

Kandis Friesen

One thousand, one hundred

A project in sculpture, installation, and sound
CAFKA 23: Stay with me, June 3 - July 22, 2023

One thousand, one hundred is an installation in sculpture, installation, and sound, triangulating a series of trees and their monumental forms. The work is grafted onto the Ukrainian / Russian Empire Mennonite practice of visiting the ancient Khortitsa oak tree in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, and planting its acorns in the diaspora: a slowly growing and dispersed installation of oaks around the world. Like many immigrant-settler communities, Ukrainian Mennonites often emphasize historic hardship as a way of obfuscating colonial alliances, and Mennonite narratives hold both a beautiful relationship to diaspora and a deep denial of complicity with empire, whether Russian or British/Canadian. The planting of these acorns is a poetic and material gesture that holds these things close together. This installation triangulates these trees-as-monuments in southern Ontario and southern Ukraine, marking the diasporic oaks through disrupting the narratives that accompany them. The acts of visiting and listening are central to the work.

The installation includes a sculptural billboard in Waterloo Park, and virtual sound installations at two Khortitsa oak trees growing in the Kitchener-Waterloo region: one at Conrad Grebel College and one at MCC Ontario.

Located in Waterloo Park, the sculptural billboard holds a close-up image of the the nine-hundred-year-old oak, which is slowly drowning due to the water table rise from a nearby hydroelectric dam, built during the first Stalinist five year plan in 1932. In a 1990s effort to save the tree, the city of Zaporizhzhia erected metal poles, flags, and ropes, evoking a ships masts, creating the strange image of an ancient tree dressed up as a ship, slowly drowning on dry land. The billboard's photograph crops out this monumental scaffolding, and focuses instead on the wire wrapped around its branches, and the concrete pushed into its broken limbs — attempts at holding its disintegrating body together, into some kind of maintained whole. The billboard in Waterloo Park looks onto Laurel Creek, part of the Grand River watershed, echoing the ancient tree's location beside a creek that feeds into the Dnipro River, both waterways constructed through controls and contours of settlement. The billboard's sculptural form draws from the dam itself, designed by constructivist architects Kolli and Vesnin.

The sound installation is virtually installed at two local Khortitsa oak trees, with a suggested listening time at sunrise or sunset, though you can visit at any time. Both trees feature the same ambient recording: an April morning sunrise at the ancient oak tree in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. The recording begins at 5:30 am, with dozens of birds and their songs and signals sounding alongside the active hum of traffic, with trucks already on the road after the nightly 5am curfew, the war conditioning daily rhythms in subtle and constant ways. Unfolding over 45'00, the installation is an invitation to visit the trees, to listen to both the recording and the sounds surrounding the trees, attuned to resonance, whether present or absent.

Sound Installation
Oak Tree (Conrad Grebel College)

Billboard Installation
Waterloo Park
(west of the Bandshell)

Sound Installation
Oak Tree (MCC Ontario)

CAFKA
CONTEMPORARY
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**Bringing
Contemporary
Art to the
Public Space**

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Scan the Echoes QR code, or search Echoes.xyz in your app store, to access the sound installations on site.

Sound Installations

To access the sound installation at the trees, download the free app **Echoes.xyz** from your app store. Search the app for One thousand, one hundred, or scan the QR code below. When you are in the area around either tree (shown as a circle in the app), the sound will automatically play. **Listen with your headphones for a more immersive experience.**

Conrad Grebel College | 140 Westmount Rd, Waterloo
Head to the southeast corner of the parking lot, and follow the path towards the large oak tree. The Khortitsa oak is surrounded by a small walkway and a plaque on a stone.

Accessibility: The oak tree is accessible by a hard gravel path that begins in the parking lot, with no curb. There is a bench next to the tree, and an accessible washroom inside the main entrance (8am-5pm weekdays).

MCC Ontario | 50 Kent Ave, Kitchener
From the entrance on Kent Ave, head straight to the back of the building, and curve left. To your right is a barn-like shed, and to your left is a small landscaped area: the very young and tiny Khortitsa oak is planted here.

Accessibility: The oak tree is in a small landscaped area along the parking lot thoroughway. There is a short stone wall beside the tree for sitting. The circle for this recording is wide, and the sound can be accessed in the parking lot and the area around the bike path. There is an accessible washroom in the Thrift Store (10am-5pm Monday-Saturday).

