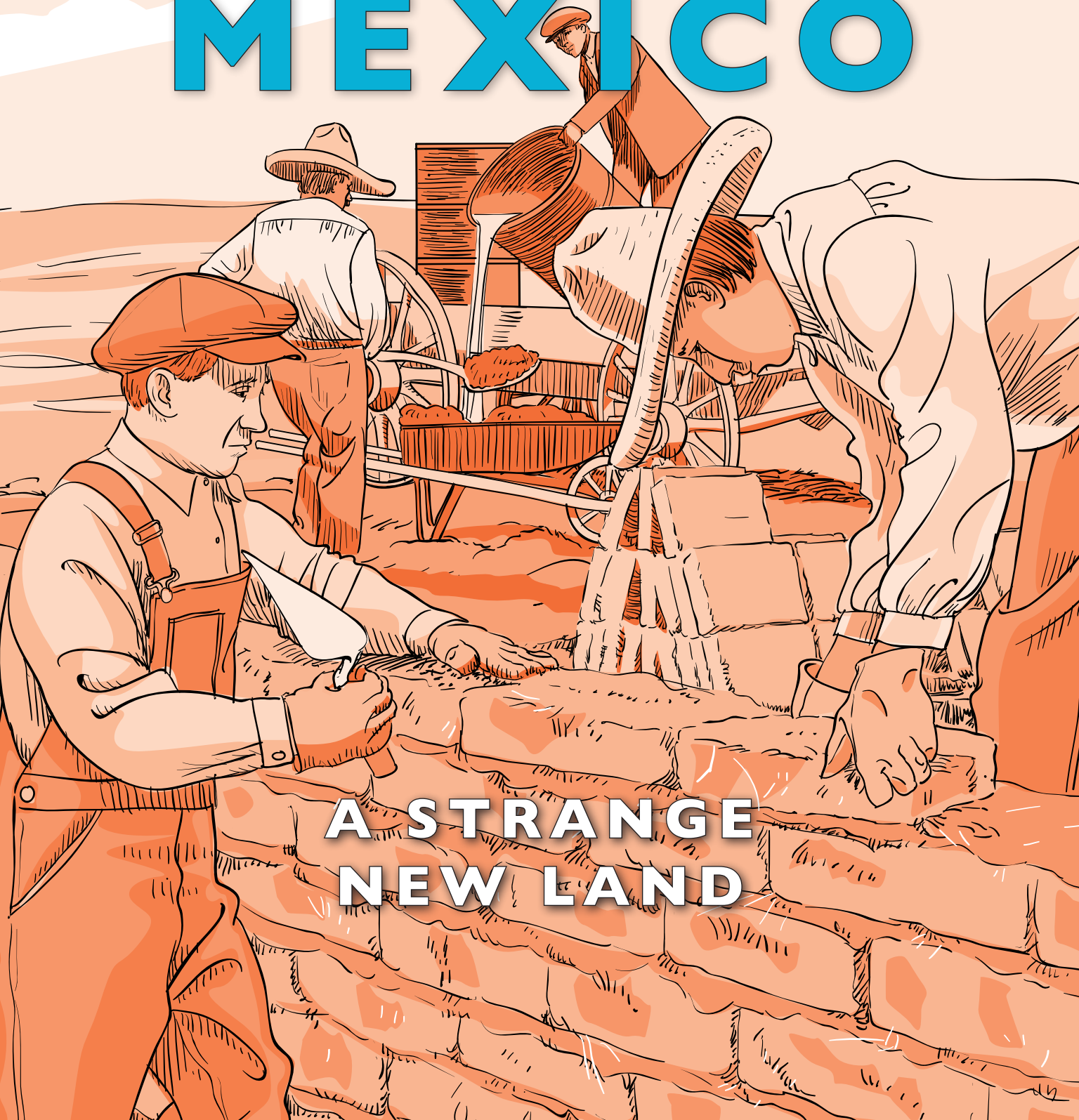


# DISCOVERING MEXICO



**A STRANGE  
NEW LAND**



# DISCOVERING MEXICO

Mennonite History for Young People  
Volume Two

# DISCOVERING MEXICO

**A STRANGE  
NEW LAND**

Rosabel Fast  
D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation  
2017

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## INTRODUCTION

This is the second volume of a story that begins in the 1920s and ends around 1960. It is about Old Colony Mennonites who moved from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s. The first volume told the story of Mennonites leaving Canada and settling in Mexico. This volume is about these Mennonites getting to know their new homeland and the people they meet there.

This story is a history, a true story about the past. In writing history, we can only tell the stories that we know, those that were left behind for us. History is the truest story we can tell with the information we can find.

History is not about people who *died* long ago. It is about people who were *alive* in the past. To enjoy history we must get into the lives of the people. As we learn facts from the past, we start to think about what it must have been like. The more information we find, the better we can see what life was like for young people and adults in the olden days.

Then we can start to think about what history means. What would our forebears, our grandparents and great grandparents, want us to *know* about them? What would they like us to *remember* about them? What would they like us to *learn* from them?

\* \* \*

In this reader you will also find vignettes as you did in the first volume. These stories introduce a section of history. To write the vignettes, I looked at facts I had about the past. Then I wondered what life must have been like in Mexico in the past. How did children, young people and their families experience life? Vignettes describe what their experiences might have been like.

—the author



## WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

### **Bold words**

In this reader you will find words in **bold** letters. These are words that you may not know. The meaning of a bold word usually comes right after the bolded word. You will also find the bolded words and their meanings at the back of the reader, in two lists. The first list follows the order in which they are used in the reader. The second list is in alphabetical, A-B-C order.

### **Italicized words**

You will also see *italicized* words. These are words from a language other than English: German, Plautdietsch (Low German) and sometimes Spanish. Usually the English word comes right after the italicized word.

Do you like to learn new words from another language? Yes? At the end of the paragraph you will find a guide for pronouncing foreign words. Use the guide to pronounce the italicized words. No? Don't worry. You do not need to read the Plautdietsch or German or Spanish to understand the stories in this reader. You can jump right to the English meanings that come after the foreign words.

Another use for italics is emphasizing an English word. For example, saying "The train *roared* into the station" means that the roar was loud.

### **What does a star or a dagger after a word mean?**

If you see a star\* (called an asterisk) or a dagger† (called an obelisk), this means that you can find more information about the word at the end of the paragraph.

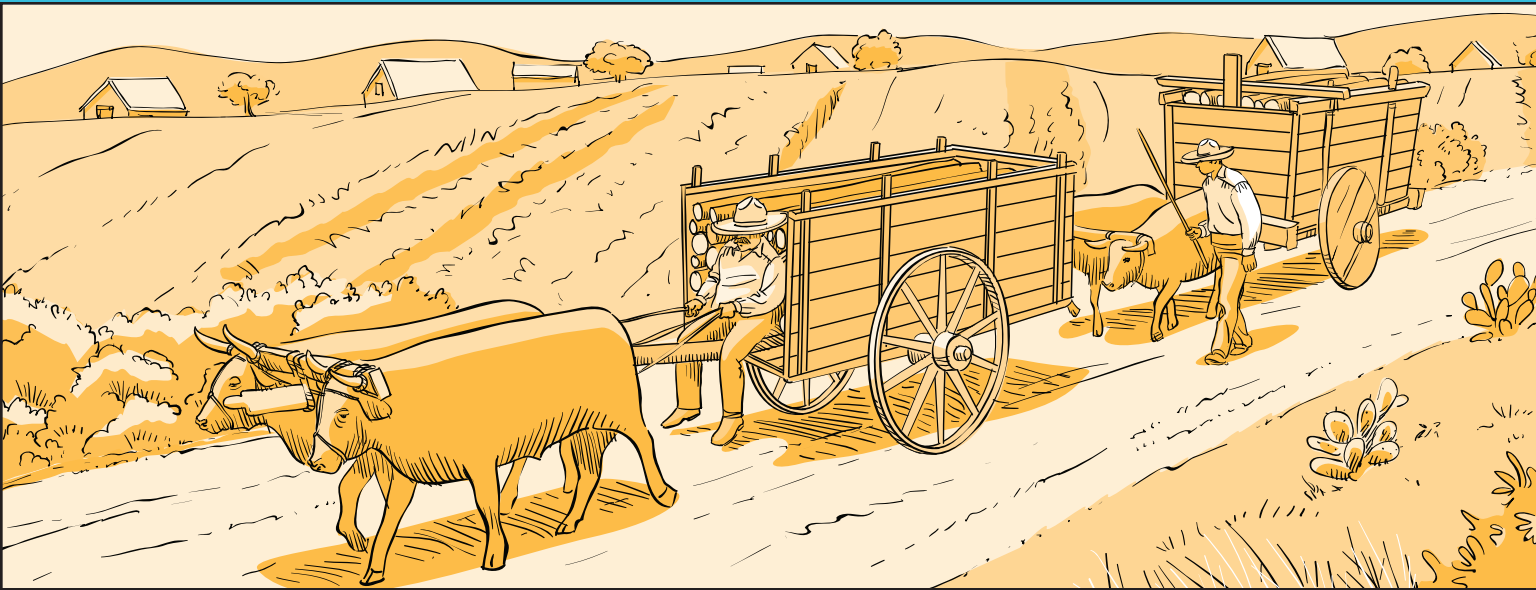
### **Did you know that . . .**

Mennonites who live in Mexico today often know four languages! Plautdietsch, German, Spanish and English.



# Meeting

## CHAPTER ONE



## 1 FIRST MEETINGS

Mexicans and Mennonites first met each other in Mexico City. That was in 1921 in President Alvaro Obregón's beautiful palace. Six Mennonite farmers from Canada had come to find land in Mexico. Their people called the group their delegates.

On this land the people planned to build new farms, set in villages

## Presidents of Mexico

---

★ **Alvaro Obregón**

December 1, 1920 –  
November 30, 1924

---

★ **Plutarco Calles**

December 1, 1924 –  
November 30, 1928

---

**Emilio Gil**

December 1, 1928 –  
February 4, 1930

---

**Pascual Rubio**

February 5, 1930 –  
September 4, 1932

---

**Abelardo Rodríguez**

September 5, 1932 –  
November 30, 1934

---

★ **Lázaro Cárdenas**

December 1, 1934 –  
November 30, 1940

★ Presidents you will meet in this reader.

on a colony. But first they needed a promise. They wanted full freedom in Mexico to follow their Christian Mennonite faith. It took one week to write up the agreement with the president. Once it was signed, the people could make plans to move to Mexico.

In 1922, the new Mennonite settlers saw Mexicans for the first time. Their train from Canada had arrived in Juarez, a city on the Mexico border. Both groups, the Mennonites in the train and the Mexicans outside, stared at each other. They both thought the other group looked very strange.

In Juarez, a group of soldiers – well **armed** with rifles *and* revolvers on their hips – got on the train. They were there to guard the train from robbers. The Mennonites in the train – who did *not* carry guns – were scared. Then they were surprised. The Mexican strangers with guns were friendly. They were easy to get to know.

When their train got to Chihuahua City, the Mennonites met train workers. These Mexicans told them where their train would take them: across high mountains and deep valleys. The Mennonites came from the flat **prairies** of Canada. They had seen low hills in the distance. They had never before seen mountains!

San Antonio de los Arenales was a train station, right next to the



Mennonites' new land. Here the Canadian Mennonites and local Mexicans met again. A crowd of Mexicans surrounded the **light-skinned**, white strangers as they stepped off train. Mexican men and boys quickly began to help Mennonites unload their goods.

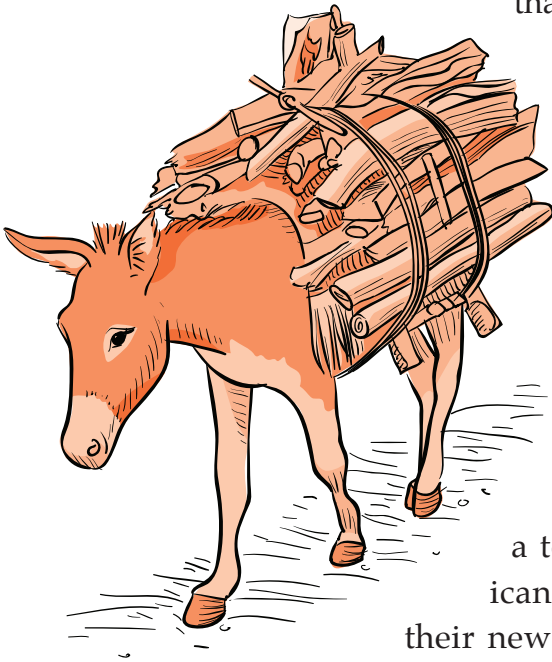
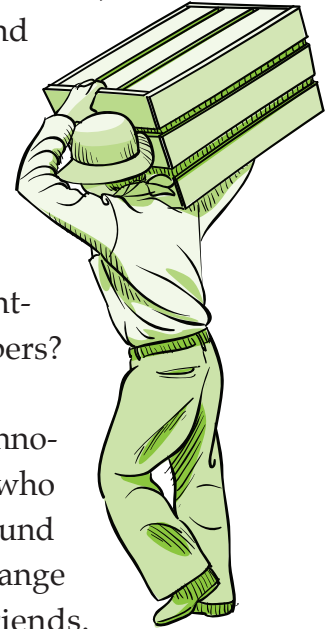
In the early days, when the Mennonites were setting up their new villages, Mexicans came around selling goods: corn, firewood, hogs, horses, cows and other items. Some of these **peddlers**, selling their goods, cheated the Mennonites. Others came back at night and stole their goods. They frightened the Mennonites. Were all Mexicans thieves and robbers? they wondered.

The Mennonites soon found out that this was not so. Mennonites learned how to live in their new home from the people who **were at home**, who lived there. They found that people who seemed strange at first could become friends.

One of their ministers, Isaak Dyck, noticed that Mexicans had a way of being patient and content. He said this was something the Mennonites should learn from Mexicans.

The Mennonite settlers also met Germans, people who had once lived in Germany. These Germans lived in San Antonio. After the Mennonites arrived, San Antonio grew into a town. Germans, Mexicans and Americans were soon opening businesses for their new customers. Later, in 1928, the name of their little town was changed to Cuauhtémoc.

Mexicans collected firewood in the nearby forest to use for cooking. They also sold the wood to Mennonite villagers. Their small strong donkeys could carry very heavy loads.



## 2 OUR STORYTELLERS

Walter Schmiedehaus came from Germany. When the Mennonite colonies opened in Chihuahua, Mr. and Mrs. Schmiedehaus moved to San Antonio. Here Mr. Schmiedehaus worked in a bank. Later he was the German Consul in Chihuahua State. He **represented**, spoke for the government of Germany in Mexico.



Walter Schmiedehaus and his wife Irene lived in this cozy little house in Cuahtémoc.

Mr. Schmiedehaus loved Mexico. He also enjoyed his new Mennonite German Canadian neighbours. These settlers knew German but spoke *Plautdietsch*\*. Mr. Schmiedehaus often translated for them: German to Spanish and Spanish to German. Many times he helped them **negotiate**, discuss things with the Mexican government.

Mr. Schmiedehaus was a good story teller. In 1948 he wrote a book about his Chihuahua experiences. He called it, *Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott*†. In

\* Pronounced PLOWt deetch (a form of German).

