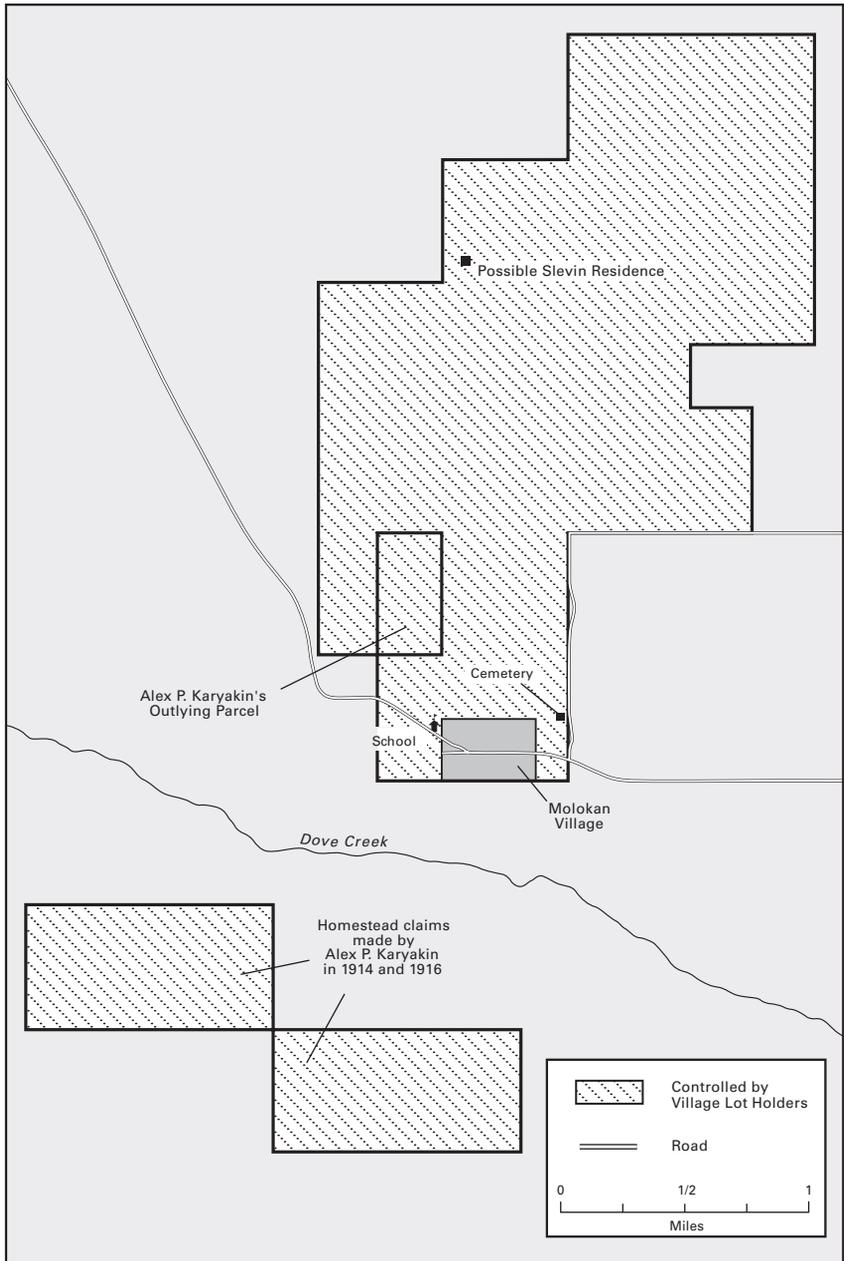


Figure 5. Land Controlled by Molokan Village Lot Holders: Park Valley, Utah, 1914–1917.

married a non-Molokan Russian in 1915, may have lived 2 miles north of the village for a short time, but this cannot be proven. Although Karyakin filed two homestead claims south of Dove Creek, perhaps to secure grazing land on behalf of the entire community, there is nothing to indicate that either of these tracts became anyone's place of residence (Barlow 2002; Box Elder County 1918; Box Elder News 1915d; General Land Office 1914; 1916; Pivovarovoff 1989, p. 107; Yates 1999, p. 15).

### **Transformation: Glendale**

Despite its promising start, the Molokans' village in Glendale did not develop any further and gradually declined. Many changes were products of personal choices and family tragedies, while others were related to economic forces that originated far beyond the villagers' world. Three original lot holders departed for periods of 1 to 5 years to live in Mexico and a new Molokan settlement in eastern Washington, and while each came back to Glendale before the end of 1918, none resumed living in the village. Others moved directly to homes built on their outlying properties, in part because of overcrowding in the small village houses and partly because of the convenience of living closer to the fields where they did most of their farming. Another man left the village after being imprisoned for his refusal to register for the draft during the First World War. He was allowed to return home after signing the registration papers, but during his absence his cotton crop had gone unpicked and death had claimed both his wife and infant son. Disheartened, he moved back to Los Angeles, remarried, and tried to make a fresh start in life.<sup>2</sup> (Berokoff 1969, p. 59; Conovaloff n.d.; Mohoff 1992, p. 217; Moore 1972, pp. 38–48; U. S. Census of Population 1920a; 1920c; 1930c; Wren 1991, pp. 34–39 and 89–91).