Billboard Installation

Waterloo Park | Waterloo (west of the Bandshell)
The billboard is facing Laurel Creek, just west of the Bandshell, and the closest entrance is Westmount Road.

Accessibility: Most walkways in the park are packed dirt, and the path from the Bandshell to the billboard is on grass. There are accessible parking spaces and washrooms closeby.



One thousand, one hundred Kandis Friesen

The sound recording you are listening to is 45’00 long, recorded at the start of dawn on a spring morning at the ancient Khortitsa oak tree in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine — a time when the birdsong becomes slowly and blastically bright, as the dried-out body of the dying oak is surrounded by small bushes and trees, grasses, flowers, gardens and yards, and dozens of smaller oaks growing from its scattered acorns. The recording was made by Maryna Svyrydova in late April, on a family visit to her hometown, just 40 kilometres from the current frontlines and a days drive from her home in Kyiv. Developing the work before the full-scale RF invasion of Ukraine, I planned to make the recording myself; instead I ask friends if they’ll be in Zaporizhzhia in the spring, meeting Maryna in the process. I walk around the tree slowly, circling once, and then again, my camera in hand.

I walk around the tree, its body surrounded by a short wooden fence, keeping me at a circular distance. Maybe the same distance between one’s body and a monumental figure, atop a stone pedestal. The fenced enclosure is the diameter of the tree’s former canopy, when it still had all of its bark, and shoots and leaves would arrive every year. Now this only happens on one of it’s arms, reaching west towards the sunset, away from the river.

There is a security guard who keeps watch from a small structure in the park. The area is now a kind of historical complex, amplifying the Cossack relationship to the site: you can climb a bronze horse and ride like the Cossacks did, and when you sit in the bronze saddle, the trunk of your body lines up with the trunk of the tree. There are other, smaller monuments, benches and a playground, a small church and ancient babas’ standing along the path. The site is surrounded by small houses, gardens and yards, and while technically in the city limits of Zapor-izhzhia,² it maintains a slow village vibe. This suburb was founded as the first Mennonite village in the 18th century Russian Empire, some structures still bearing the Flemish Bond brick patterns they brought from Flanders, Dutch, Frisian regions in the 16th century. Almost a Mennonite capital city, my grandmother came here as a refugee from her nearby village when she was a kid. She rarely spoke of the revolution and wars; she sometimes spoke of this oak tree’s branches, holding over her as she played in the dirt. She spoke of her village garden, the smell of spring, flowers she didn’t know the names of. She tried to describe their colours and shapes: she was good with her hands and frustrated with language.

I step inside the fence, and the guard intervenes when he sees me. It’s not clear whether its for my safety or the tree’s, probably both, as some of its dead branches wrapped in rope sway above my head. I took this photograph before he noticed me, my camera on the concrete patches and the tree’s dried-out body. It seems impossible that one branch is still living, what mechanism brings it water from the ground? But this is a mistaken thought — the last remaining leaves also provide sustenance, sun-fuelled chlorophyll. Trees are not as directional as they seem, they are spherical systems, and neither do they function alone. In the 1990s, just after independence, the tree became quickly ill, finally registering the effects of the slow water table rise from the construction of the Dnipro hydroelec- tric dam, then named after Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, in 1932. In a desperate attempt to save the oak, people spread mounds of compost, tried to block the underground water, and pushed concrete into places where large branches had broken off. Wire was wrapped around some of the pressure points, in an attempt to compress its body into a maintained being. In 1995, the city approved the development of the historic site, including a series of huge white metal poles, rising like masts from the ground, an apparatus of ropes draping down to support weaker branches, some now broken off and dangling in the wind. The scene evoked by these

1. Stone babas, or balbas, from the Turkic root for ancestor, are some names given to the ancient stone steles found in the steppe region from Ukraine to Mongolia, often associated with kurgan burial mounds and ranging from 600-3000 years old. The babas have beautiful human form, with their hands often held together, circling underneath their stomachs and low breasts. A major campaign in the early Soviet era was to flatten the kurgans, in order to make the steppe easily farmable; this led to many babas being moved, though often kept outside in their open-air context, in museum yards or parks, a practice unheard of in most western museums. Historians have recently recorded damage and total destruction of babas by the RF army in the Kharkiv region.