† Pronounced EYene FESS-te Boerg ist UN-zer Gott.

English, this means “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” You will find some of his stories in this reader.

You will also find stories that Minister Isaak Dyck wrote. In the early years in Mexico, Isaak Dyck was a young minister. Later he was an *Ältester*<sup>\*</sup>, the lead minister of the church. In this reader he is called “the minister.”

Sarah Fast Wiebe grew up on the Swift Current Colony in Chihuahua. She also shared stories from her life. You will find some of them in this reader as well

### 3 THE PRIVILEGIUM

Mennonites from Canada were a **separate** people. They kept themselves apart from the world around them. They were farmers who lived simply and peacefully on colonies. For them this was the best way to live their Christian faith. In Mexico they could live in villages on colonies. Here they could have their own schools and churches. They also had their own colony government. They could do all this in their own languages, German and Plautdietsch. This is what President Alvaro Obregón promised the Mennonites in 1921. They called their agreement with Mexico their *Privilegium*<sup>†</sup>.

### 4 SEPARATE BUT NOT ALONE

Of course, the separate Mennonites did not live alone. Their colonies were set among the people of Mexico (see The Chihuahua Colonies map on the following page). If the colonies were to **prosper**, do well, they would have to get to know the people in whose country they lived. As they did that, they began to feel at home in Mexico. As the years passed, Mexico became their real home. Canada moved into the past. It became the *old* homeland.

The stories in this reader are about separate colony people learning to

---

\* Pronounced AHL tes ta.

† Pronounced Pri ve LAY hee um.

# THE CHIHUAHUA COLONIES



**Legend:**

- Town
- Mennonite Village
- Railway
- Creek



live among strangers. The president had invited the Mennonites to live in his country. When he did that, he invited them to live *among* the Mexican people. He wanted his people to learn modern ways of farming from the newcomers.

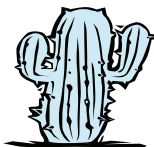
In 1921, the Mennonites had told the president that they were people of the land. They called themselves an *einfaehes Akersvolk*\*, a plain farming people. They **cultivated** land and grew food on it. President Obregón liked that. He said Mexico had enough business people. What Mexico needed was more farmers. This meant that the Mennonites had to get to know the land.

---

\* Pronounced EYEn fagh es AH kares fallk.



Mennonite village streets were part of the roads that went through the colonies. These Mexican neighbours from Miguel Chiqito are travelling through the village of Gnadenfeld.





# Getting to Know the Land

## CHAPTER TWO



### 1 ONCE YOU KNOW THE CLIMATE, IT GETS BETTER

New Mennonite settlers in Mexico thought they understood harsh weather. They had, after all, come from Manitoba and Saskatchewan in Canada. There winter lasted for months. Fierce snowstorms lasted up to three days. Temperatures went down to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . They had thought Mexico would be sunny and warm all year. They soon found out how wrong they were.

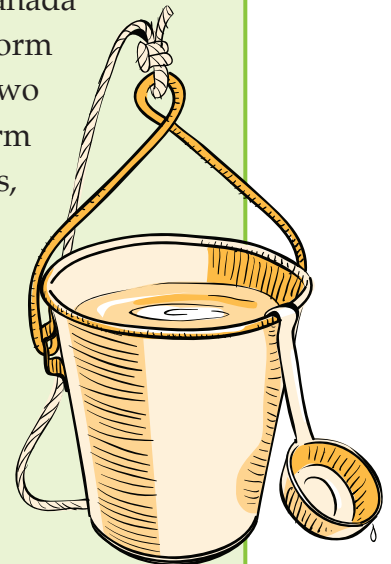
## VIGNETTE

# The Minister

The busy minister finally had time to sit down for a rest. First he **gulped** down, drank a dipper of water. My, this land was dry! Then he sat back to think about last Sunday. In Canada it would soon be spring time. In Mexico it was storm season. His people had made it through the first two years in Mexico. They had had their first sandstorm while living in tents. Now they had wooden houses, but storms were still frightening. Even inside their strong houses built with Canadian wood, they felt unsafe. Last Sunday a storm had come out of the southwest. The wind was fierce. Like a blizzard in Canada, thought the minister. But here the air was **gritty**, rough. It blasted sharp, stinging sand into your face. At least no one froze to death in a sandstorm. The minister smiled at the idea.

By Sunday the wind had let up a little. People were tired of staying indoors. They were glad to get out and walk to church. The song leader called out the number for the first hymn. For thirty minutes the group sang, loudly and slowly. Maybe the people were trying to sing louder than the wind. Singing, thought the minister, was an interesting thing. It was the same in a Canadian snow blizzard and a Mexican sandstorm.

After the hymns, the minister had shared Words from their Heavenly Father. He read the sermon in a slow rhythm. As he read, he could see the strain leave the people's faces. They knew they had a God whom they could trust. After the sermon, the





people kneeled on the floor by the wooden boards that were their first **pews**, church benches. Everyone prayed silently.

The minister had felt the peace of God in his sad heart when he prayed. Two years ago he and his wife had lost their little son Benjamin. In quiet times like this, the minister felt his sadness. It was comforting to pray silently. He could remember their happy little Beantje\*, before he had gotten so sick. Back in their tent village, they had had no way of making him better. But he must not forget to also pray for the people. They needed to be **reassured**, comforted. They had been getting used to many things. Sandstorms were only one of them.

After the prayer came the closing hymn. The words went straight to the heart. The minister's spirits lifted as he sang with the other villagers. "Once you get used to the climate," it was said, "it gets better." Maybe that was so. By the end of the day, the wind had settled, as it always did. "I do believe," said the minister to himself, "that I'm getting used to the climate."

---

\* Pronounced BE-ent tje (Little Benjamin).

## 2 GETTING TO LOVE THE CLIMATE

Walter Schmiedehaus had seen many sandstorms in San Antonio de los Arenales. After all, *Los Arenales*<sup>†</sup> means The Sand Hills! Every year he and Mrs. Schmiedehaus learned again what sand was: how much sand could swirl around their little town that was built on a sand hill. After each storm, every piece of furniture in the house had to be dusted yet again.

Mr. Schmiedehaus watched the Canadian Mennonites. He could see how hard it was for them to get used to the **climate**, weather. They had thought

---

†Pronounced LOHS Ah ray NAH lace.

Mexico would be warm because it was in the south. Already in their first days here, they had seen how wrong they were. In March 1922, the temperature went up to 18° C in the daytime. At night it went down to -8° C. In March that year, the Mennonites were living in tent villages.

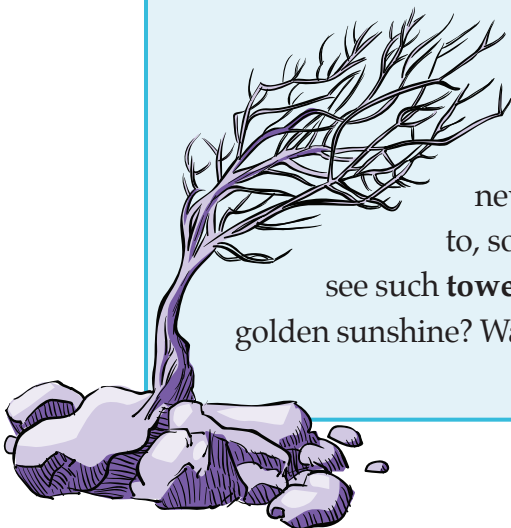
## THIS MIGHT ALSO INTEREST YOU . . .

# Weather Around the Year

Mr. Schmiedehaus loved the weather of mountainous northern Mexico as you can tell by this description:<sup>1</sup>

Regarding water, **the heavens**, skies are **extraordinarily frugal**, very stingy. The droughts are hard to bear. Then when the rain comes, the heavens do not know when to stop. The rain that streams down is unstoppable. The dry soil in the garden can't soak it all up. So, instead of growing, the seeds drown in all that water.

As for the lightning storms, the new settlers had never seen anything like it. Storms rolled down from the mountains. Then they dropped their force on the valley. Storms had no end of keys to unlock ever more downpours. The coming of the rainy season was another new experience. But it was easy to get used to, something very nice. Where else would one see such **towering**, high clouds, **rimmed**, bordered with golden sunshine? Was there anything more wonderful than the



time after a **sultry**, hot and humid thunderstorm? The clean, power-giving, mountain air that streamed into your lungs was *ausgezeichnet*<sup>\*</sup>, outstanding.

In northern Mexico, the whole year turns around its summer-time rainy season. Overnight, the brown prairie changes. It is covered in waves of soft green grass. Flowers bloom everywhere, especially in Mennonite gardens! The field mice grow fat on the beetles and grain they find to eat. In the fields, the crops suddenly grow at great speed; you can almost see the corn growing. The beans sprout and grow. The oats, which looked so **meagre**, small, now grow with astonishing speed.

The cows have also come into good times. They stand in green prairie grass that reaches up to their **bellies**, stomachs. This is especially so for Mexican beef cattle on the ranches. In the dry season, ranch cows get skinnier and skinnier. Some die of hunger. During the rainy season, they grow round and glossy.

Then comes autumn and later harvest time. Harvest goes on into December. In Canada the land lies under snow for many months. It hardly ever snows in Mexico, even up north, in Chihuahua and Durango. When snow does come, it is welcome. It brings moisture to the soil. Sometimes not one drop of rain or snow falls throughout the winter. Winter can also be cold, but never as cold as in Canada.

After winter comes spring. With it comes **treacherous**, dangerous wind. Dry, unstoppable winds blow across the **plateau**, hills or mountains with flat tops. **Wind stockings** swirl over the fields. Powerful dust clouds wander over the prairies. Our sandy mountain in San Antonio was often completely covered in fine sand. If you were outside for a short while, you came in looking as if you worked in a cement factory.

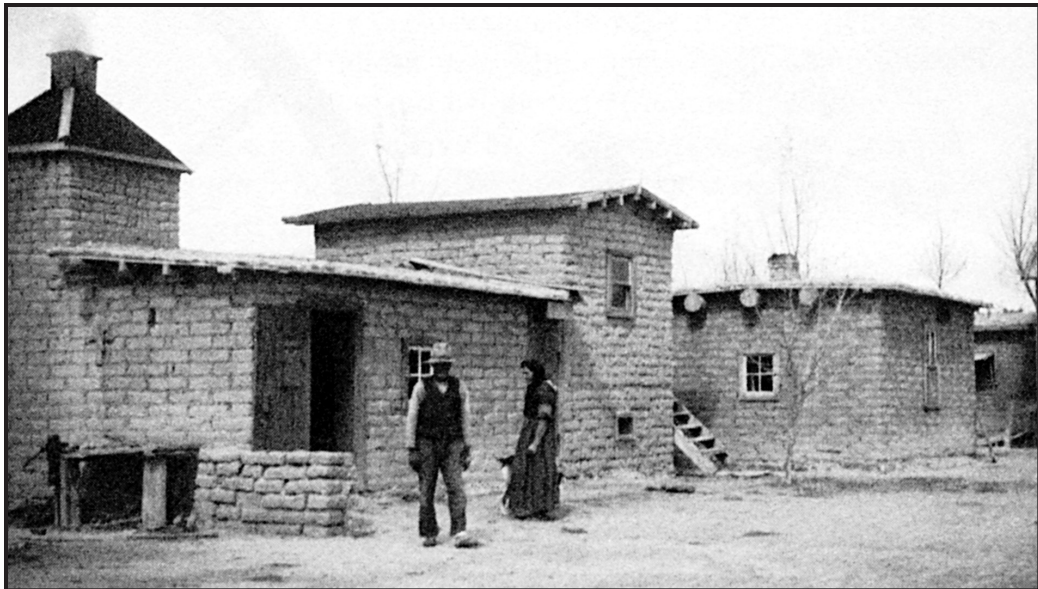
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\*Pronounced OWs geh tsEYEjch net

Fierce storms and heavenly rain were both part of life in Mexico. Over time, Mennonites came to love their dry mountain climate. They also learned many other things, about how to live separately-together with their new neighbours. And they learned how to work the land. But it was when they got used to the climate that they started to feel at home.

### 3 LIVING ON THE LAND

In an amazingly short time, village plans turned into real villages. Every village had a street with a row of houses on each side. At first the houses were small. Soon families were building larger homes. Some even built large barns attached to the houses. Each farmyard also had small out buildings for pigs and chickens.



The first houses in Mennonite villages were built Canadian style, with wood. The newcomers soon learned that adobe was the better Mexican way. Over time, houses, barns and even fences were all made of adobe.

The Mennonites had brought lumber from Canada for building. They had also cut wood in the forest in the mountains. When San Antonio got a

## VIGNETTE

# Abram

Abram liked to work. He was lucky that school only went for six months of the year.

The rest of the year he kept busy, building. Two years ago, when he was nine, they had come to this place. There was nothing here but land and sky. Abram had been dismayed. Father still teased Abram about what he said when they got to their village site. “But Pau, there’s no village here!” Abram had **announced**, said. Father couldn’t help laughing out loud. “You’re right. There isn’t,” he said. “We’ll *build* a village.” And they had.

The village now had a street down the middle and a house on every yard. The houses were mostly small. There were also a few big wooden houses with a large barn attached, right next to the house. Every house had a garden beside it, and all the animals had some kind of shelter. There was also a road on the colony and solid wood bridges over the creeks.

Abram’s village also had a school. School wasn’t much fun for Abram. He had already finished the top level. He was a *Biebla*\*. He had done all the Arithmetic cards, knew his Catechism and was pretty good at writing. Now he helped the teacher with the little children. Sometimes the school work was boring but being teacher helper was okay.



---

\* Pronounced BEE blah (Schools had four levels, similar to grades. The Biebla were in Level 4.)

Building the village is what Abram really enjoyed. Today they were starting work on their new house. It would be made of adobe. Adobe bricks were made of mud mixed with straw and dried in the sun. They made thick strong walls. Two Mexican bricklayers helped them: tall, slim Vicente, and short, wide Ramón. They had brought the frames, mixed the red-brown mud with straw, shovelled the mixture into the frames and packed it down. Then they left the bricks to dry in the sun.

As soon as the bricks were dry, the men were back. The walls of the new five-room house were marked out on the ground, where Mother had said they should go. The two builders went to work. They knew exactly what Mother wanted. They would make sure she got it.

There wasn't much for Abram to do but watch and learn. It wouldn't take him long to learn how to build an adobe house. It looked easy and was fast work. In no time the red earth walls were standing. The window and door openings were all there, according to Mother's plan. Vicente even put in some decorations. Into the wet **mortar**, mud between the bricks, he stuck small red stones in a pretty pattern. "Your Mother needs a beautiful house," he said to Abram.

Next week Abram, Father and their neighbour would build the wooden window and door frames. Then they would cover the wood roof rafters with corrugated iron sheeting, and the new house would be ready.