By 1920 only 6 of the 20 original lot holders were still living in the village. Most of these were among the most influential members of the community, including Michael P. Pivavarooff, its spiritual leader, and three respected prophets. Of the others, one had died, eight were residing elsewhere in Glendale, and several now made their homes in Los Angeles. Three of the four vacated dwellings had become the homes of new owners, all adult sons of Alex S. Tolmachoff, the village patriarch. The fourth vacated house was unoccupied and

may have already been demolished (Los Angeles Directory 1920; Tolmachoff 2002; U. S. Census of Population 1920a; 1920c; Veronin 1999, pp. 29–34; Wren 1991, pp. 17 and 23).

Additional changes occurred after the cotton market collapsed in late 1920, driving 80 percent of Glendale's Molokan families into bankruptcy and forcing several more villagers to return to California. The community was further weakened by the death of one of its members in a farming accident in 1927 and by the departure of his widow and most of their family to Los Angeles a short time later (Berokoff 1969, p. 58; Los Angeles Directory 1923–1929; Tolmachoff 2002; U.S. Census of Population 1930b; Veronin 1999, p. 35). As these families moved away, outsiders purchased or rented their properties, creating a very different social environment. In 1930, the village contained only two Molokan households and five dwellings occupied by non-Russians whose roots lay in Kansas and Oklahoma. Four of the new families were engaged in farming, while the fifth consisted of a young couple, employed as school teachers, and their daughter. Of the Molokan households, one was that of an original lot holder and his wife, while the other was headed by their youngest son, a farmer who lived with his family in an adjacent dwelling (U.S. Census of Population 1930a; Veronin 1999, p. 32).

Transformation of the village continued through the 1930s and beyond. Some of the first houses were torn down and replaced by new structures, while others were allowed to fall into disrepair. At mid-century, the village still contained seven occupied dwellings, with five non-Molokan households and two structures inhabited by Molokans, but by now the non-Molokan population consisted of an entirely different group of families than those who had lived here 2 decades earlier. The adult members of both Molokan households died in the 1950s, and for several years not a single family of this faith made its home in the village (Beatty 2004; Cole Publications 1971–1976; Mullin-Kille 1959; Salisbury 1949; Veronin 1999, pp. 32 and 44). This situation is captured by a map of Glendale's Molokan church membership in 1971, which shows that about half of the congregation was living within a mile of the village site, where the church and cemetery remained focal points of community life, but that no members lived in the village itself (Fig. 6). At this time, five non-Molokan families had homes on the village street, another lived within

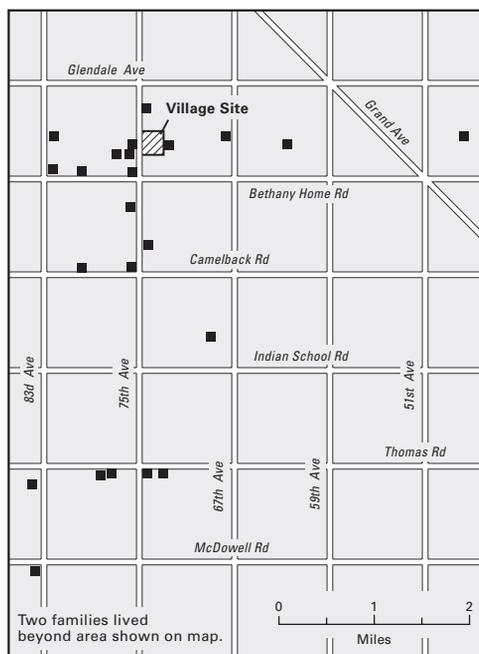


Figure 6. Residences of Molokan Church Members: Glendale, Arizona, 1971.

the village boundaries in a house facing 75<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a north-south road formerly known as Lateral 20, while still another made its home on Maryland Avenue, which now defined most of the village's northern perimeter (Cole Publications 1971; Popoff 1971, pp. 72–73 and attached maps).

In the mid-1970s Mike P. Tolmachoff, a grandson of the late patriarch, moved back into the village, where he would live for the remainder of his life, but for years he and his wife would be the site's only Molokan residents.<sup>3</sup> In 1985, their house, built around 1940 to

replace an original structure, was one of seven occupied dwellings facing the village street. Three additional houses fronted on 75<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and three others were now on Maryland Avenue. Later, a brother of Tolmachoff also returned to the village, but shortly after the beginning of this century, his period of residence, like that of Mike, was cut short by death (Beatty 2004; Cole Publications 1976 and 1985; Johnson 2005).