2. Zaporizhzhia is the capital of the oblast of the same name, and is currently 40km from the front lines. The largest European nuclear power plant is close by, occupied by the RF army since March of 2022, and the city is regularly bombed. The city was founded as Aleksandrovsk in the late 18th century, part of the Russian Empire’s so-called Novoros- siya, an occupation of what is now south- eastern Ukraine, where the empire conquered and annexed the land of the Zaporizhzhian Host and the Ottoman-allied Crimean Khanate; in 1791, the empire established the Pale of Settlement, a ghettoizing law that restricted Jewish life, residence, and movement.

3. German-born Russian Tsarina Catherine II imagined her empire as an enlightened, multi-cultural realm. After brutal conquest, she colonized the region of southeastern Ukraine with Christian European settlers. Still stateless and precarious, Mennonites

migrated for access to land and a degree of autonomy and privilege, first to the area of the Khortitsa oak. This region was the center of the Zaporizhzhian Host, a Cossack group of escaped serfs and others, often described as multi-ethnic and more independent from larger Cossack forma- tions, most of which eventually allied with different imperial powers and led anti-Jew- ish pogroms, depending on the era. After Catherine II destroyed the Zaporizhzhian Sich, she quickly settled the region with outsiders, dispossessing the Nogai, Tatars, Karaim, Cossacks and others from their lands in Crimea and north of the Black and Azov seas.

4. Mennonite Plaut’dietsch is an oral language, with dictionaries only written in the late 1970s. It is most spoken in Kazakh- stan, Canada, and Bolivia, with an estimated 400,000 speakers worldwide. While it is in some ways diminishing, it is actively used in smaller, tight-knit communities. Though it is the first language of my parents, grandpar- ents, and cousins from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, I speak very little, learning the language through my art practice and my family as an adult.

5. Mainly coming from southeastern Ukraine, they are often called Russian Mennonites (when this region was Russian Empire) or Ukrainian Mennonites (where many lived and some still live); Kazakh or Soviet Mennonites (as many stayed in Soviet Union, many exiled to Kazakhstan); Mexican Mennonites (if immigrated to Mexico), or various other nation-state-relat- ed names, including Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, Belize, Brazil, United States, Canada, Germany, Uzbekistan, Caucasus, and Russia, especially in Omsk. I use the

structural supports is as strange as it is poetic: a tree dressed up to look like a ship that is drowning on dry land, its roots slowly rotting due to the presence of a massive Stalin-era dam built downstream. I imagine the water table below us, underground, a low frequency sea providing a stationary buoyancy to this strange ship, traveling nowhere but here. Its monumentality cannot be restored; it cannot be fixed, or moved, or undone. It is a hesitant monument, encircled by narratives that push it upwards towards the sky, like invisible winds in its non-existent sails. Only the draping rope and a few broken branches move in the breeze, marking not a haunting but a void: an open space left by the dam. The airy equivalent of the reservoir created when it flooded the land upstream. I fell enamoured with this broken image, this tree-dressed-up-as-a-ship-drowning-on-dry-land, not because it was an attempt at restoration, but because it displays its own as scaffolding: disintegration as a monument itself. Its wholeness is a slow unraveling — a piling, a dangling, a hole. Content with itself, as its branches start to drag in the dirt. The Mennonites who settled here in the 18th century³ named it the Hundred Year Oak, even as they knew it was older. This was not an error, but a prediction, a wish — *they would be with the oak* for the next one hundred years. To reside in one place, without hoping for a forever in the now.