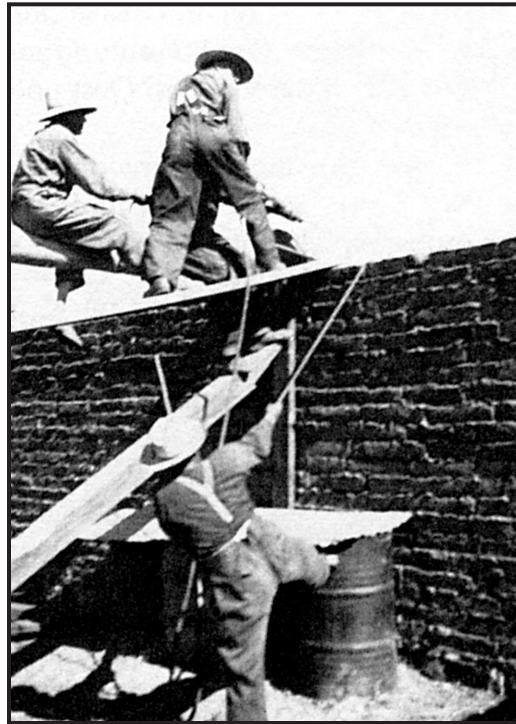
The big wooden houses that the richer families were building were nice. Abram liked his red-brown earth house better. It was the exact same colour as their fields.

lumber yard, they could buy lumber there. But wood wasn't the best way to build in Mexico. Mexican neighbours showed them the better, adobe way. Once the Mennonites got used to looking at red-brown earthen brick walls,

they agreed with Abram. Adobe houses were very pretty.

Over time, all buildings were made of adobe. Even the fences around the yards were adobe. Adobe walls kept the heat out in summer. In winter they kept out the cold. Adobe also cost a lot less than lumber. There were other things that worked better when they were done the Mexican way.

Mexicans were experts at building with adobe. Mennonite farmers learned from them, but many still preferred to hire Mexican builders.



## 4 SARAH'S TALES: PLANTING CORN THE MEXICAN WAY

Sarah Wiebe was three years old when her family left Canada. They settled on the Swift Current Colony in Chihuahua, Mexico. When Sarah was an old lady, she lived in the *Altenheim*<sup>\*</sup>, old people's home. Everyone loved to hear Sarah's memories about the olden days. Here is one of Sarah's stories:

When we first got to Mexico, our parents had four big boys who worked on the farm. Our parents hired Mexicans only when they needed help with the corn. They had to see to it that the seeds got into the ground. Our parents planted corn like the Mexicans did it. First you removed the dry soil, so that there was no dry soil on top. For this they hired Mexican workers. Then holes were made for seeding, using a long pointed stick. We young ones had to walk along behind, throwing a few seeds into each little hole. The

<sup>\*</sup> Pronounced AHL ten HEYEM.



holes were then closed with a *Koofoot*<sup>\*</sup>, cowfoot tool. My brothers made the holes and we little ones had to throw in the corn seeds.

Our parents found that they got much better corn crops than other Mennonites. Our corn came up very well; every plant came up. Those who planted corn with a machine didn't get nearly the same results. One farmer said he had definitely gotten at least seven plants per row. The rows were one kilometre long! (ha ha).

One year we planted 65 acres, all with the *Koofoot*. That took us exactly one month. *Dan meend daut schaufen*<sup>†</sup>. That meant working hard. I had only one morning that month where I hadn't been on the field. Otherwise I was there all the time, day after day. Sometimes I had to follow along and plant seeds, three rows at a time, behind three boys.

I was nine years old and I taught myself how to do the seeding by watching my parents. I held the corn sack in one hand; meanwhile I put two kernels into the other hand and **tossed**, threw them neatly into the hole. This way I didn't have to bend over as I walked along the row.

The boys noticed how straight I walked. They told Father that my seeds weren't going into the holes because I wasn't bending over. There were many holes that had no corn in them. Father took out his little mirror that he used for looking into my holes. All of my holes had seeds in them. It was the other children who were scattering seeds beside their holes!



\* Pronounced COW fowt.

† DAHn mEYEd dowt SHOU fen.

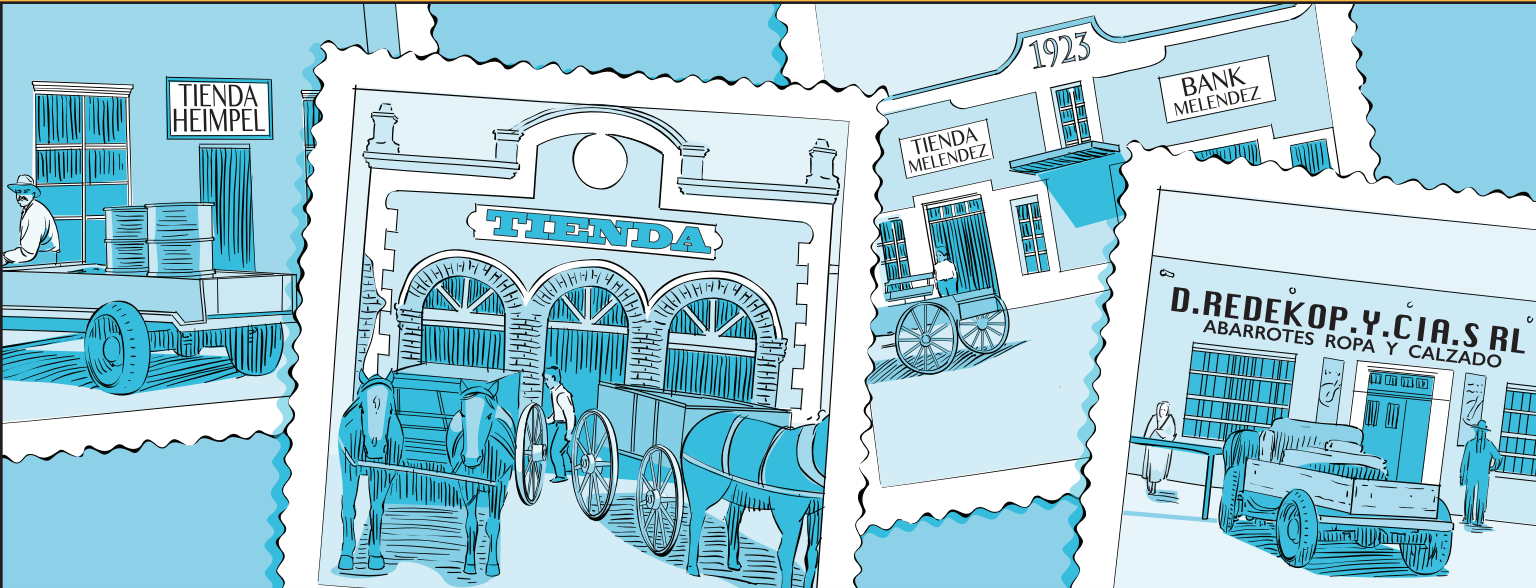






# Conducting Business

## CHAPTER THREE



## 1 SAN ANTONIO

In 1922, San Antonio was just a train station. It was there for the large ranches and the silver mines of Chihuahua. The little settlement around the station had a station master's house, a few small workers' houses and a big shed. The shed was used by cowboys for the herds of cattle they brought in from the ranches. There was also a huge water tank. Here the

**steam-powered locomotives**, engines that roared into the station filled up their water tanks. San Antonio also had exactly thirteen trees. (The Mennonites counted them when they arrived!)

## 2 CANADIAN FARMERS ON THEIR WAY

In 1922 the word was out. A large group of farm families from Canada was moving to Chihuahua. Business people **perked up their ears**, listened. These newcomers would need food, medicine, tools, cloth for sewing clothes, shoes, machinery and building wood. The newcomers would be bringing hundreds of American dollars. They would spend these dollars in Mexico.

In March, when the first Mennonites arrived, the tiny settlement with thirteen trees began to grow. In no time, San Antonio turned into a small town. It had a bakery, a butcher shop, a general store, a pub, a hotel and a restaurant. It also had a telephone office. And Mennonites did bring their money, thick rolls of dollar bills safely tucked in the men's front jacket pockets. These Canadians were used to putting their money in the bank and then writing out cheques. A bank would do well in San Antonio. So the first new businesses were banks. One of the banks was run by Jakob Wiebe. Mr. Wiebe's father was one of the men who had found this land for the Mennonites. A row of other businesses soon followed the bank. Mexicans, some Americans and Germans like Mr. Schmiedehaus were ready for their Mennonite customers.



## 3 FAVOURITE STORES

Years later, old-timer Mennonites remembered the small town of San Antonio on the Sandhill. Getting out of their villages to go shopping was exciting in those days. The Mennonites had two favourite stores where they could speak German when they shopped. The Heimpel Brothers' **dry goods** store was one of them. Leo Heimpel

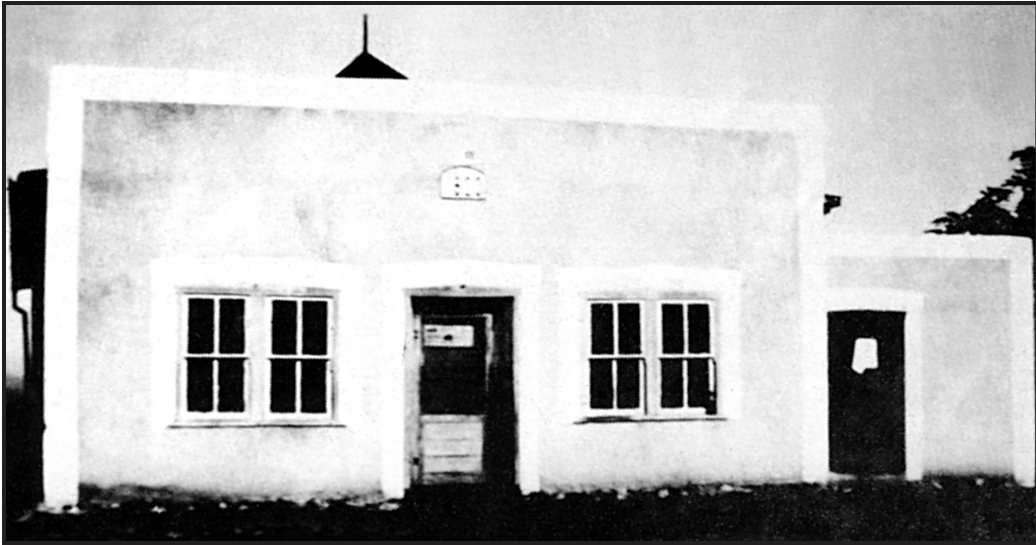
had started off as a pedlar. He had travelled through their villages selling his wares. Then he opened the store in town. The other store was Redekops. When Mennonite shoppers were in town, and were looking for one of their friends, someone was sure to say, "Well if she isn't at Heimpels, she'll be at Redekops," or "If he isn't at Redekops, look for him at Heimpels."

German businesses in San Antonio helped Mennonites begin to feel at home in Mexico. The Germans also added a certain character to the Chihuahua colonies.



*Botica San Antonio* (above) is Spanish for San Antonio Drug Store. This store was owned by Walter Schriedehaus, who was German. Mennonites liked to shop here because they could speak in German.

*Tienda* (left) is Spanish for store. This tienda was owned by the Heimpel brothers who also spoke German. Here customers are buying barrels of gasoline.



In 1922, this old village general store on the Swift Current colony was very new. It had just been built.



Village stores were not “self serve.” All goods were stored on shelves behind a long counter. While customers waited for the clerk to fill their order, they chatted with other shoppers and caught up on village news.

## THIS MIGHT ALSO INTEREST YOU . . .

# Life in the Wild West: German Banker Saves Colonies' Silver

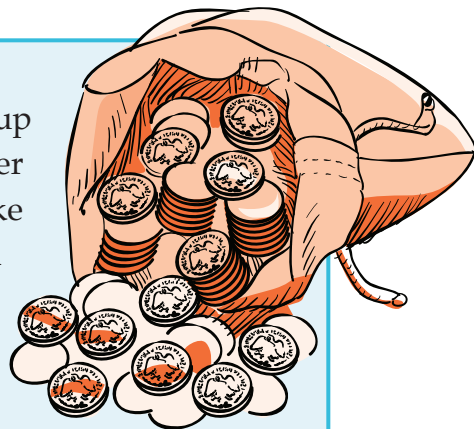
Mr. Schmiedehaus loved to tell this story about the olden days in San Antonio, but only after it was all over:<sup>2</sup>

The Mexican revolution had ended in 1920, but Chihuahuans had not yet forgotten it. A man called Don Lolo, for one, was not ready to stop fighting. He decided to start his own little revolution in Chihuahua. It was really a local matter, but for a couple of days we did not know what would happen. Don Lolo was camped 50 kilometres from San Antonio. It was possible that he might make his way to our town. From there he might head out to the Mennonite villages. There he would take whatever he needed.

I was also worried about our bank. The Mennonites kept their money with us. What if? we imagined. What if Don Lolo suddenly rode into town, strode into the bank, pressed a revolver against someone's chest and demanded money for his revolution? At this time my supervisor at the bank and his brother were both out of town. I couldn't ask them for advice.

We knew that Don Lolo's plan was a **wobbly**, poor one. We were quite sure he would not be successful. But we could not be certain. I had to make a plan. The Mennonite colonists knew very little about what was happening. But we did, and we worried.

It was my friend Walter Peters who came up with a plan. “Why don’t you hide the silver money among the corn?” he said, “I’d like see them try to get it out of *there*.” Behind the office were large granaries. They had about two metres of loose corn inside. “An excellent idea,” I said. So I **lugged**, carried about a dozen sacks of silver coins – 1000 pesos per sack – to the granary. I sank the sacks into the corn. I also kept some money back in the cash register. In the worst case, we would lose that money.



That same night, the day I had buried the silver, I was called out of my home. Two dangerous-looking, gun-carrying guys demanded that I come with them. In the car, a third guy was sitting behind the wheel. If I thought I would surprise the guys and jump out of the car, that hope was **dashed**, lost. The two men squeezed me in between them so that I couldn’t move. Not a word was said.

After some extremely painful moments, in the dark of night, I knew we were going to the bank. *Also doch!*\* This was it, as I had feared. In front of the bank stood a fourth guy, waiting for me.

But he was not what I expected. The man was collecting debts for the government. He had a telegram in his hand, from my company in Chihuahua City. The telegram was a message saying I should pay a sum of money we owed. So. . . not bank robbers after all! What a relief. But the night was not over. Things were not yet as easy as they looked.

I had just hidden those sacks of pesos in the corn. I thought it would be wise to keep that little secret to myself. I took the guys into the bank and opened the cash box. They examined the situation, surprised at how little money they found there.

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\* Pronounced AHL zoh DUHjch.



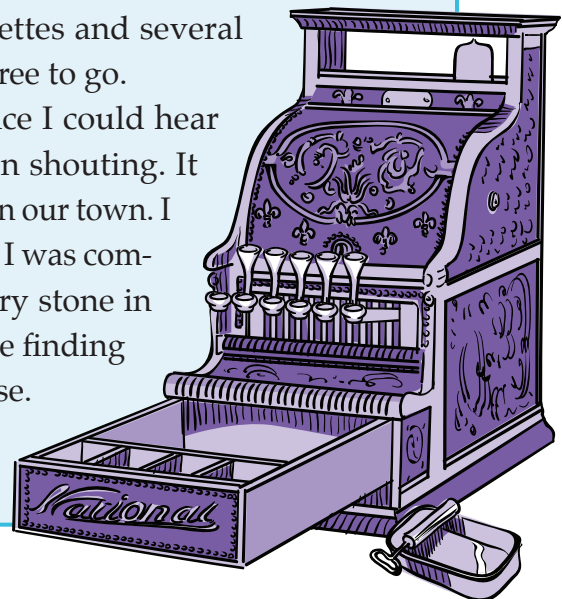
They were not impressed. When I explained that there was not enough money there to pay the bill, the four guys just smirked. They simply could not let me go, they said, before they had the money.

