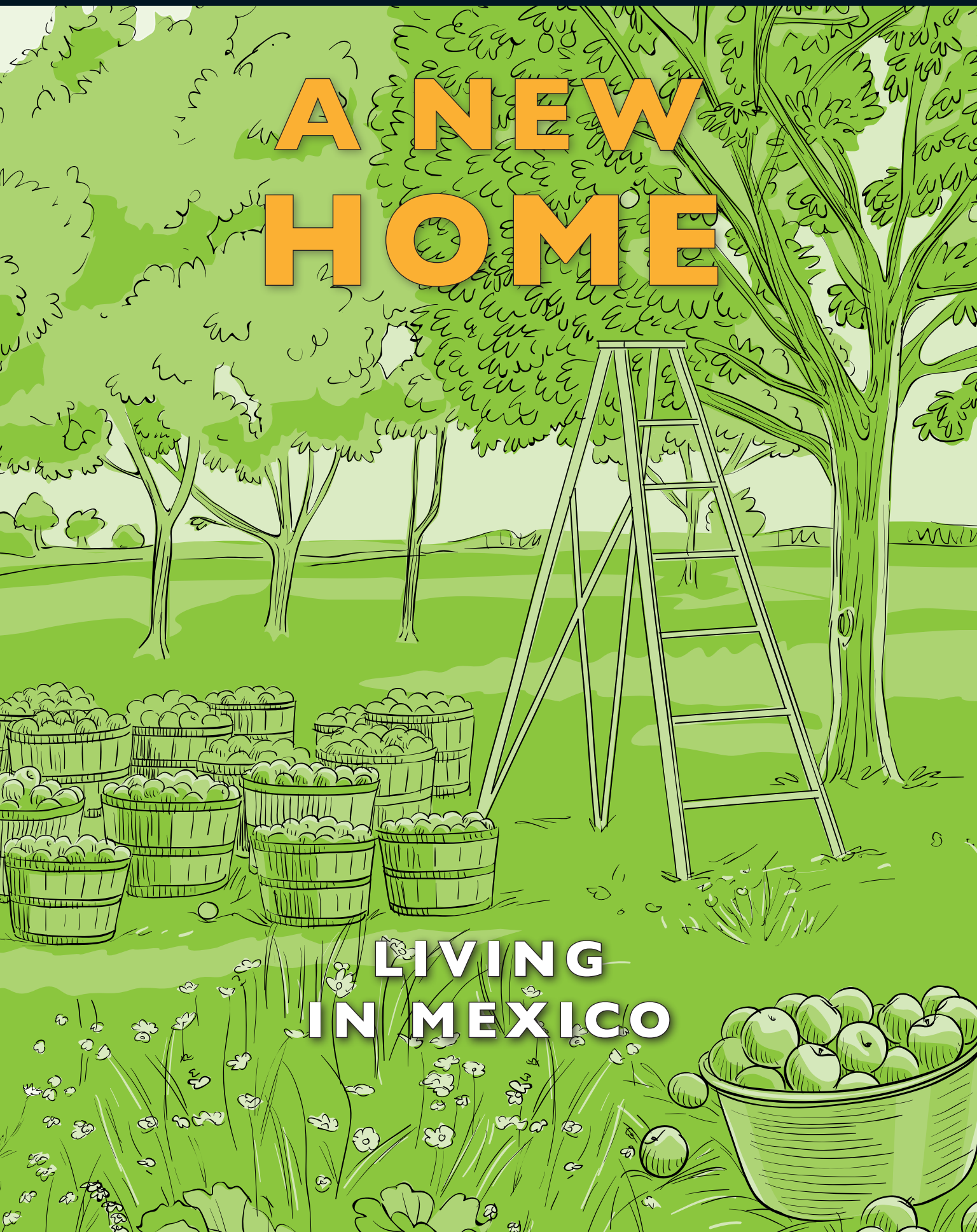


A NEW HOME

LIVING IN MEXICO

A NEW HOME

Mennonite History for Young People
Volume Three

A NEW HOME

LIVING IN MEXICO

Rosabel Fast

D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation
2017

Rosabel Fast has taught language arts and social studies in elementary schools and written readers for German Mennonite schools in Mexico. She holds two graduate degrees, in history and adult education, with a specialty in teacher education. She applies her passion for, and delight in, engaging learners through the use of authentic, interesting and relevant content, and in creating educational resources for learners and their teachers. Rosabel's series Mennonite History for Young People is one of these resources.