In a loose summary, Mennonites emerged within the Anabaptist movement during the Radical Reformation in 16th century Europe, resisting both the new Protestant and the old Catholic powers. The Anabaptists variously demanded the separation of church and state, the abolition of property and wealth, and a direct, collective relationship with god and each other. They baptized one another, met secretly to learn to read and write, sharing interpretations of scripture and abolish- ing the need for hierarchy and tithes and priests. Drawing on the recent German Peasant Rebellion, both movements informed the emerging socialist, communist, anarchist movements that later took shape through the theories of Marx, Engels, and others. An acute threat to dominant powers, Anabaptists were tortured and killed, and many, like the Mennonites, fled, either westward to Pennsylvania, onto occupied Lanape territory, or eastward to Prussia and then the Russian Empire, to other occupied territories. Their persecution led to a strong identification with martyrdom and displacement, and a central Mennonite book is the *Martyrs Mirror*, an illustrated compendium of torture and death that I read with deep interest as a child, one that demanded I consider death for my beliefs. It is this radical context, of a people born not of an ethnicity or nation, but of a movement and a moment, that remains central for me — to my political formation, to a collectivity that builds in opposition to property and wealth, in opposition to nationalist, ethnocentric, and colonial frameworks of power: towards justice not in a distant heaven, but here, on a material earth. Like an IWWW anthem, my choir tuned to these directions.

Mennonites who fled eastward brought Plaut’dietsch⁴ with them, a dialect of the oral Low German language that shifts with context. Absorbing bits of Polish, Ukrainian, Yiddish, Russian, and Turkish (and later Portuguese, Spanish, and English), the language is a portable architecture, grafted onto every context its speakers inhabit. While they picked up written High German in Prussia, this oral language carried an intimate collective space, understood through the saying: *dee eensja heimat fonna menniste ess oahre muttasproak - our only homeland is our mother tongue*. An aural geography, that comes into being through resonance, and dissipates when the resonance ends. Through this language and shared culture, something you could call Russian Empire Mennonite⁵ culture formed. I share this in detail to speak about the naming of the Hundred Year Oak, the ancient tree tied to future time, and the practice that came to surround it. As another wave of Mennonites left Ukraine after the 1917 revolution and wars —many losing their petit-bourgeois status and land through revolutionary collec- tivization, experiencing Soviet restrictions of religion, language and culture, and enduring the later era of Stalinist repression— the idea of leaving was not foreign to them. They had left many times before, and would likely leave again. This is a specific kind of diasporic-settler relationship: language itself as territory, a porta- bility that also implies a floating, a maintenance of possibility through separation, a severing.

term Russian Empire Mennonite to denote those who lived in that empire from the 18th century or so, and developed a somewhat common culture, some of which is still held in common today.

6. Part of Documenta 7 in 1982, in Kassel, Germany, Beuys and volunteers planted 7000 oak trees in the city and across West Germany, each with a recognizable basalt stone marker, as his work for the exhibition. Documenta itself was an ideologically-driven post-war national project started in 1955, supported by allied / occupation forces, and billed as a kind of ‘reset’ for (West) German culture, freed from it’s National Socialist past. Meanwhile, many prominent NS figures held positions in government, universities, and major businesses, and many (if not most) companies who profited from concentration and death camp labour paid little to no reparation or apology, up to the present.

7. Simon Schama writes about this exten- sively in *Landscape and Memory*, docu- menting the desire of fascist, imperial Germanic power to root itself in a distant tribal ‘German’ past, invoking the tempo- rality of oak trees and pagan oak worship. Head Nazi architect Albert Speer built on this ideology, obsessed with future ruins, always thinking a thousand years into the future and into the past. He prioritized ‘natural’ materials such as oak and stone, and famously composed architectural light installations at the Nuremberg rallies.

Importantly, Benjamin Goossen elaborates on enthusiastic Mennonite collaboration with the Nazi army while they occupied Ukraine, and the development of Mennonite ethnic identity as allied with German-ness and empire in *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and*

These Mennonites developed a practice of planting acorns from the Khortitsa oak, a dispersed and diasporic forest. When I first learned of Joseph Beuys’ *7000 Oaks*,⁶ I was surprised at their similarity, both a subtle ethno-arboricultural practice that, at first glance, seems quite beautiful, but holds a deeper implication in its roots. In addition to the historical use of the oak as a symbol of naturalized, ancient power in National Socialist and earlier imperial German⁷ ideologies, both practices separate a tree from wider relational life, and produce it as a singularity, a monument — Beuys’ trees are planted separately, each marked by a basalt stone, and the Mennonite trees are often rendered official through a plaque or a ceremonial planting. The commemorative aspect is repeated, producing a Menno- nite memorial that functions both on its own, and as a site of future invocation. The common theme of freedom — of Canada as salvation, for example — is recurring, silencing the colonial violence enacted by the British Empire and Canadian state, the process through which Mennonites became settlers, salvaged, saved. A commemoration can be a kind of cleansing.