The only person I could call for help was Walter Peters. He had the key for the cash box in our store. I would find enough money there to pay. But I had asked Peters to stay at my house. My sister was visiting and I did not want to leave her home alone.

All I could do was head for the store. Then I would see what would happen next. There were four of them and I was only one. When we walked into the store we met a **colourful scene**, lively sight. The door was unlocked and a noisy group of men had made themselves at home there. The place smelled like sardines. The floor was covered with peanut and sunflower seed shells. Cigarette smoke filled the air. I saw a tequila bottle flash in the lamp light.

I pushed my way to the cash register through the crowd of men. I soon saw that no one had touched the money. There was enough there to pay the government agent. Now my three companions willingly helped me clear out the store. One after the other the men left. Most went without much pressure. And so all was settled. The store was short one bottle of tequila, several packages of cigarettes and several more cans of sardines. And I was free to go.

I stepped outside. In the distance I could hear guitar music, pistol shots and men shouting. It was party time, it seemed, not only in our town. I walked home in total darkness. But I was completely sure of myself. I knew every stone in this sand hill town. I had no trouble finding my way from the store to my house. Everything had turned out well.



But in my whole life, I never forgot that pitch black night in San Antonio.

Meanwhile Don Lolo and his revolutionaries failed in their plan. Don Lolo was lucky to get away on his horse. He took himself off to the United States.

\* \* \*

This was not the only time that Mr. Schmiedehaus lugged the heavy sacks of Mennonite silver pesos to the granary. Life in San Antonio really did feel like the Wild West. Bank holdups were part of life in Chihuahua.

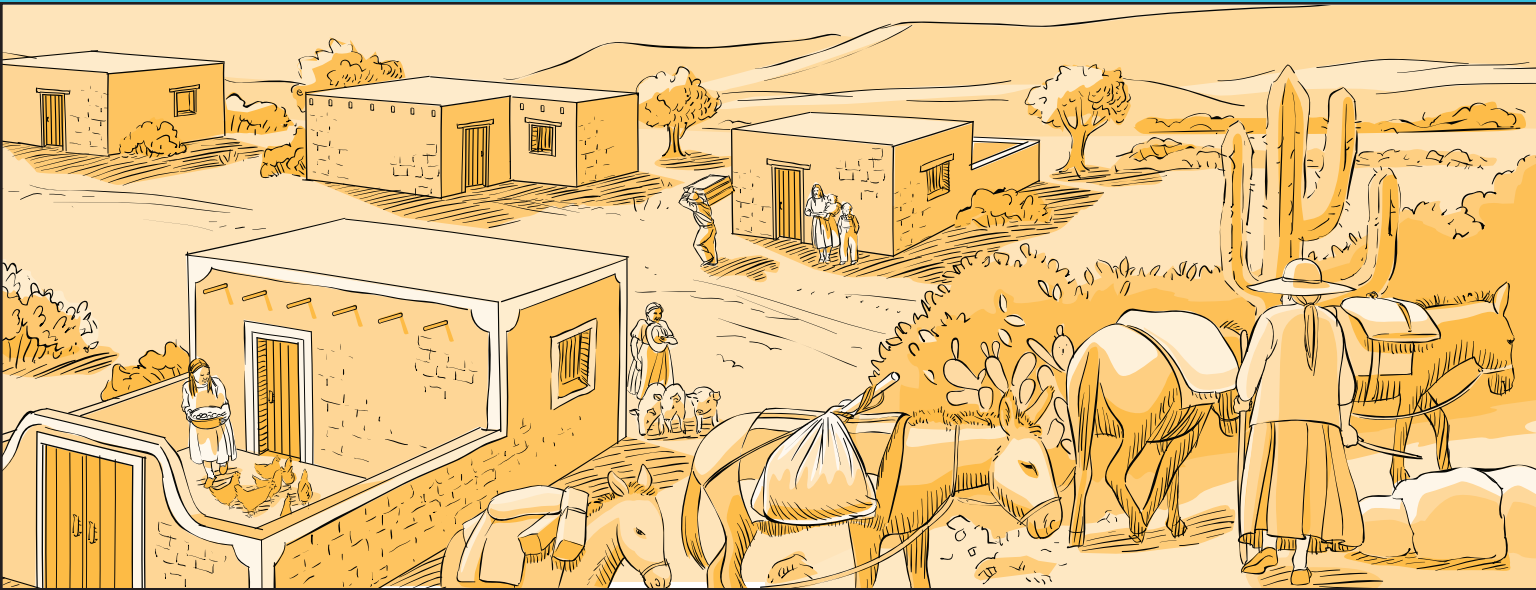






# Whose Land?

## CHAPTER FOUR



### 1 THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO RISE UP

In 1910 Mexico had two groups of people. They were the very rich and the very poor. By far the largest group were the poor. The state of Chihuahua has 247,455 square kilometres (95,543 square miles). In 1910 all of this land belonged to about ten families. These rich families lived in large houses on

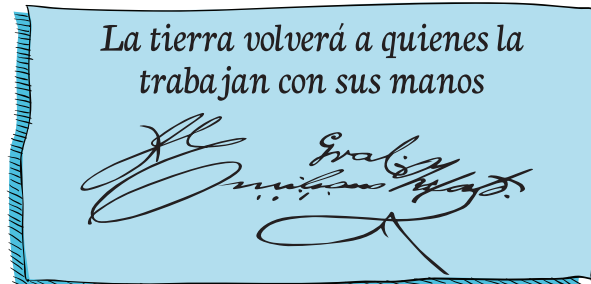
their *haciendas*<sup>\*</sup>, ranches. They had thousands of head of cattle. Many of the other Chihuahuans worked on the land. They were cowboys, cowherds or labourers. They were paid almost nothing for the work they did.

This **unjust**, unfair situation could not go on forever. By 1910 the poor people had had enough. They had also **banded together**, become a group. As a group, they were strong enough to **revolt**, go against the landowners. Emiliano Zapata led their revolution in the south of Mexico. Pancho Villa took it to the north, all the way up to Chihuahua.

The **slogan**, saying of the revolution was: “The land belongs to those who cultivate it!” It took ten long years of fighting. By 1920, the rebels had won their war. Mexico had a new government. This government worked for the poor people.

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\* Pronounced AH see EN dahs.



## VIGNETTE

# Land Changes Hands

The sky above was clear and blue. Señor Zuloaga shaded his eyes. All around him were miles and miles of grass. On this ranch, thousands of head of cattle grazed. All this land, as far as his eyes could see, belonged to the Zuloaga family. They had owned the land for as long as they could remember. Life on the land had been good. Señor Zuloaga, his daughters, his sons, his wife and friends had a very comfortable life. They had

everything they wanted. Now that good life was going to end.

The year was 1920. The government of Mexico had been **overthrown**, taken over. This government had supported rich landowners like the Zuloagas. The new **socialist government** would work for people who did not have land. It was a government for poor people, those who worked for landowners. The government's first job would be to divide up the land. Land of the rich would be taken and divided up among all the people.

But Señor Zuloaga did not plan to lose everything. He was a very rich man and did not want to become a poor man. He was also a **shrewd**, smart businessman. Some people said that he was also not afraid to make shady deals.

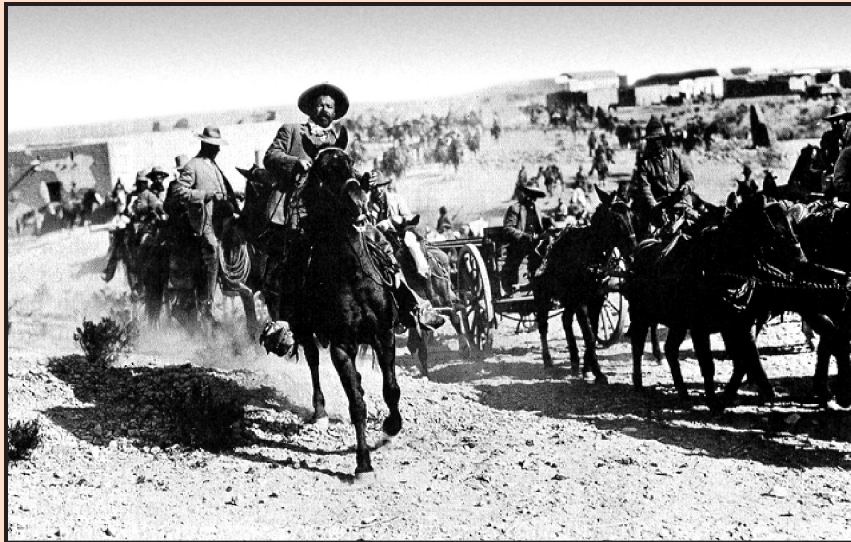
\* \* \*

In Saskatchewan, Canada, lived another businessman. His name was John Wiebe. Mr. Wiebe bought and sold land. He knew Spanish well and was keeping his eye on Mexico. A **revolution**, war had taken place there. Revolutions meant that land would change hands. Mr. Wiebe knew some very rich landowners in Mexico. They would want to sell their land before it was taken away. Now he got busy, finding out who in Mexico was selling.

In Canada, that same year, a group of people were looking for land. They did not want just any land. They wanted a lot of it, enough for 6000 people. These people needed land for growing grain. They were Mennonites who spoke Low German. Mr. Wiebe also spoke Low German. He knew just the piece of land for these Canadian farmers. Señor Zuloaga would be happy to meet Mr. Wiebe and make a land deal. Mr. Wiebe would be glad to help out Señor Zuloaga. He would match the people who needed land with the man who wanted to sell his.

## Pancho Villa

Pancho Villa\* controlled Chihuahua from 1914 to 1920. One way of working against the old government was to attack **foreigners**, non-Mexicans. Pancho Villa was known to hunt down foreigners and even kill them. This embarrassed the government. The old government wanted to look good in the eyes of the world. At the end of the revolution, Villa stopped this activity.



In 1922 when the Mennonites came to Chihuahua, Pancho Villa was still around. The Mennonites loved to hear stories about this big man, with a big hat, on a big horse riding through the land with a band of men. They also got to meet him! One writer said: "On at least one occasion [Pancho Villa] and his band bought goods in the Mennonite villages."<sup>3</sup>

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\* Pronounced PAHn cho VEE ah.



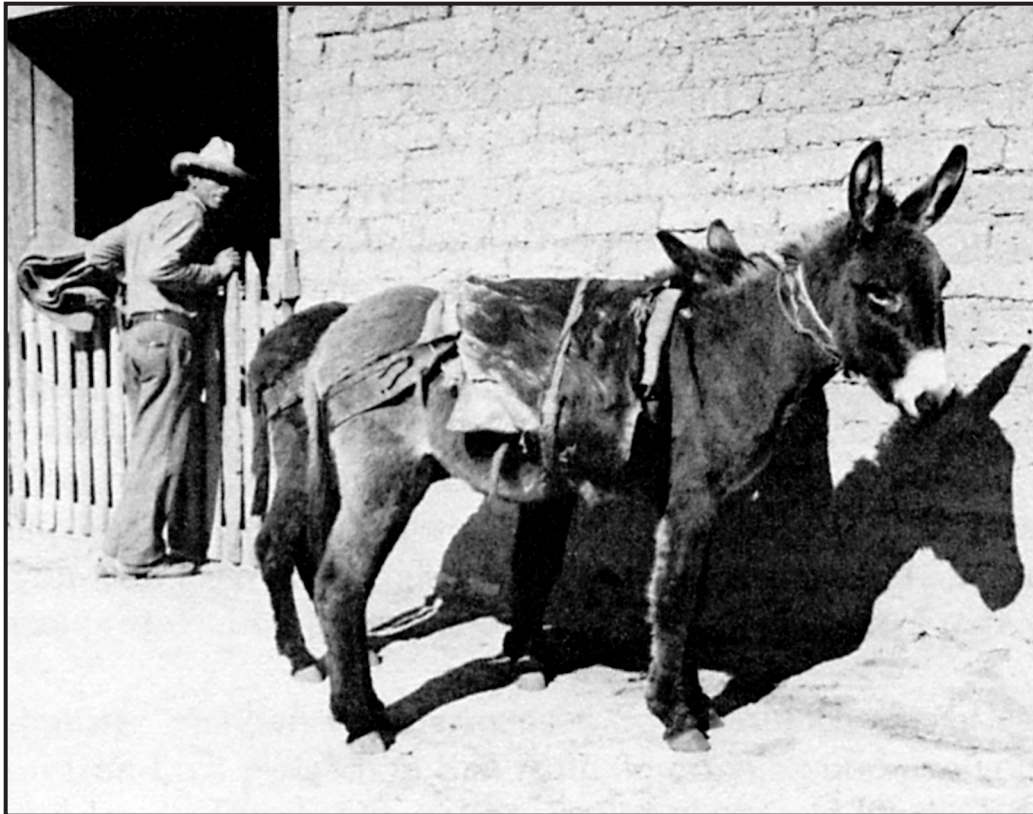
## 2 AT LAST! THE LAND BELONGS TO THOSE WHO CULTIVATE IT

The new government soon set out to divide land among the poor. The new landowners were called *Agraristas*\*. The Agraristas could not wait to get on to their land. Before the new government was organized, they chose land on their own. They built small houses on the chosen land and planted corn and beans on it.

Having land, however, did not mean that they became rich. They had very little money to buy what they needed to work the land: implements, working animals and the seeds to plant. Change did not come at once in Mexico. It took a long time.

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\* Pronounced ah grah REEs tahs.



A “new” landowner and his burro.

## 3 TWO GROUPS OWN THE SAME LAND

The Mennonites came to Chihuahua when the new government was only two years old. The new leaders were still learning how to run a country. This meant that things were **unruly**, wild. Because of this unsettled state of things, the Mennonites had a bad surprise. As soon as they got to Mexico, they had built villages and planted crops. Then they found out that the land they were settling might not belong to them.

This was a very bad news indeed. They had paid well for their land in Mexico, maybe even a little too much. Yet the Agraristas, who lived around their colonies, said it was theirs. They had already planted beans and corn on the land and built small houses. Around the colony, on colony land, there were now little villages, called *ranchos*\*. At first this was not a problem. The colonists had bought a lot of land. They didn't need all of it yet.

Then the trouble began. If the land belonged to those who cultivated it, two groups were cultivating it! Mennonites and Agraristas.