Today, every resident of the village is a non-Molokan. A few of the first houses, now greatly modified, stand beside the village street, but they are outnumbered by modern structures. Some original lots remain intact, but many have become fragmented, while others have been consolidated, with the largest parcel now owned by a non-Molokan who is married to the granddaughter of one of the earliest residents (Fig. 7). Only the church grounds and the cemetery are fully in Molokan hands. In October, 2005, three dwellings were vacant, and one of them, an original Molokan house on the north side of the village street, was slated for demolition and would be replaced by a

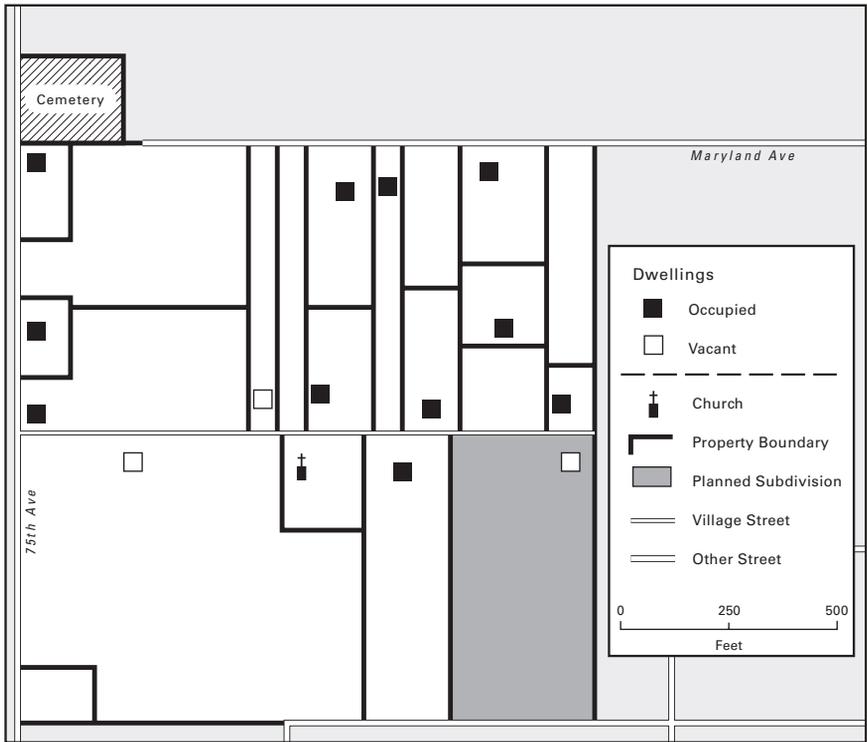


Figure 7. The Russian Molokan Village: Glendale, Arizona, October, 2005.

modern structure. A more dramatic change was about to take place on a 5-acre parcel in the southeastern part of the village, which had been purchased from Mike P. Tolmachoff's heirs by a real estate developer who intends to get this property rezoned, subdivide it, and build 15 single-family homes. The house formerly occupied by the Tolmachoffs has been vacant since the spring of 2005, and will be torn down when development begins. On Maryland Avenue, what were once the back ends of village lots have become house sites and front yards, a complete reversal of the Molokan plan. Zoning provisions which reflect the site's agricultural origins make it possible for present landowners to have cultivated fields and to keep small numbers of horses, cattle, sheep, and poultry, preserving a semi-rural island in a suburban sea that has consumed most of the early settlers' outlying properties (Beatty 2004; Cole Information 2005; Hill 2005; Johnson 2005; Maricopa County 2005; Veronin 1999, pp. 44 and 116).

### **Disintegration: Park Valley**

In Park Valley, breakup of the village was quicker and more decisive. Here, the principal problems were environmental in nature, in contrast to the personal and economic crises that affected the Glendale village. For as long as the Molokans remained in Park Valley, annual precipitation never exceeded 10 inches, and crops failed with regularity. The worst year was 1915, when fewer than 2 inches of rain fell from May 1 through the last day of August. No specific records of crop failure on the Molokans' land exist, but the words of Andrew M. Runswick, a Swedish immigrant living a mile west of their village, speak volumes about farming during this terrible summer. Runswick planted 13 acres of barley and rye in the spring of 1915, but reported that the weather was "to [*sic*] dry [for my crops] to even come up." Conditions were so bad, he said, that he decided not to plant an additional 7 acres that he had plowed in 1914. Some villagers did manage to bring in small amounts of garden produce that they had watered from domestic wells, but it was never enough (Reibin 2002; Runswick 1915; Utah Climate Center n.d.; Yates 1999, p. 17).