Commemorations further sanitize the messy history lived by the actors. They contribute to the continuous myth-making process that gives history its more definite shapes: they help to create, modify, or sanction the public meanings attached to historical events deemed worthy of mass celebration. [...] Years, months, and dates present history as part of the natural cycles of the world. By packaging events within temporal sequences, commemorations adorn the past with certainty: the proof of the happening is in the cyclical inevitability of its celebration.

— Michel Trouillot, Silencing The Past

I’ve never been to the Waterloo region, but I know there are Khortitsa oaks there before I start looking, and I quickly find two official trees: one planted in 2004, for the founding of the Russian Mennonite Memorial Garden at Conrad Grebel University College, growing next to Laurel Lake, part of the Grand River water system.⁸ The other was planted just last year, alongside the parking lot of the Mennonite Central Committee Ontario offices, in honour of the MCC centenni- al, founded in 1921 to send aid to Mennonite refugees in Ukraine. I speak with people at both organizations, to understand the desire to plant these oaks. We talk about honouring those lost, killed, and exiled; of cultural memory, and connection to place. We talk about the current war in Ukraine, solidarity and aid, the intensity of violence and loss in the same regions as a century ago. We talk about what it means to plant a tree as a monument on this land, this specific land, on these traditional territories of the Attawandaron (Neutral) and Haudenosaunee peoples, this Six Nations of the Grand River Haldimand Tract land, this Mississau- gas of the Credit First Nation land. This land, where nations were made refugees through genocide, famine and wars, the cultural ban, stolen children, the occupa- tion that never ended, the continual flow.⁹ This land where Black freedom runners built homes and communities just northwest of Waterloo Township, only to be forced out, both their presence and eviction almost erased.¹⁰ We talk about the separation of histories,¹¹ of visiting trees and the grammar of plaques.¹²

The first time I saw the dam, I travelled through it from below. Our boat entered the lock, the sun obliterated, as we moved from the wide, open river to a sudden enclosure, the bottom of a tall concrete box. The engines turned off and the acoustics were strange, like an empty wet cavern with sky at one end. It echoed, only upwards. I felt a creep of panic, and with nowhere to go, I sat and listened to this strange space, as I knew I would never enter it again. The water slowly rose, and we were transported up to the other side, up and eventually over, in a slow process that felt much too fast. It was one of the largest dams in the world when built, and it covered the almost-impassible rapids that existed here —*za-porohamy*— drowning them in their own water, while controlling the rapid river as it flows towards the Black Sea. It was built as part of the first Five Year Plan,¹³ between 1927 and 1932, with engineering assistance from Germany, US, and Canada, a presence of Canadian colonial industrial knowledge right here in southeastern Ukraine. This smoothing of the river —its surface and its flow— is

and Mennonite work towards justice and reconciliation. Presentations from the conference will be published in the upcom- ing issue of Journal of Mennonite Studies.

12. There is another tree-as-monument at Conrad Grebel University College, a black walnut tree planted in honour of Swiss Mennonite settler arrival. It has now received a second plaque, twelve years after its first plaque, acknowledging that the tree was planted as a settler monument, and that now, now, there is work to do — what is to be done? *A new plaque everyday. The same plaque, but it gets repainted everyday. The same plaque, but it gets repainted every hour, sloppy and still wet, convoluted into a slow-moving fountain of paint. The plaque is removed and remade in cardboard every- day - only cardboard, string, and a sharpie - and, depending on whether its raining or snow- ing, it might disintegrate into a papery pile. The plaque stays and is covered with a new metal inscription of a QR code for bank transfers directly to defenders at 1492 Land Back Lane. Both plaques are buried in the ground, and they receive a third plaque, that marks the histories of the plaques and announces an institutional commitment to Protect The Tract, guided by the Haudeno- saunee Haldimand Tract Moratorium. The above-ground plaque for the two buried plaques is built so large that it houses outdoor tables and a fire pit and benches and chairs for gathering. The plaque-that-is-now-a-space-for-out- door-gathering receives it’s own plaque, which is an artist-run plaque for muted and silenced histories in the region — those emanating from here, and those forced here through other colonial displacements. The plaque is hammered down to a thin metal sheet and used as a speaker, and the*