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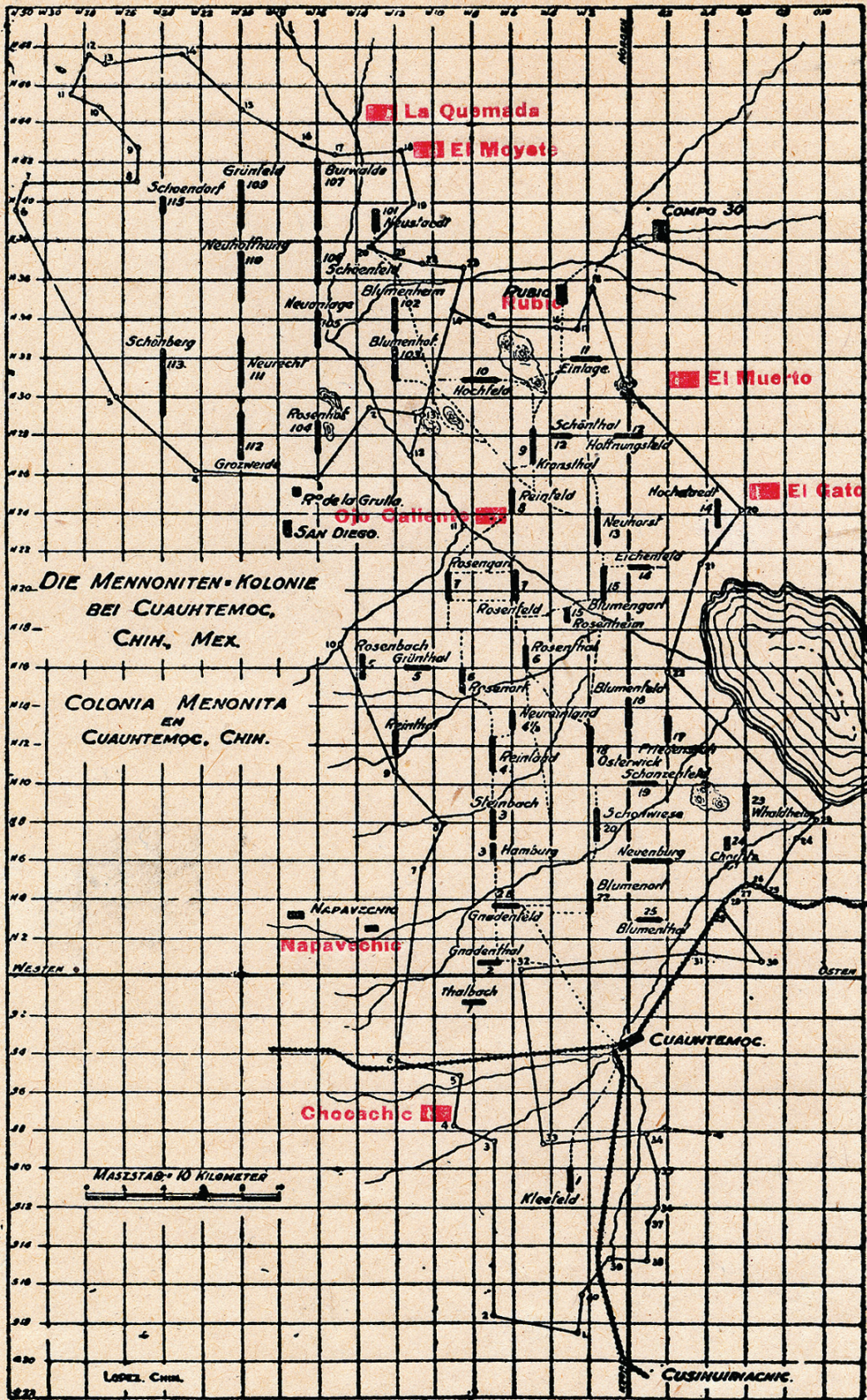
\* Pronounced RAHn choass.

### The Original Chihuahua Colonies Map

The map on the right was drawn by hand, with pen and ink. It's the original map, the first map of the colonies that we know of.

On this map you can see how close the Mennonites built their villages, shown as black rectangles, to Mexican villages, shown in red. Look for:

- Chocachic and Napavechic, south and west of Mennonite land
- El Muerto and El Gato in the east
- La Quemada and El Moyote in the north
- Rubio and Ojo Caliente in the middle. Ojo Caliente is right on the colony.



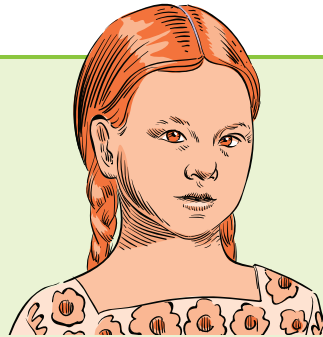
## 4 WHO GETS TO CULTIVATE THE LAND?

The Mennonites had bought the land with an understanding. The Zuloaga family would move the people who lived there to another place. The Zuloagas had not kept this promise. As more Mennonites came from Canada, they needed all the land they had bought. About three years after they came to Mexico, the trouble began. It was a problem for the Mennonites and for the Agraristas.

The Mennonites first noticed a problem when their neighbours' cows got into their fields. The cows ate the crops the Mennonites had worked so hard to grow. When they put up good fences around their fields, they found the wires cut. They also lost farm equipment and tools. The Agraristas were clearly angry at the Mennonites. These Mennonites were living on their land.

### VIGNETTE

## Estela



Estela, a Mexican girl, jumped when the door flew open. Her father stormed in. “Why did we have that revolution anyway?” he shouted. “Why did Pancho Villa get the land for us, give it back to us, to *us*, who deserved it!? Didn’t we all agree that land belongs to the people who cultivate it?”

Estela was always a little frightened when her father went on one of his **tirades**, rants. He did have a point though. He had said, many times, that he was ready to start working the land. BUT! the land had been sold to *Mennonites*! Right under their noses. Well! He was just going to put his cattle in their

cornfields. Let *his* cows eat *their* corn on *his* land! He had chosen his land carefully. He had found just the right piece. And these newcomers weren't even Mexican. They came from Canada!

Estela listened. She had first smiled at a friendly Mennonite girl at the train station in 1922. Since then she had had little to do with the newcomers. She heard almost nothing about them except for Father's arguments. Who owned the land? Who had the right to cultivate it, *Menonitas* or *Mexicanos*?

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\*Pronounced menno NEE tahs and may hee KAHN ohs.

Abram J. Neufeld, the *Vorsteher*\*, leader of colony government, did all he could to find a solution. A group of Mennonite leaders travelled to Chihuahua City. There they showed their papers to government officials. They had proof that they paid for the land. This trip took a lot of time and effort. But the leaders didn't know if the officials had even looked at their papers.

The government did one thing to help out. It sent police to Mennonite villages to keep out the robbers. This solved one problem. It also made the Mennonites very uncomfortable. They did not like to see men with guns walking around in their villages. They certainly didn't want them to be used.

Then the Mennonites got some frightening news. A new government in Mexico City was not letting any more Mennonites into Mexico. What could this mean? The Mennonites had been welcomed to Mexico. What had gone wrong? It was time to ask for help. In San Antonio the Mennonites had a friend. He would know what to do. You have already met this friend. His name was Walter Schmiedehaus.

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\* Pronounced Fuhr SHTAY yer.

## 5 MR. SCHMIEDEHAUS STEPS IN TO HELP

Mr. Schmiedehaus spoke German and Spanish. He knew Mexico well. He was a banker who also worked for the German government. He knew how to talk with people in the government and get them to act.

On the colony lived Klaas Heide. Mr. Heide was a gentle, honest man. He knew how to deal with people and run a colony. Klaas Heide and Walter Schmiedehaus were good friends. When Mr. Heide heard the bad news from Mexico City he knew what he had to do. It was time to solve the Agrarista problem. Mr. Heide's first step was to visit Walter Schmiedehaus.

This time Klaas Heide did not ask Mr. Schmiedehaus to give advice. He asked him to work **on their behalf**. The colony gave Walter Schmiedehaus **power of attorney** to do their business for them. This was unusual. Mennonites did not like to give important matters to someone who was not one of them.

Mr. Schmiedehaus was honoured to be trusted like this. He was also a little bit nervous. The job would not be easy. He would have to go all the way to Mexico City and talk with people in the government there. But he had no time to worry. He gathered all the papers and documents he needed. Then he got on the train and headed south to Mexico City.

But Mr. Schmiedehaus did



Walter Schmiedehaus is seen here listening to his good friend Gerhard Rempel. Mr. Rempel was the Vorsteher of the Manitoba Colony from 1933 to 1944.



Agraristas gazing at their land.

not have to work alone. He had friends here and there who would help. First he stopped in Chihuahua City. There he got a letter from the governor. The letter explained that the Mennonites were good and upright people. Mexico needed these people. It also introduced Mr. Schmiedehaus to the president of Mexico.

When Mr. Schmiedehaus got to Mexico City, he went first to his old friend, General Eugenio Martínez. The general took him right to the president. President Calle

greeted Mr. Schmiedehaus. Then he sent him off, from one government office to another. Mr. Schmiedehaus finally got to the right person. Then he went to that man's office every day.

The first thing he learned was that Mennonites had gotten a bad name. It was said that Mennonites did not come to Mexico to help the country. They only looked after themselves. It was said they looked down on Mexicans and quarrelled with them.

None of this was true. Mr. Schmiedehaus was sure of that. He knew the Chihuahua Mennonites well. So he corrected that mistake. Then he explained that it was Señor Zuloaga who had not kept his promise. The Mennonites had bought his land **in good faith**, trusting him. They were not trying to cheat anyone. If the land belonged to the Agraristas, Zuloaga should not have sold it to the Mennonites.

It took Mr. Schmiedehaus one week to work things out. Once everything was clear, the right government official solved the problem. He liked the way Mennonites lived together on a colony, yet each family owned their own farm. This is how Mexico wanted to divide up land for groups of Mexicans.

Mr. Schmiedehaus then explained that the Mennonites did not use guns to settle quarrels. They had done their best to solve the Agrarista problem

## TO THINK ABOUT . . .

### Whose Land?

Years later, when Minister Isaak Dyck was the Ältester, he reminded his people about the land they lived on. The Ältester wrote: “When our people asked the government to move the Agraristas off our land, I often reminded them of what the Lord said to the Israelites: Love the native people on your land like you love yourselves. You too have been strangers in Egypt.”<sup>4</sup>

peacefully. They had also built roads, bridges and **drainage ditches** for water to run off. These people were *good* for Mexico!

The government official understood. He got right to work. First, he brought a message for the Mennonites from the president. The letter said the promises that had been made would be kept. New Mennonites who arrived would be welcome. Mennonites would have no trouble from the government about following their religion.

This was very good news. But it did not solve the Agrarista problem. For that, Mr. Schmiedehaus went back to General Martínez. The general sent Mr. Schmiedehaus to the Minister of Agriculture. With that meeting an agreement was made. The Agraristas would be given land. It would be as good as, or better than the land they had. The land would have water. The Agraristas would get materials they would need to build new houses.

To be sure the promises were kept, an engineer would be sent to Chihuahua. He would see to it that everything got done. And in the fall, President Calle was coming for a visit to Chihuahua. Everything had to be done before he arrived.

Now Mr. Schmiedehaus was ready to go home. It had taken him three weeks to work things out. He hardly had time to report his good news to



Klaas Heide, when the engineer from Mexico City arrived.

The Zuloaga family settled their part. The Mennonites gave several thousand hectares\* of land to the Agraristas. For this land they did not need to pay the Zuloagas. The Agraristas settled on their new land and built new houses on it.

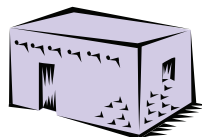
So the quarrel was settled. Both groups could now cultivate the land. During this unruly time in Mexico, men carried revolvers and often used them. Yet, in this three-year quarrel between Mennonites and Agraristas, not one gunshot was fired. All had been settled peacefully.

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\* 1 hectare is 10,000 square metres of land.



Mennonite farmer seeding his field.





# Good Leaders Make Good Colonies

CHAPTER FIVE



## 1 THOSE WHO LEAD

Manitoba, Swift Current and Durango were the first three Mennonite colonies in Mexico. Each colony was successful. They all had good leaders. Good leaders make good colonies.

Colony leaders were **elected**, chosen by the villagers. These leaders did not have special training. They did not get paid for their work. They worked

for the people and with the people. The Vorsteher looked after everyday life on a colony. The Ältester was the leader of the churches on the colony. Ministers were elected to work with the Ältester. Each village elected a Schullt\* to work with the Vorsteher. Deacons were elected by the church to help poor people.

When the colonies were new, everyone was learning. Every day, it seemed, there was something new to figure out. The elected leaders had to learn like everyone else. They had to make decisions and then **see them through**, do the work. Often they were not at all sure how things would work out. They made many guesses. Then they had to trust that things would work out.

The elected leaders did not work alone. All adults worked together. Children and youth also had their part. They knew how to do the jobs they were given. They knew how to get their part of the work done on time.

Good colonies were safe and **self-sufficient** places. Colonists looked after themselves, their farms and each other.

But the colonies were never completely separate. Learning to live separately together with Mexicans was part of life. A good colony had wise people with good ideas for how to do that.

A colony usually had some **outstanding**, very good leaders. Some were elected. Others were just natural leaders. There were also many women and men who were guides. They showed children and adults how to live well on a colony.

Good colony leaders had good minds, they worked well with people and they stayed with a job until it was done. During the early years, leaders had to be **resilient**, tough and ready for new experiences. With so much to learn, people became tired, worried and quarrelsome. Getting everyone to work together **required**, needed wisdom from Above. Good leaders did not forget that important point.

### Leaders of the Chihuahua Colonies

- ◄ Abram Wiebe and Johann J. Friesen were the first Ältesten on Swift Current and Manitoba Colonies.
- ◄ Cornelius Wolf and Abram J. Neufeld were the Vorsteher of these colonies.

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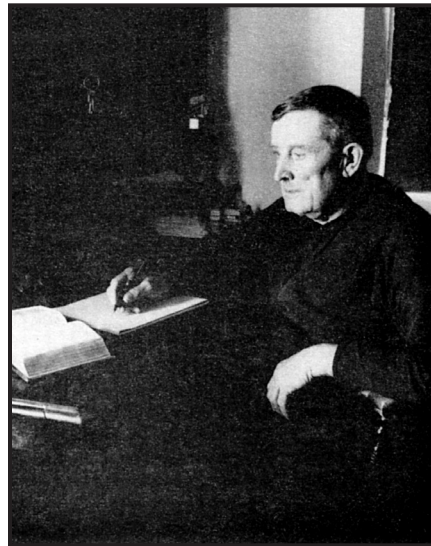
\* Pronounced Shult.

- ◀ Jacob J. Peters and Johann Wiebe looked after the *Waisenamt*\* on Manitoba Colony. Waisenamt means orphans fund. This was colony money that was used like a bank.
- ◀ Gerhard Rempel was another Vorsteher who is remembered for the wise way he led the Manitoba Colony.

## 2 MINISTER JOHAN WALL

Good leaders make good colonies. Minister Johan Wall was an excellent leader on Durango Colony. He is one example of what a good colony leader was like. Here is a list of important events in Minister Wall's long life, which began Russia.

- ◀ He was born in 1875 on the Fürstenland Colony in Russia.
- ◀ He moved to Manitoba, Canada, in 1892.
- ◀ In 1899, he moved to Hague, Saskatchewan.
- ◀ He became a minister in 1903.
- ◀ In 1919 in Canada, the government closed Mennonite village schools. The children now had to go to government schools. Johan Wall was one of the leaders who met with the Canadian government. The group hoped to solve the problem and keep the village schools open.
- ◀ When the problem could not be solved, Johan Wall went with a group to look for a new homeland in South America.
- ◀ He was an excellent **negotiator**, speaker for buying land. On the land hunting trips, Johan Wall met many different government officials. He travelled to Ottawa, Rio de Janeiro,



Minister Johan Wall was an important church leader. He was also a wise negotiator.

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\* Pronounced V EYE zen AHmt.

Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Mexico City.