Crop failures were not caused by drought alone. One woman recalled later that "terrific sand storms covered up the fields two and three feet deep. And after a sand storm, cloudbursts soaked the fields to the point where everything rotted in the ground" (Young 1932, p. 161). The sand storms affected everyone's land, but probably the worst of the flash floods took place on Alex P. Karyakin's outlying parcel, where fields had been laid out astride two shallow washes which the men hoped would provide water for their crops through overflow. They never thought that thunderstorms in Utah would produce too much rain, but this occurred in June 1914, when well over an inch fell in a single storm, and again in July 1915, and they paid dearly for this oversight (Reibin 2002; Utah Climate Center n.d.).

Some people gave up and returned to California after the crop failures of 1915. By September 1916, so few children remained in the village that county officials closed the school after 1 year of operation, and moved it to another community where there was more need for it. The last families departed in 1917. One of them, too poor to afford railroad tickets, loaded their belongings and six children

into two horse-drawn wagons and made their way to Salt Lake City, where they and five other families stayed for several months to more than a year, earning money that would enable them to get back to Los Angeles. By 1920, 19 of the 20 families from the village were again living in California, with 12 of them making their homes in Los Angeles. Seven families resided in the Central Valley, where they continued to pursue their ideal of an agrarian life, but no longer within the setting of a traditional Molokan village. The 20<sup>th</sup> family, which had lived in Portland, Oregon, during the First World War, when the husband found work in a shipyard, now made its home on a rented farm in the Willamette Valley, close to a half-dozen other Molokan families (Carter, Palmer, and Norris 1970, p. 32; Los Angeles Directory 1920; Polk 1916–1918a; 1918b; U.S. Census of Population 1920b; 1920c; 1920d; 1920e; 1920f; Zolnekoff 2002).

Once it became certain that the Molokans would not return, local residents began dismantling the village, moving some of the better structures to their ranches and tearing others apart for materials needed to repair sheds and corrals. More than one Park Valley family took furniture that had been left behind and used it in their own home. As time passed, transient sheepherders took a further toll. Today, it is possible for visitors to discover the schoolhouse foundation, hints of property boundaries, scars that were once fields, and evidence of all 13 houses, but they must look carefully to find any of these. The most readily visible remnants are the graves of the Kalpakoff women, enclosed by a picket fence erected in 1915, which symbolize the effort that went into creating this community of farmers and its complete failure just a few short years later (Bowen 2003, pp. 16–19; Yates 1999, p. 17).

## Conclusions

The Molokan villages in Glendale and Park Valley began in a similar manner but evolved differently. Each was laid out by recent immigrants who had lived in traditional street villages before they came to the United States, so it is not surprising that the settlements they created closely resembled the ones that they had left behind. Each village was home to 20 families, but each contained fewer than this number of houses, which required some families to live with

relatives. Each community contained outlying properties earmarked for farming, but it is here that their paths diverged. Outlying land in Glendale was cultivated intensively, but this did not occur in Park Valley because a lack of water limited most residents' agricultural activities to their house lots. Many Glendale villagers found it convenient to take up residence close to their fields, whereas in Park Valley most outlying land remained untilled and virtually indistinguishable from surrounding expanses of dry rangeland, discouraging movement out of the village.

Failure of the villages occurred for different reasons and proceeded at different rates. Each was conceived as a self-sustaining social unit, but only the Park Valley community approached this ideal during its entire period of existence, in large part because it lasted for only a few years and during this time its residents had few viable alternatives. At Glendale, dissatisfaction with living conditions within the village and the relative ease of establishing homes on nearby parcels, the impact of the First World War and the postwar economic crisis, and the interest of outsiders in acquiring village property all took their toll. None of these factors affected the village in Park Valley, which was brought down by crop failure. In a broader sense, each fell prey to forces that remain influential in today's Intermountain West. In the case of Glendale, these were individualism, modernity, and suburban sprawl. In Park Valley, most blame should be placed on harsh environmental factors. Despite the strength of their common Old World roots, neither village could withstand the enormous pressures imposed by new cultural, economic, and physical conditions that their residents encountered in 20<sup>th</sup>-century western America.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance and encouragement of Andrew J. Conovaloff and Sarah Yates while conducting the research that led to this paper.

<sup>2</sup>It is possible that friction associated with a scheme to help Molokans from San Francisco resettle in Arizona, to which some villagers contributed land, livestock, and financial aid while others did nothing, may have influenced decisions to relocate to outlying properties, but informants do not agree on this point.

<sup>3</sup>Some informants believe that Mr. Tolmachoff never lived outside the village, but this is not supported by directories or the map prepared in 1971 by Popoff, at the time a member of Glendale's Molokan community.

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