D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation,
Winnipeg, Canada
www.plettfoundation.org

Printed in Canada
20 19 18 17 1 2 3 4 5
ISBN 978-0-9694504-4-3

Art Director and Graphic Designer: Anikó Szabó
Illustrator: Lynn Shwadchuck
Copy Editor and Proofreader: Jennifer D. Foster
Photograph Scanning and Retouching: Jerry Sutherland

Photographs from *75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko*, 1997, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 1987, and *Die Altkolonier-Mennonitien in Mexico*, 1982, courtesy of Comite Pro Archivo Histórico y Museo Menonita, CP 31500 Cd., Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, México. 31500, *Die Mennonitische Post*/Derksen Printers Ltd., Steinbach, Manitoba, and CMBC Publications Winnipeg, Manitoba, respectively.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Fast, Rosabel, author
A new home: settling in Mexico / Rosabel Fast.

(Mennonite history for young people ; volume 3)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-9694504-4-3 (softcover)

1. Mennonites--Mexico--History--Juvenile literature.
2. Mennonites--Mexico--Social life and customs--Juvenile literature. I. D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, issuing body II. Title. III. Series: Fast, Rosabel. . Mennonite history for young people ; v. 3

BX8119.M4F383 2017 j289.7'72 C2017-906480-0

CONTENTS

NORTH AMERICA

In the 1920s, Mennonites from Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Canada, travelled all the way across the United States to Chihuahua and Durango, Mexico, to find a new homeland. Today, Mennonite villages and colonies can be found across the country.

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of about 6,000 people who moved from Canada to Mexico in the 1920s. It is also about their **descendants,** or their children and grandchildren. The story begins in the 1920s and ends around 1960.

It is about Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico. Today, descendants of these people live in Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, Texas, Kansas and other places in Canada and the United States. Many also live in other Latin American countries.

This is a true story about the past. It is a history. In writing history, we can only tell the stories that we know about, 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 to have been there. The more information we find about the olden days, the closer we come to knowing what it was like to live during that time.

Then we can start to think about what history means. What would our **forebears**, or 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 book you will also read vignettes. These are stories that introduce a section of history. To write the vignettes, I looked at the facts and the information that I had about the past. Then I wondered about what life must have been like in Mexico in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. How did children, young people and their families experience life? I wrote the vignettes to describe what their experiences could have been like.

—the author

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Bold words

In this reader you will find words in **bold** print. These are words that you may not know. Don't worry. The meaning of a bolded word usually comes right after the word.

You can also find all the bolded words and their meanings at the back of the reader, in two lists. The first list follows the order in which the words are used in the reader. The second list is in alphabetical, or A-B-C, order.

Italicized words

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

Another use for italics is emphasizing an English word. For example: The train *roared* into the station – means the roar was loud.

What does a small star* after a word mean?

The star, called an asterisk, means that you can find more information about the word in a note at the bottom of the page.

A second word on the same page is marked with a dagger† (also called an obelisk).

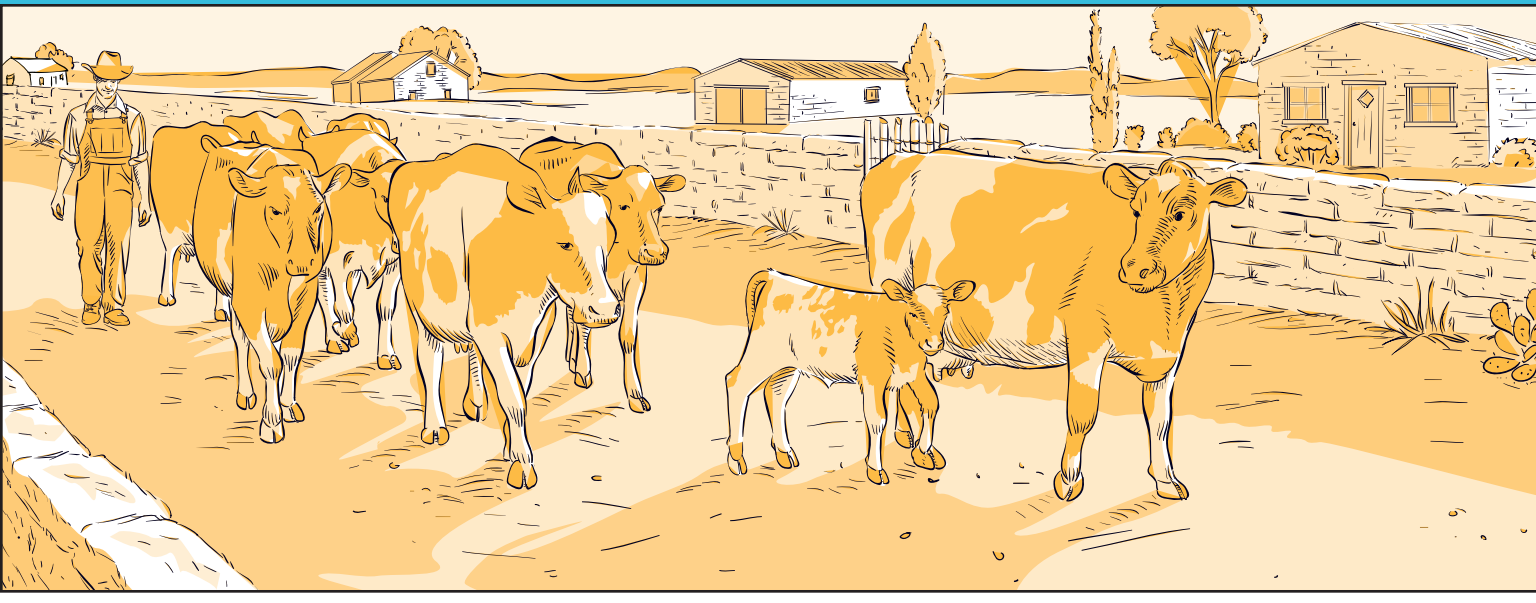
Did you know that . . .