- ◀ Minister Wall was **committed**, true to his work.
- ◀ He believed God would lead him and his people in finding a new homeland.
- ◀ He was also the people's minister. In Durango, Mexico, he guided the people through hard times. He showed them how to trust God to give them what they needed. He comforted those who were lonely and sad.
- ◀ Johan Wall believed that God would give the people health and strength to do the hard work of building a new colony.
- ◀ Minister Johan Wall died in 1961 in Durango, Mexico. He had preached 1536 sermons in church, married 162 couples, and held 217 funerals. He was 86 years old.

## THIS MIGHT ALSO INTEREST YOU . . .

### The Vorsteher Has 'Important' Visitors

Good leaders are remembered for important things they did. On Mennonite colonies, leaders were also just ordinary villagers. Mennonites believed that all people were **equal**. There were no "important" or "unimportant" people among them. Those who led were also servants. Even the children knew this, from reading the New Testament. They read from their Bibles every day at school.

Here is another story told by Mr. Schmiedehaus.<sup>5</sup> He was a good friend of Vorsteher Gerhard Rempel. The story made Mr. Schmiedehaus smile. It reminded him that his friend did

not think that some people were more important than others.

\* \* \*

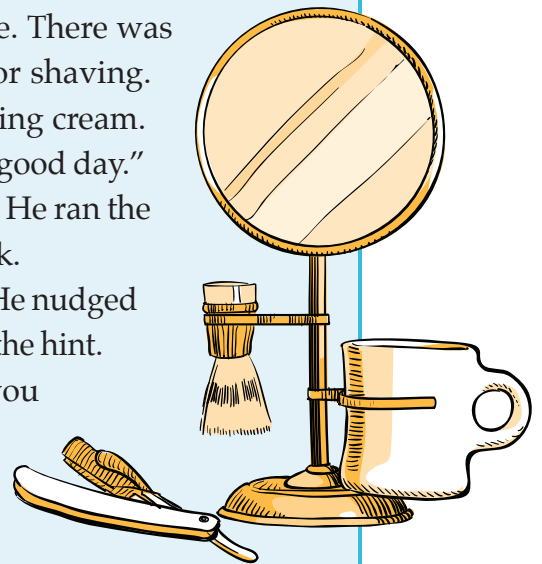
In 1939, the government of Germany sent a royal couple to visit the German settlements in Mexico. They were Baron and Baroness Rüdts. Mr. Schmiedehaus was honoured to take these important visitors on a tour of the Mennonite colonies. One of their first stops was Gerhard Rempel's home. A couple of boys opened the gate for the visitors and then the door of the house.

The visitors found the Vorsteher in the big front room. He was sitting at the table with a small mirror in his hand. On the table was a mug with a broken handle. There was also a shaving brush and a **razor**, used for shaving. The Vorsteher's face was covered in shaving cream. He stopped for a moment and said, "Well, good day." But he didn't let the visitors interrupt him. He ran the razor over the **stubble**, beard on his cheek.

The Baron looked at Mr. Schmiedehaus. He nudged him with his elbow. Mr. Schmiedehaus got the hint. He said to the Vorsteher, "Today I bring you guests – a high honour. They were sent from Mexico City and—"

"So. *Die Gesandte*?" I see, the guests?" asked the Vorsteher. Now he turned his head toward the visitors. With his razor he waved a welcome. "That's good," he said. "Now all of you, take a seat on the bench over there." Then he turned back to his mirror, in perfect peace. The "important" visitors listened to the scratching of razor on beard stubble.

It didn't take the Vorsteher long to finish the job. He snapped



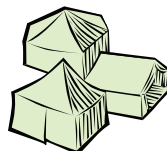

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\*Pronounced ZOW, dee je ZAN tih.

his razor shut, put the brush back into the mug and wiped his face and hands with a towel. Only then did he stand up. "Now, done! Well, a hearty welcome in my house and to our colony," he said.

Mr. Schmiedehaus stood up as the Baron and the Vorsteher shook hands. He now saw that the two men were much alike. They were also different. One had a pleasant, friendly face. The other had a true and honest expression that shone from his eyes. The Vorsteher's expression represented the hundreds of Mennonites on the Mexico colonies.

The Vorsteher's family showed the guests their house and farm. In the evening, they set up tables made of boards. On these simple tables, a feast was spread. Neighbours were invited. They spent the whole evening visiting.



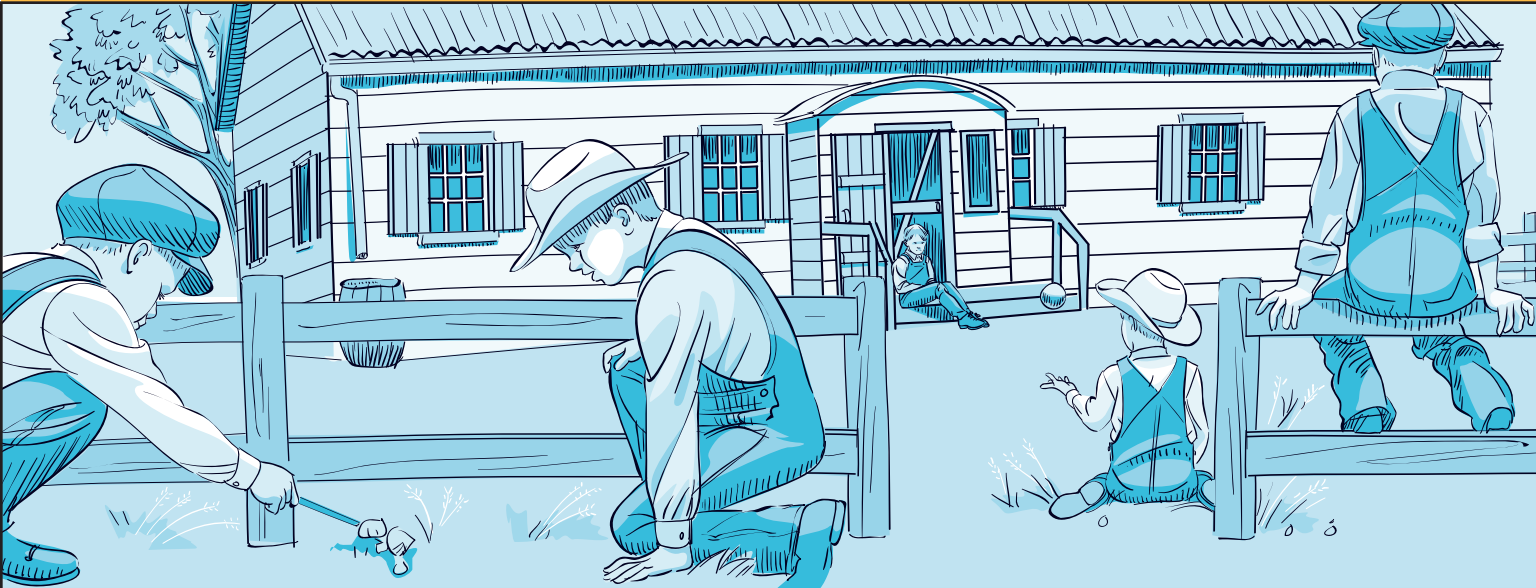






# Trouble Comes to the Colonies

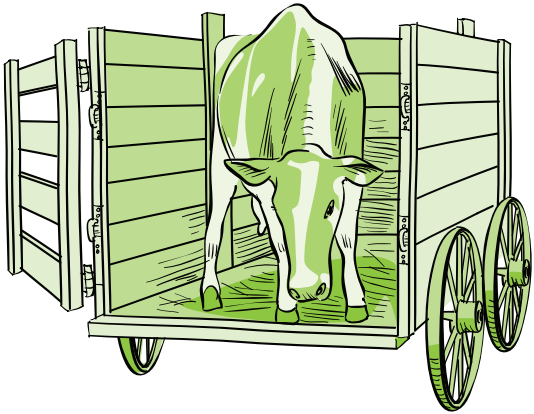
CHAPTER SIX



## 1 THEN THINGS STARTED TO GO WRONG

They had done it. The Chihuahua colonies were settled. They had built houses, farms and villages. They had learned to like the climate. They were taking advice from Mexicans, like building with adobe, for example. All these things made their life comfortable in Mexico.

The settlers were happy with their *Privilegium*, their promise from



President Obregón. When they got the promise, one of their leaders, Johann Loeppky, had shaken the president's hand. There were tears in his eyes as he said, "We will always be **in debt** to you, owe you for your friendly **hospitality**, welcome. We got a better invitation in Mexico than anywhere else."

But around 1928, things started to go wrong, one thing after another. The early years had been hard, but people had expected that. They worked together to help each other. In five years they had built a colony of villages and farms. They had learned how to live in Mexico. They were feeling settled. They knew they could make it here.

Then the weather changed. They had had four good years. After that the rain stopped. The year 1928 was a dry one. So was 1929. Crops cannot grow without rain. When rain did come, it often came with large hailstones that smashed the crops that were growing. Without crops, animals do not have enough **feed**, food. Instead of getting milk from their cows to sell for money, farmers had to sell the cows. When the money ran out, some of the men left the colony to find work on ranches. Some went all the way to Casas Grandes to work for American farmers who lived there.

At the same time, Mexico was in an **economic depression**, hard times. Money did not have **value**, worth. Prices for their crops were low. Costs were high. The depression was hard on everyone in Mexico.

During these years, when no one had much money, the banks were in trouble. In 1928, one bank in San Antonio closed, then another. The colony, and farmers who had money in the bank, lost their savings. Those who were still paying for their land could not make payments. Some families lost their land. Others felt they had been cheated.

Money was not the only thing people worried about. Other things began to happen that made them feel **uneasy**, afraid. They began to wonder if Mexico was safe for their families.

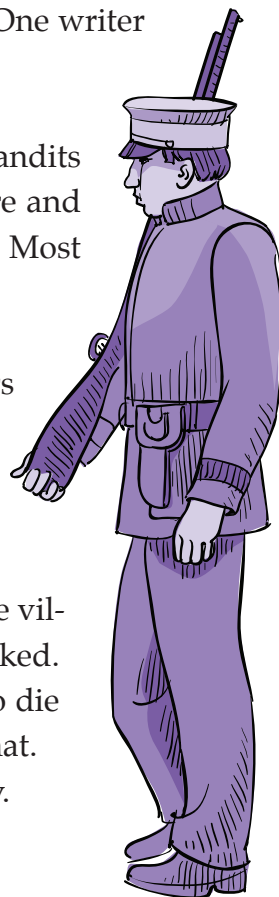
## 2 TOO MUCH TO BEAR

In 1933 something very frightening happened. Word spread across the colonies that there had been a murder in a Mennonite village. One writer described it like this:

When our loving God allowed it, the gruesome attack of bandits and a murder on our colony, there was great unrest. More and more people found themselves wanting to leave this place. Most wanted to go back to Canada.<sup>6</sup>

Something had to be done to reassure the people. The leaders decided to ask the government for help. Soon a group of soldiers arrived. They came with their rifles to guard the villages. The Mennonites had come to Mexico so that their sons would not have to become soldiers. Now other soldiers were doing the work for them. This is not how they wanted to live. One day the villagers heard that a robber had been shot. The people were shocked. Yes, stealing was wrong. But it was very wrong for someone to die for stealing. Some villagers stopped reporting robberies after that.

The villagers did not know that more trouble was on the way.



## 3 VILLAGE SCHOOLS LOCKED: TEACHER AND STUDENTS, DO NOT ENTER!

What is happening to us? We've only been in Mexico for 13 years. Now we're right back to where we were in Canada. What did we do wrong? This is what mothers, fathers, teachers, Schulten, ministers and Vorsteher were asking.

At school the children were having their own conversations.

"No more school! I like that idea."

"But no school at all? I like school!"

“This is my last year.”

“Will we never be able to go to school again?”

It was May 1935. A government school inspector had just come and gone. He had walked into their school and asked the teacher for a teaching plan. He looked at the plan and said it was no good. Then he moved the children and teacher outside. He put a lock on the door, turned the key and went to the next village. He took the key with him.

What could this mean? What were government school inspectors doing in their villages?

In the 1930s, schools in Chihuahua had to have a socialist teaching plan. The plan could have no religion in it. To obey this school law was not possible for Mennonites. They could not take religion out of their schools. Every day at school, Mennonite children prayed the *Unser Vater*<sup>\*</sup>, the Lord’s Prayer, sang hymns, learned their Catechism and read the New Testament and Bible (Old Testament). Children learned their Christian Mennonite faith at school.

Now their schools were closed. These were dark days for everyone. Surely they must have made a big mistake, thought the parents. They should never have moved to Mexico. The best thing to do might be to pack up and go home to Canada. Was God still here with them in Mexico? Or was God just looking the other way for a while?

The ministers reminded the people about finding land in Mexico. They remembered how they had praised God when the telegram came. “Land found and bought!” is what the telegram had said. That land was this good land where they now lived.

The ministers prayed to God to show them what to do. The people prayed for the ministers. Their leaders would do what they could. After that they would have to take what came along. “*Mensch denkt aber Gott lenkt*, People plan but God leads,” they said. Still, they worried. The children watched, waited and wished they knew what was going to happen to them.

Once the shock of locked schools was over, the people acted. First they sent a message to the Mexican government. They got no answer. They tried again to contact a government official. Again they got no answer. Finally three ministers, Johan P. Wall from Durango and Peter H. Klassen and

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\* Pronounced UHn zare FAH tare.

Abram Dyck from Chihuahua, went to Mexico City. They hoped to meet President Lázaro Cárdenas there.

Instead of meeting the three Mennonite ministers, the president sent them a message. He wrote:

I would like to do what you asked for. I would like to keep the promises of the President who made them. But this is impossible. We must have the same law for everyone. I cannot have a different law for one separate group of people.<sup>7</sup>

With that answer, two ministers went home. Johan Wall stayed. He wanted to see what else could be done. He spoke with people and asked questions. The only answer he got was “No!” In the end, there was only one more thing to try. Johan Wall asked the president for permission to **break off**, end their *Privilegium*. They would like to take their children and their property and go back home to Canada. It had come to this.

With that request – at the very last moment – the impossible happened. The president said “Yes!” Their schools would be opened. Two days later, everything was settled!

On December 22, 1935, Walter Schmiedehaus got this letter from Vorsteher Gerhard J. Rempel:

*December, 1935*

*My Dear Mr. Schmiedehaus!*

*Yesterday our friend Abram Dyck in Village Gnadenfeld got two telegrams.*

*One was from the German consul...which said: “December 20. School freedom gotten. Congratulations.”*

*The other from Mr. Johan P. Wall, Patos, Durango, mailed on the return journey in Canitas: “December 20. Homeward with complete success. Schools will open immediately. Letter follows.”*

*Wishing you well,*

*I remain your ever proven Friend,*

*— Gerhard J. Rempel*

The Chihuahua officials did not want to believe the message from President Cárdenas. But Johan Wall had brought the papers with him. The schools could open and teachers could teach according to their **custom**, their own ways. In January 1936, the children would be back in school.

In every village, children were happy. It had been eight months. Now their long boring days would soon be over. Right after Christmas they would be back in school again, together with all their friends.

### What Subjects Did School Children Learn?

In the past, most schools had three main subjects: Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. This was the same in Mennonite colony schools.

Students practiced writing on slates – little blackboards, one for each pupil.