13. The dam was designed by Kolli and Vesnin, two architects who survived the Stalinist prohibition of Constructivism by adjusting their work to industrial projects. It was built of concrete, stretching across the Dnipro River and flooding whole villages, creating a Zaporizhzhian Atlantis of houses, cemeteries, and churches, trees and gardens, now at the bottom of the reservoir. A void was filled, dark and soaking wet, the water flow counted as it crossed the concrete lines. A Five Year Plan was the calendar-clock of the Soviet mass-industri-

one of the structural projects of modernity: the smoothness of land, water, movement, making, thinking, speaking, hearing, feeling, smooooooooothed out into a manageable, profitable, calculable flow. This smoothed-out dam apparatus electrified a massive industrial region, producing a huge reservoir over one hundred kilometres long, easy-to-navigate and elevate. Like the steppe,¹⁴ smoothed of its kurgan and flattened into tillable soil, both the land and the water were brushed and pressed, ready to continue the flow.

The sound recording you are listening to is 45’00 long, recorded at the start of dawn on a spring morning at the Khortitsa oak tree in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine — a time when the birdsong becomes slowly and blastically bright, as the dried-out body of the dying tree is surrounded by small bushes and trees, grasses, flowers, gardens and yards, and dozens of smaller oaks growing from its scattered acorns.

The ancient tree’s protected status produces a small oasis here for plant and animal life, and in its centre, a fenced-in circular void. And when the central tree disintegrates enough, you will be able to enter this void, centre your body where the tree once was, and listen to the sound of sunrise surround you. This is the void of the hesitant monument, stuck and always moving, sailing and always rooted; refusing solidity through its material formations. It is a sonic architecture, produced through its own monumental scaffolding, its absence twinned with the reservoir of the dam: one dark and wet and heavy — immensely quiet — and the other bright and airy, full of sound. To reside in one place, without building a forever in the now.

This birdsong was recorded on a late April morning, just after the end of the nightly 5h00 curfew — a time that, before the full-scale invasion, was quiet and calm, now filled with sounds of movement that begin as soon as the curfew hours stop. War is a time of counting, counting, marking, repeating like a circular circumference, repeating like a memory you’re not sure you can recall, repeating, as the reference point falls away. Counting, or not at all counting, counting down and counting up, with the interior thought that a monument is too solid for this experience of this kind of time, too solid for this kind of loss. This is the interior of the void, you center your body in the middle; it is a sonic space, floating and always rooted, refusing solidity to the rhythm of your interior choir. The hum of highway traffic rolls, people talk on their way to work, the guard dog barks its job, footsteps pass on gravel. Time is stretched and pulled, compressed and stuck, tripping.



The Khortitsa oak tree in April, 2023, photo by Maryna Svyrydova.

alization campaign, drawing on the massive- ly destructive practices of industrialized countries, such as Canada. It was a very specific form of counting, a high pressure expectation of transformation — counting, counting, like a circular circumference, repeating itself as the reference point falls away.

14. This vast prairie of steppe grasses was flattened for efficient production during the early Soviet period. Part of the Eurasian steppe that stretches from Bulgaria to Mongolia, this region of Ukraine held over 500,000 kurgan, ancient burial mounds that shaped the landscape and produce(d) micro-climates and -ecologies. After the intensive flattening of the land, only about 50,000 remain, mostly in the middle and edges of fields, now being mined and trenched, traced with phosphorus in the RF invasion and occupation of Ukraine. This flattening also happened in the prairies on Turtle Island, through genocidal policies and acts, the attempted annihilation of the bison, occupation and mass settlement of immigrants and refugees, including many Mennonites, Ukrainians, and Jews from this part of Ukraine. In southern Ontario, the colonial powers destroyed old growth forest through logging and settlement, selling wood for the furnaces of European industry and materially expanding the British navy, with an average ship requiring 8000 oak trees alone. The old growth was a thick and textured ecosystem, sustainably managed by the nations who cared for it forever; British/Canadian occupiers systematically dredged, evened, and surveyed it into settler farms, orchards, fields, and roads in less than a few hundred years.

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