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

Do you like learning new words from another language? Yes? Use the guide for pronouncing the words, so that you can say the new words. No? Don't worry. You do not need to read Plautdietsch or German or Spanish to understand the stories in this reader. You can jump directly to the English meanings that come after the foreign words.

Before You Read the Story

CHAPTER ONE



1 EVERYONE HAS TO GROW UP

"Everyone has to grow up," they say. In the 1920s, about 6,000 Mennonites moved from Canada to Mexico. These pioneers built roads, bridges, homes, farms, villages and colonies. A group of villages, the people who lived in them and the land around the villages was called a colony. You can read more about these first Mexico colonies in earlier volumes. The stories in

this reader take place in Mexico in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

By now, the pioneer years were over. The Mennonites had settled in Mexico. And Mexico, not Canada, was their home now. But the Mennonites never really stopped pioneering. They were always trying out new ideas for getting their work done. They also opened new colonies. There, families started pioneering all over again.

The stories in this reader are about young people, adults, villages and colonies becoming mature. Mennonites spoke Plautdietsch. They also read in German and later some learned Spanish. But Plautdietsch was the language for living. In Plautdietsch "to mature" is *groot woaren*[*]. Groot means "big" or "grown up." In these stories, groot is also about getting **established** or settled down.

2 MENNONITES WHO BELONG IN MEXICO

The farmer men and women on Mennonite colonies had needed time. They did not feel settled in Mexico right away. They also had to learn one important thing: Who were they? Mexican or Canadian? The people around them were talking. They wondered about these Mennonites. One writer said: "These Canadian farmers are standing with one foot in two places, one in Mexico and one in Canada."[1] It was true; they did that for quite some time.

But now they knew who they were. They had stepped with both feet into Mexico. Between 1935 and 1945, the Mennonites of Mexico matured. They learned how things worked in Mexico. They knew where they belonged. And especially, they knew who they were. They were not exactly Mexican. They were Mennonites from Canada, who belonged in Mexico.

The history in this reader is about being established. It is about children who become *Jugend*[†], or youth, and adults who feel more and more settled. Their new villages have become comfortable places. They feel like home.

* * *

* Pronounced GROUT VO ah ren
† Pronounced YOU ghent

The first Mexico Mennonite colonies were Manitoba, Swift Current and Hague-Durango. They started as tent villages on wide open land. The tents were soon replaced by small wooden houses. Step by step the colonists learned how things worked in Mexico. They learned from the Mexican people who lived around them. For example: they learned that adobe was the better Mexican way of building houses. Mennonites learned by trying and failing. They often failed several times. But they kept going until they got it right.

Over the years their colonies filled up, and new ones were needed. At that time, the first three colonies became mother colonies. They helped young daughter colonies get started. They were certainly grown up by then.

3 WHAT IS A COLONY?

The first job in building a new colony is laying out village plans. Then comes making roads and building farms: houses, barns, outbuildings and so on. Each village also needs a school, and the colony needs several churches. Not every village needs a church, but there must be enough. No family should have to travel far to get to church. Remember, many of the Mennonites in this story travelled by horse and buggy. They did not have cars or pickup trucks. A colony was really a group of people. They were families and neighbours living side by side along their village streets.

4 COLONY CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Children and youth were full members of their village. They worked with adults to plant and grow food. They helped run the household. In summer they worked in their bean and corn fields. Of course, they also went to school, *and* they had time to play or visit with friends.

School was the time when the village children could be together. Their day started by walking to school with their friends. Recess was the time

for playing games in the schoolyard. Once they finished school, at about age 12 or 13, children would still play with friends. But playing wasn't the same anymore. They were becoming the Jugend of the village. Jugend was the time when young people learned to become adults.

5 OUR STORYTELLERS

Our storytellers, David Peters and Sarah Wiebe Fast, both grew up in Mexico.

David's Tales

David was born in Mexico. He said his parents had done things a bit differently. First they had all their boys, then all their girls. David was the youngest boy, right in the middle of a large family. He grew up on the Manitoba Colony in Chihuahua, Mexico.