They learned Arithmetic from sets of small cards with problems to solve.

For reading they had four books:

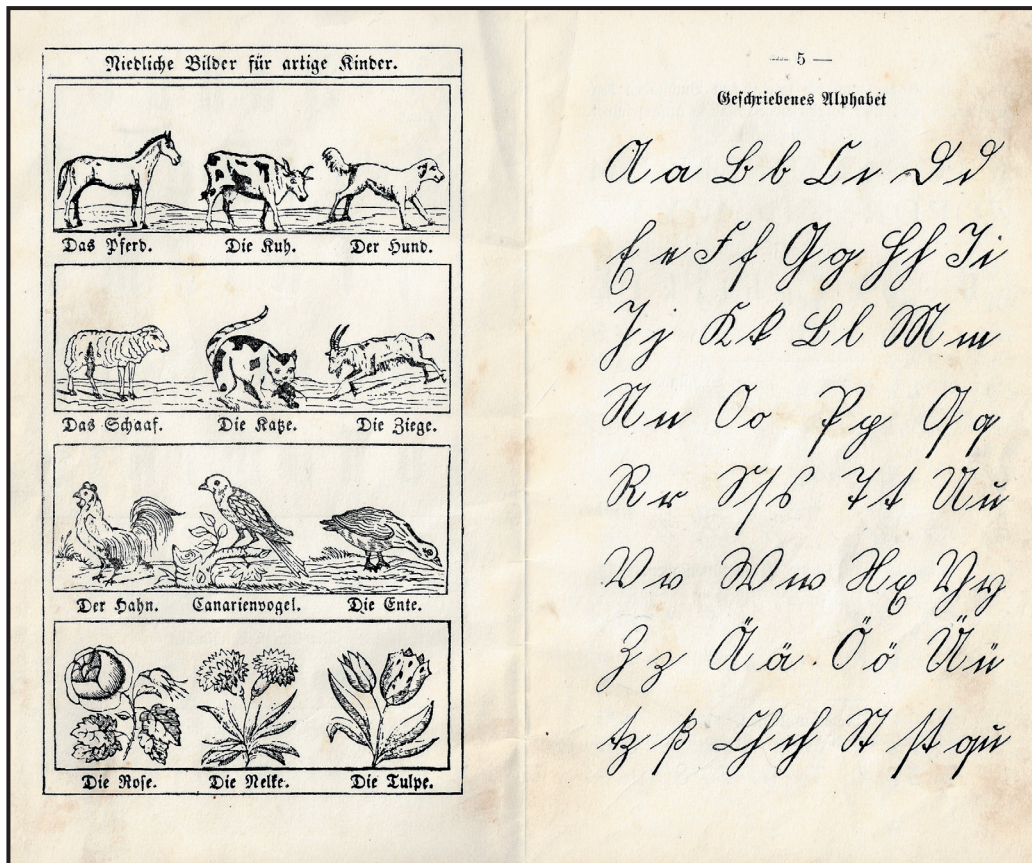
- The *Fiebel*\* (see image, right) was used to learn the ABC and to teach Reading Level 1. (Levels were similar to grades.)
- The Catechism was a small book of questions and answers about Christian teachings. It was used for Reading Level 2.
- The New Testament and Old Testament were readers for Levels 3 and 4. The Old Testament was also called the Bible.

Children in Level 1 were called *Fiebla*. Students in Level 2 were *Katechisma*. Students in Levels 3 and 4 were *Testamenta* and *Bielba*.†

\*Pronounced FEE ble.

†Pronounced FEE blah, kaht eh KjEEZ mah, TES tah MEN tah, and BEE blah.





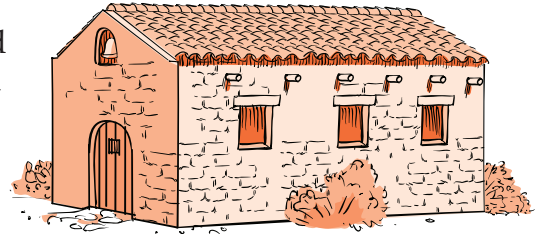
Two pages from the Fiebel: *Charming Animals for Diligent Children* on the left and *Alphabet in Cursive* on the right.

## 4 STILL AFRAID

Their schools were open again. But the people had lost their trust in the government. Rumours flew around the villages. What if the government closed their churches? The government might even take away their land. Large landowners were not welcome in Mexico. It was against the law for churches to own land. A colony looked like a large piece of land that belonged to the church. Mennonite land did not belong to the church. Each family owned their own farm. Their land records, however, did not show this very clearly. As it turned out, the people had good reason to be afraid.

## 5 CHURCH DOORS LOCKED

Almost every Mexican village and town had a church. There were tiny churches in villages and larger churches in towns. Cities had big beautiful cathedrals. This time it was the Mexicans, not the Mennonites, who had a big shock. The government decided to close all Catholic churches. Church doors were locked and church bells stopped ringing. The people could not go to church on Saturday evening or on Sunday morning as they were used to. They could not have weddings in their church. When someone they loved died, they could not even have a funeral in their church.



At first the Mexicans didn't notice the Mennonite colonies. Mennonites lived separately. They had their own schools and churches. They did not speak Spanish. But when they took a closer look, the Mexicans were upset. Mennonite churches were still open! Why could the Mennonites keep on going to church? They weren't even Mexican. They were Canadian!

## 6 WHY DON'T MENNONITES HAVE PROPER CEMETERIES?

The Mexicans also noticed something else that was strange about the colonies. The villages did not have proper cemeteries. Government officials also saw this. Because the Mennonites had a promise from the government, it was not a good idea to close Mennonite churches. But they could do something about their graveyards. A new law was written: The colonies must have proper cemeteries, and only one per colony.

This was bad news for the Mennonites. If they had a funeral at the other end of the colony, they would have to travel 80 kilometres to get there. By horse and buggy that was a very long trip. This new law also meant the government was watching them. With the law, the government was moving

right into the heart of their lives, to the graves of people they loved.

Their leaders explained all this to government officials. The officials agreed to let them have four cemeteries. After more meetings, they gave their permission to have 15 cemeteries. That settled the problem. It also left the people feeling frightened. If the government was making laws about their funerals and cemeteries, what would it do next?

## VIGNETTE

# Abuela Julia's Funeral



Funerals and cemeteries were very important to Mexicans. When *Abuela*\* (grandmother) Julia died, her body was placed in a beautiful coffin and taken to the big church. Her family made sure that she was not left alone there. All night people came to church to sit with Abuela's body. The next day, everyone dressed in black and went to church for the funeral.

After the funeral, the villagers followed Abuela's coffin to the cemetery. The church had been full of flowers for her funeral. Everyone knew and loved Abuela Julia and brought flowers. Now the flowers were carried to the cemetery and put on Abuela's grave. The pile of flowers on Abuela's grave was high and wide. Later Abuela Julia's grave would also have a tombstone. Her name and the dates she was born and died

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\*Pronounced ah bWAY lah.

would be on the stone.

Every year, on November 1, her family would clean up all the old flowers, dead branches and litter from her grave. Then they would decorate it with new flowers. Her family would stay by her grave all night. The whole cemetery would be filled with villagers. All were remembering their dead loved ones by candlelight.

When travellers drove through their town in daylight, they would always see the cemetery first. It was easy to find because it was covered with bright decorations and plenty of flowers.

## Grandmother Klassen's Funeral

Funerals were very important for Mennonites. When Grandmother Klassen died, they washed her tired old body and dressed it in white. The school teacher wrote a funeral invitation in beautiful German letters. The invitation was sent around the village from house to house to let everyone know the time of funeral. The village coffin builder got to work. He cut, shaped and nailed together long white boards to make a coffin, just the right size for Gramma. The men and boys dug a grave in the hard dry earth. For the funeral service everyone dressed in black, in their best clothes. After the service the whole village and their visitors walked behind the coffin to the grave. There they sang a hymn and listened to the minister's words, until the last "Amen."

Then the stillness was broken. Four young men stepped forward. Each grabbed a spade and began to shovel dirt back into the grave. Shovelfuls of hard clods thumped loudly onto the strong wooden box below. When all the dirt was back

in place, Grandmother's brother raked the dirt into a neat mound. He packed it down firmly and carefully. Now Grandmother could rest. The villagers turned away from the grave and walked back home.

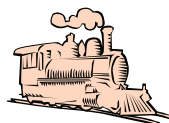
There the girls and women carried out bowls of *Kjringel*\* they had baked the day before. The men cooked the coffee in a large iron pot. Everyone had to eat before they went home.

The new grave had no flowers on it. There would never be a tombstone with Grandmother's name on it. In a few years the new grave would turn back into grassland. The cemetery would look no different from the field around it. Grandmother did not need a tombstone. She was in a better place, with Jesus and the friends who had gone before her. She had lived a good life. Those who stayed behind would not forget her.

And Grandmother's grave was not without flowers. Every year when the rains came, the cemetery was magically covered with a sea of blue flowers. In late summer, brilliant sunflowers **blazed**, shone bright yellow among the tall corn that grew right beside the cemetery.

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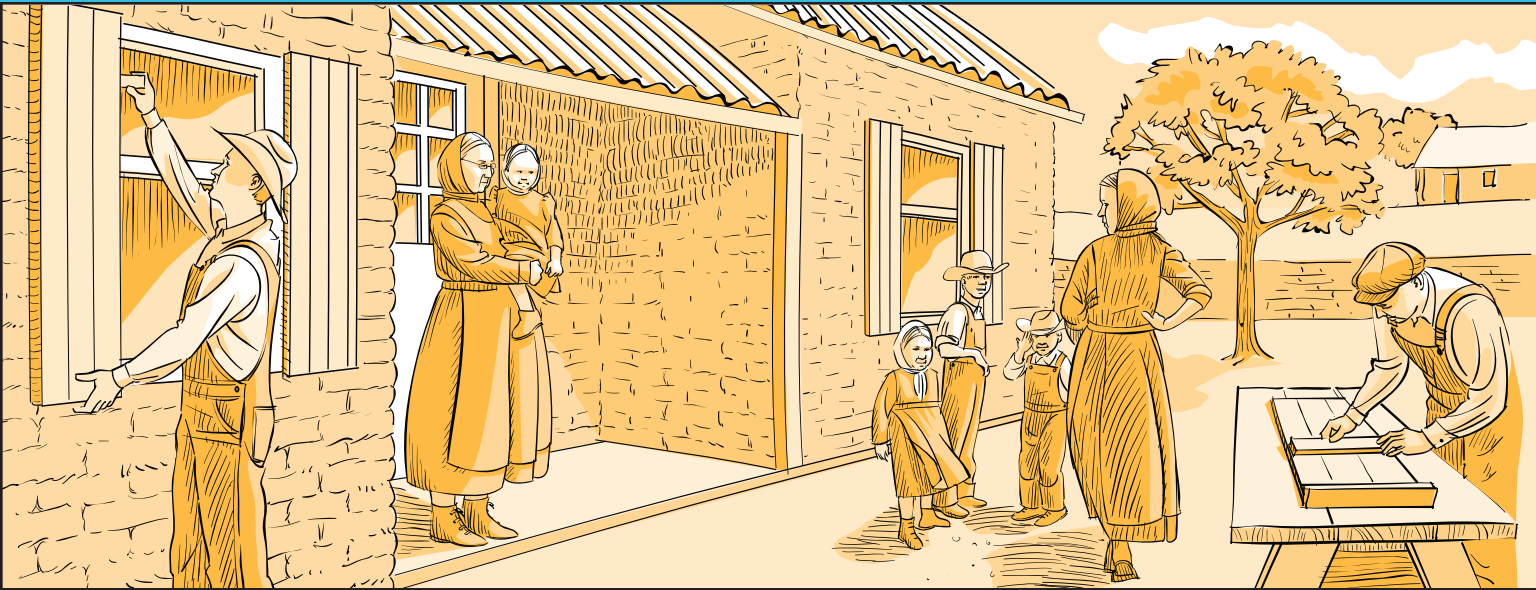
\* Pronounced KJRING el.





# Courage

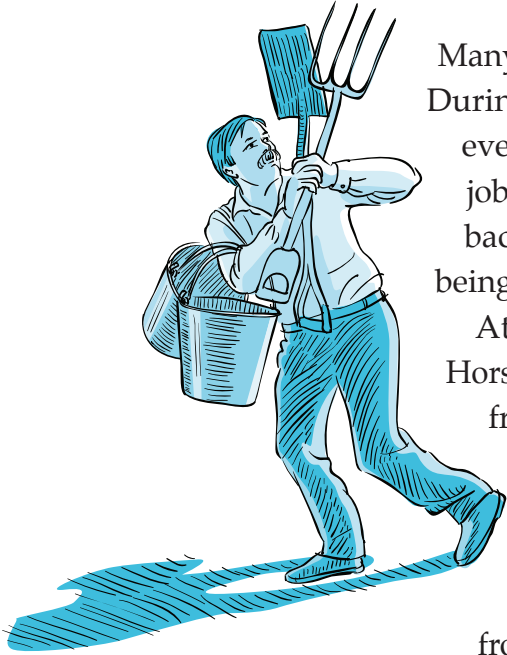
## CHAPTER SEVEN



### 1 WHERE DO WE STAND?

“The farmers here are standing with only one of their feet on their land.”<sup>8</sup>  
That’s what one writer said about Mennonites in Mexico in 1936.

The adults were not sure what they wanted. Maybe they were Canadian and would always be Canadians. Maybe Mexico would never feel safe again. At the moment, their Mexican neighbours were not very friendly.



Many of these neighbours had lived in the United States. During the economic depression there, life was hard for everyone. Americans said Mexicans were taking away jobs from Americans. So the Mexicans were being sent back to Chihuahua. These people were not happy about being sent home.

At the same time, the colonies started losing things. Horses, tools, equipment and **seed grain**, seeds were taken from their barns at night. Likely the robbers were the people who had been sent home. They had been treated badly by the Americans. Mennonites from Canada looked a lot like Americans. So why not help themselves to their things? That's how it looked from the side of some of the Mexicans. But no one really

knew exactly who was stealing or why. The children heard their parents' worried conversations. The children wished they knew what would happen.

Mennonite villagers were also still thinking about 1933. When they noticed that strangers were coming on their yards at night, they were frightened. What terrible thing would happen next?

It is not a wonder, with all these problems, that the Mennonites felt unsettled. They made sure their Canadian citizen papers were order. They got ready to leave, in case things got worse. Many Mennonites did not have Canadian passports. That was just one more thing to worry about. The children watched and waited. At school they talked endlessly about moving back to Canada.

## 2 TAKING ACTION

They say that one restless sheep disturbs the whole barn. Between 1928 and 1939, there were many restless sheep on Mennonite colonies. One group got ready to move back to Canada. Another group made plans to move to Paraguay. For a short time, it seemed people might even move to South Dakota in the United States. Single families moved back to Canada on their



own. When things didn't work out for them in Canada, Mexico did not let them back in.

These were hard years for the Vorsteher and ministers. Their work was to make sure their people were safe and could live well. They tried to give the people hope. They challenged them to put their faith in God. They urged them to keep on working together.

## VIGNETTE

# The Wall Family

*The Wall family is eating supper.*

Jacob Wall (father): It looks like we'll be moving to Canada. *Canada!?* Six heads go up. Forkfuls of potatoes and *Schmaunt Fat\**, *gravy stopped in mid-air. What had Father just said?*

Jacob: We're going to Canada to live. We can't stay here any longer.

Peter: Why not?

Jacob: We can't stay here with this government and these people.

Aunsch: Are the Wiebes going to go too?

Jäapa: Really? To Canada? Will we go on Saturday?

Johnny: I don't want to move to Canada.

Anna Wall (mother): Shush shush. We're not going tomorrow. You can put your forks back in your mouth.

Baby Mary: *Waut es un Kanada!?*<sup>†</sup> What is a Canada?

Everyone laughs.

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\* Pronounced SHmawnt FAHt.

† Vaut ESS en KAH nah dah.

## VIGNETTE

# Schoolchildren

The village children were on their way to school: all **riled up**, worried and excited. The Walls were moving to Canada! Would the Wiebes go too?

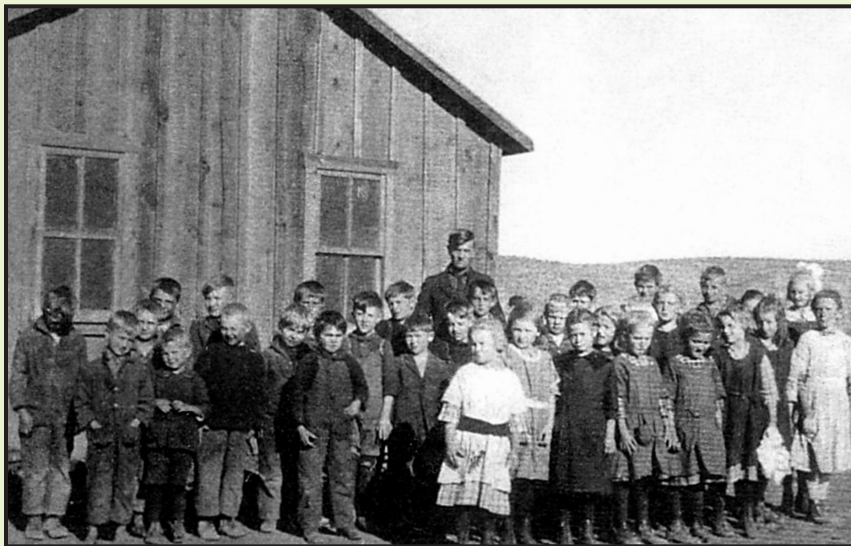
“I wish I could go to Canada,” said Justina. Her cousins lived in Canada.

“Don’t say that,” corrected the oldest boy. “Canada is not good for us.”

“That’s right,” added the second oldest boy. “But Mexico isn’t either. It has a bad government.”

“What’s wrong with the government?” several children wanted to know.

“I don’t know exactly, but you know they closed our school.” That from the oldest boy.



Schoolchildren and their teacher at a Sommerfelder school in 1923. Their colony, called Santa Clara, was still very new.

“My mother said they could even take our land if they wanted to!” added the oldest girl.

“Let’s not talk about it anymore!” This from a group of little girls. They could hear the fear in the excited voices around them.

And so they arrived at school. They settled down only a little bit as they went inside.

The 25 students sat down on the benches of their long desks: boys on one side, girls on the other, little ones at the back, oldest in the front row. Teacher Enns got up behind his desk. “Stand,” he said. The children rose, folded their hands, and recited together: “*Unser Vater, in dem Himmel*\* *Our Father, who art in heaven . . .*”

As they sat down, Teacher Enns looked at their **flushed**, warm faces. “Let’s remember this line,” he said. “‘Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ Some people are talking about moving to Canada. We will leave that argument in God’s hands. Get out your reading.”

Then Teacher Enns **paused**, stopped. “Testamentah,” he said, “Let’s see if anyone can find Mark Chapter 4.” Justina’s hand shot up first, as usual.

“Okay, let’s hear you,” said the teacher. “Start reading at verse 35.”

Justina read clearly and perfectly, as usual:  
On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. . . . A great wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was being swamped. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are **perishing**,

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\*Pronounced UN zare FAH tare, in dame HIM ell.



Recess at a school on Durango colony. This picture was taken much later, as you can tell by the style of the girls' hats.

drowning?" Jesus woke up and **rebuked**, scolded the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind stopped, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who . . . is this man, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

(Children in this vignette would have been reading from Luther's German translation. Here the story is paraphrased in English.)

The children watched their teacher and waited for him to speak. "We don't want to forget," he said calmly, "that there is One Higher than we who can calm a stormy sea."

Teacher Enns sat down. The children knew the daily routine. They opened their books and began to read silently.

More and more families got ready to leave Mexico and return to Canada. So many went that the church decided to help them. A group of leaders went to Canada to meet with government officials there. Could people without passports come back home? That is what the leaders wanted to know.

This is the answer they got from the government: Any Canadian citizen can get a passport and come back home to Canada. But Mennonites who come back will not get any more special privileges. They will definitely not be able to have their own schools.

### 3 PLANTING BOTH FEET ON THE LAND: TAKING ANOTHER LOOK AT MEXICO

These were bad days. It looked as if the Mennonite colonies were marching from one bad crisis to another. They were not sure if their life in Mexico could keep going. At the same time, most of the people were busy living and making a living, as usual.<sup>9</sup>

This is what one historian wrote about Mennonites in Mexico in the 1930s. Things really had gone wrong for them. But everyday life went along as usual. What the writer said was true. Life doesn't stop. It just keeps going.

The writer also understood how history works. History tells the **highlights**, interesting or important events. Highlights can be about good or bad experiences. They are what people still talk about years later. The stories you just read are hard-time highlights. But among all the problems life went on: cows were milked two times every day, children went to school on weekdays, youth visited with friends on Tuesday evenings\*, on Saturdays the houses were cleaned, on Sunday ministers led church services and then families went visiting.

It is also true that the people had been very frightened. They had become unsettled. But now they had to decide. Were they Canadian or Mexican? Would they give up and move back to Canada or would they stay in Mexico

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\* Tuesday evening was visiting time for young people. They often visited outside on their village street. They also went to other villages that were close enough to walk to.

and try again?

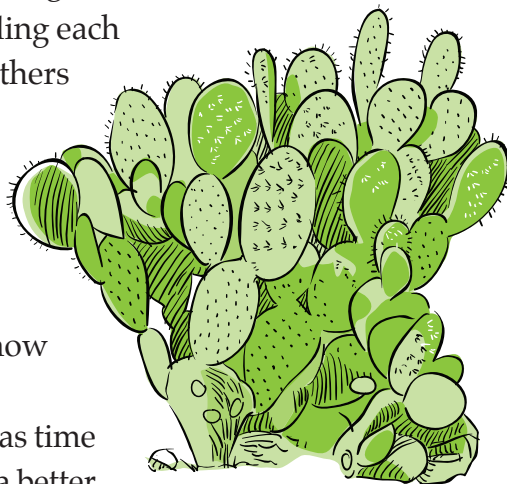
The stern words that came from the government in Canada helped people decide. They took another look at Mexico. Some things here were good. The government had closed their schools but the schools had opened again. The government had kept most of its promises. When the people thought about it, the Mexican government seemed quite good. Besides, by now they knew how things worked in Mexico. They weren't so sure they still knew how things worked in Canada. They knew even less about Paraguay or South Dakota or any other new place they might move to.

Parents also thought about their children. Would they want to move and leave many of their friends? Maybe moving would be exciting for them. But maybe it would not.

\* \* \*

Then in 1939, something happened that made everyone stop and think. Another war – World War Two – started in Europe. Canada would again be at war. Young Canadian men would be sent off to fight. For Mennonites, killing people was wrong, even in a war. Disagreements between countries should not be solved by people killing each other. This new war helped mothers and fathers decide. Their children were born in Mexico. Mexico was their first home. Suddenly the parents also knew where home was. If this land was home for their children, it must also become their home. Even those who had been determined to leave Mexico now decided to stay.

They had lived in Mexico for 17 years. It was time to stop wasting days and months looking for a better place to live. It was time to put effort into life in Mexico. Some families still decided to move back to Canada. Some of these also moved back to Mexico again. But most families made a firm decision. They stepped onto their good Mexican land with both feet.





This large barn with a hayloft full of fresh hay shows that hard times were also followed by good times for farm families in Mexico.

One writer explained it like this:

The feeling that they needed to leave Mexico slowly died out. There was a determination to stay in Mexico. The people now gave Mexico their **best effort**, tried hard, because it was their home.<sup>10</sup>

By now the economic depression was almost over. Everywhere things **were looking up**, getting better. Mothers and fathers looked to their God to lead them. They told their children stories about how God had taken care of them for 17 years. They reminded each other, “In life there is the good and there is the bad.” This was true in Mexico *and* in Canada.

Parents liked to tell their children, especially the youth, that “one has to know where home is.” Now they, the parents, also knew where home was. It was Mexico.







## NOTES

1. Schmiedehaus, W. (1982).

2. Ibid.

3. Sawatzky, H. L. (1997), p. 67.

4. Dyck, I. M., p. 95.

5. Schmiedehaus, W. (1982).

6. Lehrer Harder, quoted in Schmeidehaus, W. (1982), p. 147.

7. Schmiedehaus, W. (1982), p. 136.

8. Ibid., p. 147.

9. Sawatzky, H. L. (1997), p. 160.

10. Ibid., p. 253.

# EIGHTY WORDS! THAT MIGHT BE NEW FOR YOU

## LIST #1

Words in the order you see them in the reader.

### Chapter One

**armed.** Had rifles and revolvers.

**prairies.** Flat land.

**light-skinned.** With light or white skin.

**peddlers.** Travelling sellers.

**were at home.** Lived there.

**represented.** Spoke for.

**negotiate.** Discuss things with.

**separate.** People who kept apart from others.

**prosper.** Do well.

**cultivated.** Plowed land and grew food on it.

### Chapter Two

**gulped.** Drank.

**gritty.** Rough.

**pews.** Church benches.

**reassured.** Comforted.

**climate.** Kinds of weather.

**the heavens.** Sky.

**extraordinarily frugal.** Very stingy.

**towering.** High.

**rimmed.** Bordered.

**sultry.** Hot and humid.

**meagre.** Small.

**bellies.** Stomachs.

**treacherous.** Dangerous.

**plateau.** Hill or mountain with flat top.

**wind stockings.** Wind swirls.

**announced.** Said.

**mortar.** Mud between bricks.

**tossed.** Threw.

### Chapter Three

**steam-powered locomotives.**

Train engines that run on steam.

**perked up their ears.** Listened.

**dry goods.** Cloth, coffee, paper, dishes and so on that are for sale.

**wares.** Goods to sell.

**wobbly.** Would fail.

**lugged.** Carried.

**dashed.** Lost.

**colourful scene.** Interesting sight.

### Chapter Four

**banded together.** Became a group.

**revolt.** Go against.

**slogan.** A saying.

**overthrown.** Taken over.

**socialist government.** works for poor and landless people.

**shrewd.** Smart.  
**revolution.** War inside a country.  
**unjust.** Unfair.  
**foreigners.** Non-Mexicans.  
**unruly.** Wild.  
**tirades.** Rants.  
**on their behalf.** For them.  
**power of attorney.** Do their business for them.  
**in good faith.** Not trying to cheat.  
**drainage ditches.** For water to run off.

### Chapter Five

**elected.** Chosen.  
**see them through.** Do the work.  
**self-sufficient.** Can look after themselves.  
**outstanding.** Very good.  
**resilient.** Tough.  
**required.** Needed.  
**negotiator.** One who makes deals.  
**committed.** True to.  
**equal.** When there are no "important" or "unimportant" ones.  
**razor.** Used for shaving.  
**stubble.** Beard on his cheek.

### Chapter Six

**in debt to.** Owe.  
**hospitality.** Welcome.  
**feed.** Food for animals.  
**economic depression.** Hard times.  
**value.** Worth.  
**uneasy.** Afraid.  
**break off.** End.  
**custom.** Their own ways.  
**blazed.** Shone.

### Chapter Seven

**seed grain.** Seeds.  
**riled up.** Worried and excited.  
**flushed.** Warm.  
**paused.** Waited.  
**perishing.** Drowning.  
**rebuked.** Scolded.  
**highlights.** Interesting or important events.  
**best effort.** Tried hard.  
**were looking up.** Were getting better.

## LIST #2

Words in alphabetical, A-B-C order.

- announced.** Said
- armed.** Had rifles and revolvers
- banded together.** Became a group.
- bellies.** Stomachs.
- best effort.** Tried hard.
- blazed.** Shone.
- break off.** End.
- climate.** Kinds of weather.
- colourful scene.** Interesting sight.
- committed.** True to.
- cultivated.** Plowed land and grew food on it.
- custom.** Their own ways.
- dashed.** Lost.
- drainage ditches.** For water to run off.
- dry goods.** Cloth, coffee, paper, dishes and so on that are for sale.
- economic depression.** Hard times.
- elected.** Chosen.
- equal.** When there are no “important” or “unimportant” ones.
- extraordinarily frugal.** Very stingy.
- feed.** Food for animals.
- flushed.** Warm.
- foreigners.** Non-Mexicans.
- gritty.** Rough.
- gulped.** Drank.
- highlights.** Interesting or important events.
- hospitality.** Welcome.
- in debt to.** Owe.
- in good faith.** Not trying to cheat.
- light-skinned.** With light or white skin.
- lugged.** Carried.
- meagre.** Small.
- mortar.** Mud between bricks.
- negotiate.** Discuss things with.
- negotiator.** One who makes deals.
- on their behalf.** For them.
- outstanding.** Very good.
- overthrown.** Taken over.
- paused.** Waited.
- peddlers.** Travelling sellers.
- perishing.** Drowning.
- perked up their ears.** Listened.
- pews.** Church benches.
- plateau.** Hill or mountain with flat top.
- power of attorney.** Do business for others.
- prairies.** Flat land.
- prosper.** Do well.
- razor.** Used for shaving.
- reassured.** Comforted.
- rebuked.** Scolded.
- represented.** Spoke for.
- required.** Needed.
- resilient.** Tough.
- revolt.** Go against.
- revolution.** War inside a country.
- riled up.** Worried and excited.

**rimmed.** Bordered.  
**see them through.** Do the work.  
**seed grain.** Seeds.  
**self-sufficient.** Can look after themselves.  
**separate.** People who kept apart from others.  
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**unjust.** Unfair.  
**unruly.** Wild.  
**value.** Worth.  
**wares.** Goods to sell.  
**were at home.** Lived there.  
**were looking up.** Were getting better.  
**wind stockings.** Wind swirls.  
**wobbly.** Would fail.

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In *Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico, Volume One*, you met a big group of Mennonites who made an important decision. They sold their farms in Canada and moved to Chihuahua and Durango, Mexico. In this reader, you will see how the young people and adults in this group got to know their strange new homeland. Abram loved Mexico's red-brown earth. Two brick layers, Ramón and Vicenti, turned it into adobe bricks for building houses. Sarah and her brothers and sister planted a large field of corn by hand. The adults, who knew snow blizzards in Canada so well, were frightened by Mexico's fierce sandstorms. Wise leaders and a good German friend solved difficult problems together. All this and more...

On the cover: Building homes with adobe bricks instead of wood was strange for newcomer Mennonites in Mexico. But they soon learned from their neighbours that adobe was the better, Mexican way.