Sarah's Tales

Sarah was only three when her family moved from Saskatchewan, Canada, to the Swift Current Colony in Chihuahua, Mexico. When she was an old lady, living in the *Altenheim**, or an old people's home, people loved to hear the stories she told about when she was young.

Besides David and Sarah, you will find other memories of life in Mexico throughout the reader. These memories were told by many different people.

* Pronounced AHL ten Haym

Growing up in Mexico

CHAPTER TWO

1 WHAT CHILDREN LEARNED IN SCHOOL

Every village on every colony had a school. Every child went to school. But children did not go to church or Sunday school. They learned their *Bible* stories, catechism (a small book of questions and answers about the Christian faith), prayers and hymns at school. The teacher and his or her family lived right in the schoolyard. Their house was attached to the school. There

was also a small barn in the schoolyard for the teacher's cows, horses and other animals. Around the schoolyard was a fence made of adobe bricks.

The school was located in the middle of the village. This way, no child had to walk very far to school. From November to March, and one more month in the summer, they were in school. School was the place where the children gathered, where they got to see their friends. Besides reading, writing and arithmetic, the children learned their Christian Mennonite faith at school. They also they learned to be good villagers.

Here are some memories about what they did at school, from our storytellers' interviews.

Margaret

Did the children in Margaret's village like school?

"*Oba jo. Jo, jo*[*]. But yes. Yes, yes." That's what Margaret said when she remembered her school days. "I had all my friends at school. I played with everyone. I enjoyed that very much."

Margaret loved playing *Holltje Jriepa*[†], wood tag, at school. "There was one Jriepa, or It," she explained. "If we were touching wood, the Jriepa couldn't catch us." The schoolyard had lots of wood: fences with wooden posts and gates, a wooden school door, wooden window frames, a large stack of firewood and so on.

"When the Jriepa came our way, we saw to it that we got to some wood. If we didn't make it in time, it was, '*Nu, bes du!*'[‡] Now it's you. You had to go to the side. Once you were caught the game was over for you." Margaret didn't like being inside and working at home. She loved running around outside. The faster you could run, the more fun it was to play Jriepa. Margaret loved playing Jriepa.

Betty

Betty liked walking to school in winter right down the middle of her village street. She had to laugh when she remembered what she wore. She wrapped a big, black, woolen square around herself on cold winter days. "I walked

---

* Pronounced Oh bah YO, Yo
† Pronounced HULLt Yeh YREE pah
‡ Pronounced NOO, doo bes

All schools had boys and girls. But they sat on different sides of the classroom. This is the boys' side. Notice that the smallest boys are right at the back and the oldest boys at the front. Can you think of a reason for this custom?

along the village street looking like that!" she said.

One day, Betty and her friends thought of a new idea for a game. They would see who could be at school first in the morning. Betty said, "I really wanted to be first, so I got up very early. The school door wasn't even open when I got there. Each day I got up earlier and earlier. I wanted to be at school first, every day. This meant waiting a very long time for the teacher. Finally, he came and unlocked the school door for us."

Helen

Helen really liked her teacher. It was too bad he moved to Paraguay. After that they had a teacher who was not good. He punished the children very hard. Helen and the other children were always nervous at school with that teacher. Helen's parents never said anything bad about the teacher in front of the children. That didn't mean they didn't know. One day Helen heard her father talking to Mother in the other room. He said, "We're not going to keep that teacher. He writes bad cheques. He tells lies, and he's supposed to be teaching our children good things." Soon Helen had a new teacher. Everyone knew that lying and writing bad cheques were not the only reasons the old teacher was gone. Parents wanted a kind teacher for their children.

David

David couldn't remember ever being bored at school. "The school day had many short parts," he said. "First we read silently. Then each group **recited,** or read out loud. After that we worked out math problems that the teacher had prepared on cards. The teacher handed out a card to each child. Whenever we finished a problem, we got to walk up to the front of the classroom to get our answers checked. We also did writing. After lunch we had the same schedule over again."

Margaret

Most village children walked home for lunch every day (no lunch boxes for them). But Margaret lived too far from school to go home. Instead, she had her lunch at Grandmother's house. Margaret and Grandmother had different ideas about food. "My grandmother *loved* fish," said Margaret. "'Today, we have *fish*!' grandmother would say when I walked in the door. Okay, I liked fish, too, but Grandmother *really* liked fish," said Margaret.

"Grandmother bought fish from a peddler who came through the village. She dipped pieces of fish in flour and fried them in butter in a heavy iron pan. Grandmother had her fish with coffee. We also had potatoes. I like that Grandmother prepared my lunch, and we two ate lunch together."

Margaret's grandmother looked like all the other grandmas in those days. Margaret explained: "Grandmother had a very long, wide skirt and those slippers that old grandmothers wore. They always flapped on the floor when old ladies walked."

David

David remembers a time when things weren't fair. At recess the children were playing *Pom Pom Pull Away, All the Horses Run Away*. Not looking where he was going, David ran into a little girl. The little girl's nose started to bleed. After that the teacher divided the children up for playtime. The little ones played in one group, and the big ones played in another. The teacher put David in with the little ones.

This isn't right, thought David. "It was I who ran into a little girl. Shouldn't I be playing with the older children? That would have made more sense. It would also have been much more fun for me," he said. But David kept his

thoughts to himself. Correcting the teacher was not allowed in his Mennonite village school in Mexico.

2 DAVID'S TALES: WHO'S THE BEST WRITER IN CLASS?

Who was the best writer in class? Well, that might be David or his brother. They were both good writers. Writing was like art. It was beautiful to look at. That is, if the page wasn't covered in ink blots and crooked letters. To write neatly with a stick pen and ink, you needed *ne fiene Haunt**, hands that could do fine work. David had fine fingers. He **inherited**, or got, them from his father. Father could make almost anything with his clever hands.

It was the custom in the village for the fathers to have a meeting every month. They decided what needed to be done in the village, such as painting the school, smoothing out the holes in the village street and so on. They also held writing contests for the school children.

A couple of times a year, the school children had to do their writing on a sheet of paper. Most days they wrote in notebooks. For the contest, the teacher put a number on the back of each pupil's writing sheet. Then the teacher made a list of all the pupils and the numbers on the back of their writing sheets.

That evening at their meeting, the fathers read each piece of writing; one set for the boys and one set for the girls. After they thought about it for a good long time, the fathers laid the sheets out in order: the most beautiful one was at the top.

The next day the teacher got the two stacks of writing back. He checked his name sheet to see which pupil's work was at the top. He looked at both piles – one for the girls and one for the boys. Then he announced the winners. David was used to being close to the top of the boys' group. Justina was always at the top of the girls' group.

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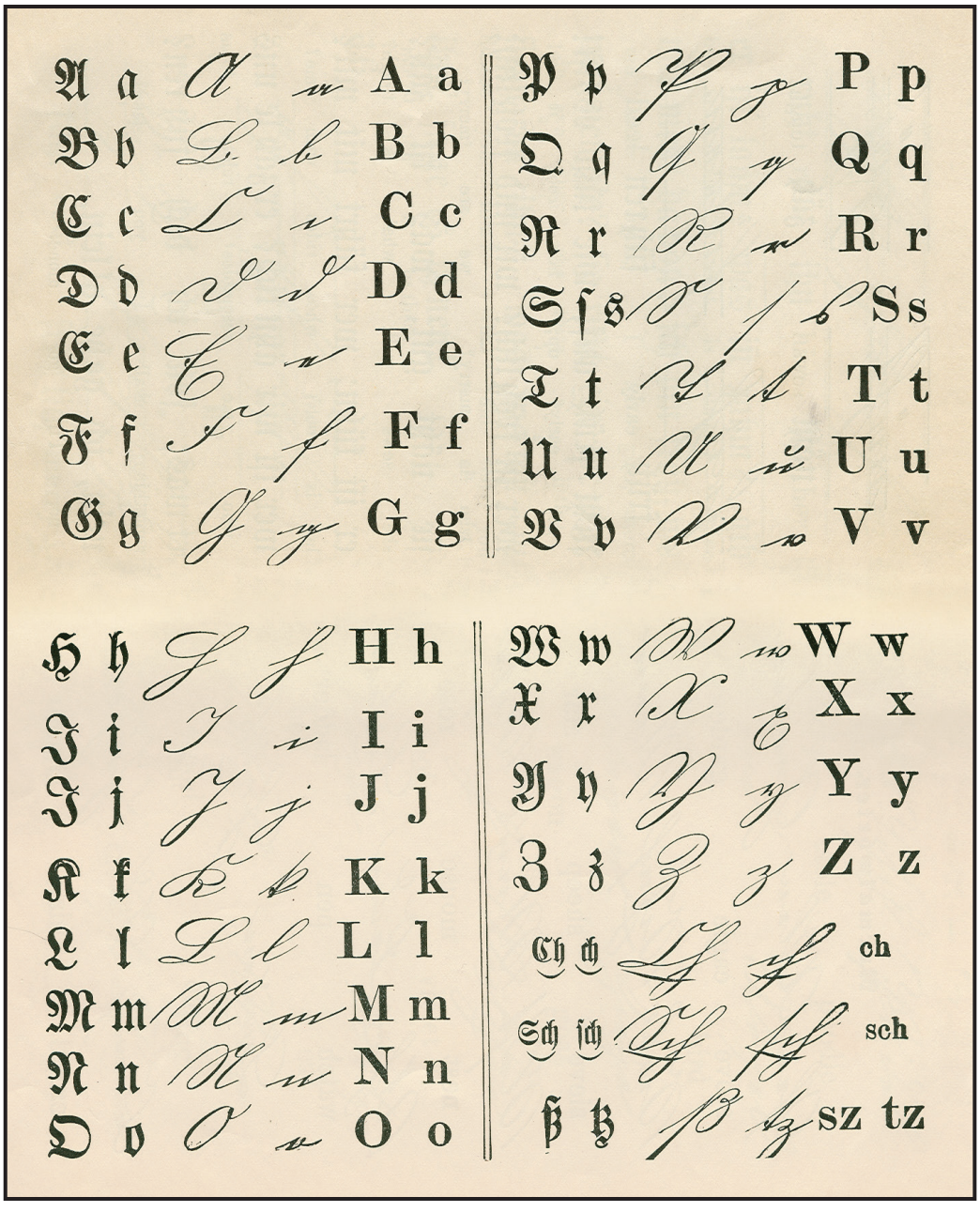
* Pronounced Neh FEE ne HAUnt



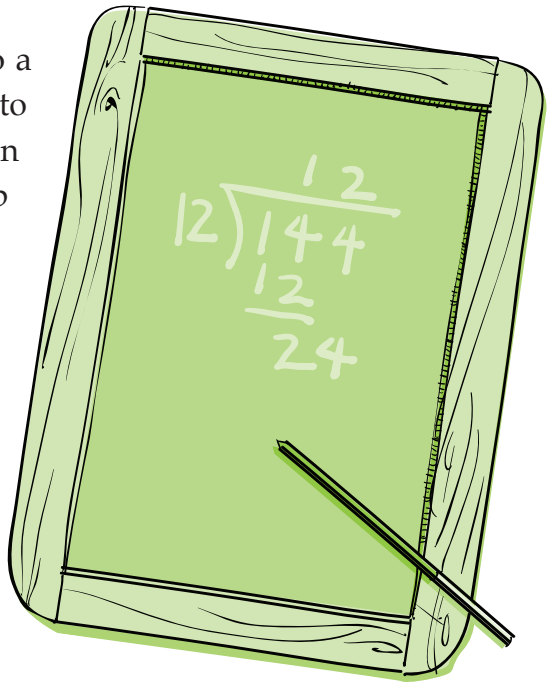
During one of these contests, the fathers judged all the boys' and girls' work together. That time David's sheet came back with the number seven – a long way from the top. *Ouch*, that stung. There were too many girls ahead of him. Then David found out that Justina had gotten number eight. That made him feel much better.

3 HANDWRITING COULD BE FUN

Writing was a very important subject and it was *not* easy. Some children loved it. Others didn't, because it was so hard. All their writing was done with ink and in German. German is written in four different ways:

- German type used in books was called Gothic.
- German script was written by hand in two styles. One style was the same as English cursive.
- The other cursive script was called Latin or *Schpetsen**, points.
- Roman type looks exactly like English. It is used in German books today. It was not used for German in the olden days. You can see the three German writing styles on page 12.

The children did not write with pens when they first started school. They began with a slate and *Schiefa*†. A slate looked like a tiny blackboard. The Schiefa was a stick for writing on slate, something like long, thin chalk. Once they could write neatly on slates, pupils could start using ink and paper. They wrote in notebooks that the teacher made for them.



Each desk had a bottle of ink set into a hole. Stick pens with nibs were dipped into the ink. Getting the right amount of ink on the nib took practice. The ink liked to drip off the nib in ugly blots. You had to hold the pen carefully. Pressing too hard made the ink come out in blots. If you didn't press hard enough, the ink would not flow onto the paper.

A perfect page of writing, with all letters the same size and no blots, was a *big* achievement. Children and their parents were very proud of perfect **penmanship,** or handwriting.

* Pronounced SHPET sen
† Pronounced SHEE fah

This picture of children walking to school is quite modern, not as old as most photos in this reader. But the village church is an old one. It was built around 1950.

4 GERMAN, PLAUTDIETSCH AND SCHOOL SUBJECTS

School was taught in German, because that was the language for reading and writing. At home everyone spoke Plautdietsch, Low German. This was the language for talking. The teacher also sometimes spoke Plautdietsch in school to explain things.

The three main school subjects were reading, writing and arithmetic, things that everyone needed to know.

The *New Testament*, *Old Testament* (which was called the *Bible*), catechism and hymn book were the readers. All of them were in German. Beginners also had a *Fiebel**, a reader for learning the alphabet. Once they knew how to read the Fiebel, it was time to read the catechism. Every child had to know the catechism from memory before they finished school. After the catechism came the *New Testament* and then the *Old Testament*.

Every school day started with the Lord's Prayer. After that it was time to

* Pronounced FEE bal

open the hymn book and sing. These song books had only words, no notes. The tunes for the songs were very plain. When they were sung, however, they weren't plain at all. The children **embellished**, or added, notes to the tune while singing. Learning to sing these added embellishments was fun. They also made the hymns sound very good.

Between each line of the song, the teacher hummed a short tune. This was called *Aufsingen*[*], ending the line. Aufsingen led the children into the next line of the song. Sometimes the teacher surprised one of the children. "Lisa, you sing auf now," he might say at any time. Then Lisa, or any other child who was asked, had to think fast to make up the little tunes.

Friday afternoon was playtime. The children came to school prepared. The younger ones brought dolls, toy tractors, maybe a ball or other toys. They also played Jriepa, or tag; *Blinja*[†], blind man's bluff; and other games. The older children organized the games and were in charge of the games.

And that was a week at school.

5 NO END OF WORK

Outside there was carrying water from the well to the house, raking the yard, weeding the flower beds, hoeing the vegetable garden, watering the fruit trees, picking vegetables and fruit, and chopping wood and carrying it into the house.

On the farm there was feeding the cows, chickens, pigs, calves and geese, and giving them water. There was also cleaning the animals' pens. On the fields there was seeding corn and beans, hoeing the corn, weeding bean fields, harvesting beans, bringing meals to the workers and picking corn.

Villagers on colonies worked hard. Young people were part of the village and part of the work. Families grew and cooked their own food. They sewed their own clothes. They fixed their own tools and farming equipment. There were also village carpenters who built their furniture. Sometimes families hired workers. But mostly they did the work themselves.

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* Pronounced AUf ZING en
† Pronounced BLING yah

Work began in the morning and ended in the evening. In between, everyone sat down at the table to eat and rest, four times: breakfast, then the hot noon meal, after that was *Faspa*[*] (bread with butter or jam, cookies, cheese and coffee) and finally a small supper in the evening.

Parents taught the children all the jobs that had to be done. First they did easy jobs, then the harder ones. There was no end to the jobs. In the house there was dusting, sweeping, washing dishes, cooking, baking, laundry, sewing and more.

* Pronounced FAS pa

VIGNETTE

Eva Cooks a Meal

Eva, age nine, was cooking supper for the family. Mother had made sure the fire in the wood cook-stove was not too big or too hot. Eva had peeled the potatoes and got them boiling on the stove. Then she fried the smoked sausage. Learning to cook potatoes was easy. Frying sausage was a bit more complicated. When the sausage was brown and crisp, but not burned, Eva took the pieces out of the pan. Then she got ready to make the gravy. Gravy was not easy.

Eva waited until the heavy iron pan had cooled a little. Then she carefully sprinkled flour into the warm sausage fat in the pan and stirred the flour into the fat. She kept on stirring as Mother added cream, a little bit at a time. They stirred and poured until there was a nice layer of cream gravy bubbling in the pan. Potatoes with gravy, fried sausage and fresh

bread – that would be supper today.

Eva ran to the door and shouted to Abram and Father to come in for supper. Then she dumped the hot potatoes into a serving bowl, stacked the sizzling sausage on a plate and carried the food to the table. Mother followed with the gravy and bread.

"What do you think?" asked Mother, when Abram and Father walked in the door, and the younger children were seated at the table. "Our Eva cooked this meal all by herself, except for a little help with the gravy." Eva's faced flushed, but she held her head high. She looked straight at Abram. Abram shrugged and pretended to be Father. "Will it be safe to eat?" he asked in a low voice. Eva's cheeks turned bright red. She made a dive for her brother, ready to **tackle**, or grab, him. Abram grabbed her wrists, and they burst out laughing.

"Just don't grow up too fast!" said Abram.

6 WITHOUT ELECTRICITY AND VEHICLES

Most colonies decided not to hook up to electricity. This meant that there were no electric stoves, sewing machines, light bulbs, dishwashers or milking machines. Cows were milked by hand two times a day. Colonies also decided to not have cars or pickup trucks. Instead, horses were harnessed to buggies or wagons. After a trip to town, they had to be unharnessed again. Horses and other animals also had to be fed, twice a day.

Not everyone agreed with these lifestyle decisions. But colonies that chose this lifestyle had good reasons for doing so. Life without electricity and vehicles was simple. It kept the colonies quiet and peaceful. Hard-working people had time to sit and talk in the evenings. They had time for long, slow buggy rides. Visiting cousins and uncles and aunts in another village was

often part of their Sundays. Without pickup trucks and electric machines, people had to work together. They had to take time to help each other out.

The ministers and parents said: "Living on the land, growing food for the world and helping neighbours on a colony is a good way to live. It is the way we practise our Christian faith. Living without electricity and vehicles makes life move slowly. That makes it easier to keep a lifestyle simple."

7 LEARNING TO WORK: WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG

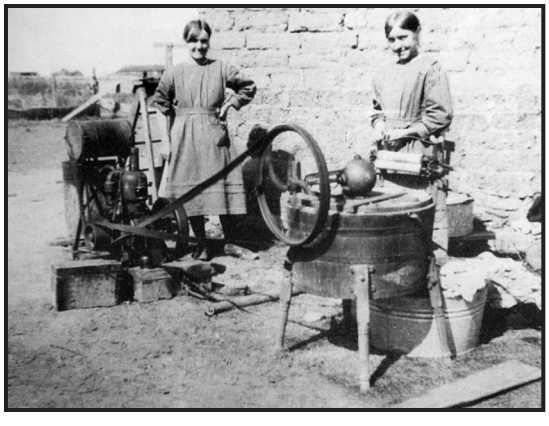
All the storytellers you meet in this reader had to work at home. They had no trouble remembering all the many jobs they did. They started learning their jobs when they were still very young.

Tina

Tina remembered laundry day when she was just a little girl. On laundry day, Mother washed all the clothes by hand in tubs. Kettles of water were heated on the stove. Even the fire needed work. It did not burn on its own. Someone had to keep adding wood.

When Mother finished washing the clothes, she handed each of her two little girls a small pail. Tina and her sister used them to carry out all the wash water, pailful after pailful after pailful. Then when Mother went outside to hang the laundry on the line, she called out to her daughters, "Now, girls, go clean the laundry room."

"That's what we did every



A "modern" washing machine. The tub at the front is filled with hot water. The agitator in the tub is turned by the motor at the back. It moves the clothes in the tub back and forth to get them clean. Once the clothes are washed, they go through a wringer. Finally, they are hung on wash lines in the yard. In the hot, dry weather of Mexico, the clothes dried very quickly and all at the same time.

Doing the laundry, without automatic washers.

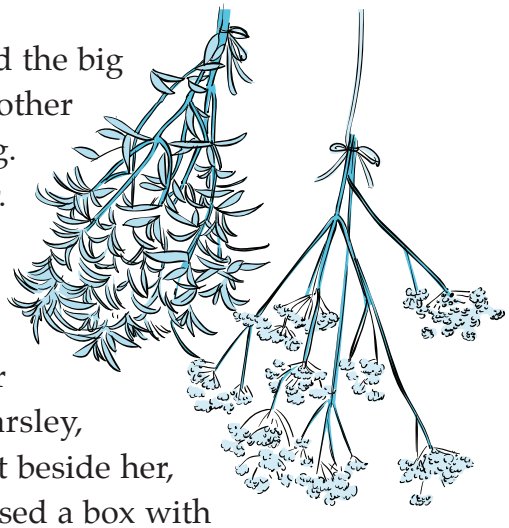
week," said Tina, "carry out many pails of water and then clean the laundry room."

David

David had to wash dishes at home. It was not his favourite job. Sometimes even his grandmother got him to wash the dishes at her house. David soon noticed that Grandmother never asked his older brother to help with dishes. So he complained to his brother. "Why does she always ask me, not you?" he asked. "Oh," said his smart-aleck older brother. "If you twist the tea towel and don't get the dishes dry enough, she won't ask you anymore."

Margaret

Margaret was seven when her mother taught her to sweep the floor and dust the furniture. Northern Mexico was a very dusty place. Margaret swept all the floors every day. First she swept the back bedrooms, then the



big front room. Every other day, she also dusted the big room. That was her work. Margaret and her mother were an unusual family. Most families were very big. Margaret's family had only herself and her mother.

Margaret's mother loved gardening, and Margaret loved helping. Mother was lame. She couldn't walk or stand very well. So she did her gardening from her chair. Near the house Mother had a garden for *Fienet**, small plants: dill, parsley, summer savoury and so on. Margaret was right beside her, ready to follow Mother's directions. Margaret used a box with holes in the bottom to sprinkle water on the seeds and later on the little plants. "That's how Mother got everything to grow," said Margaret. Margaret was only six when she started to do Mother's gardening like this.

8 LEARNING TO WORK: WHEN WE WERE YOUNG

When they were old enough, at about age 10, children started milking cows. Some already knew how to milk before that. They also learned to harness horses to buggies or wagons and to unharness them again. Older boys and girls worked in the fields with horses. Horses pulled the plow and other **implements,** or farm equipment. Older children also helped out at the neighbours' or at their married brothers' and sisters' homes.

Helen

Helen was the youngest in her family. But she was old enough to take the bus by herself. She was going away for the week. She would be the *Kjinja Mäakjen*†, babysitter, at her married brother's house. Helen lived in the *Nuadkollenie*‡, North Colony.

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* Pronounced FEE net
† Pronounced CHING ah MAY ah Tyen
‡ Pronounced NOOad KULLeh NEE

This group of boys, and a little sister, have stopped for Faspa, coffee break, during harvest time. A huge load of sheaves is just arriving from the field. The boys may be waiting to feed the sheaves into the threshing machine.

Before she left for her brother's house, Helen had to learn one Spanish word. "When you come to your bus stop, just say *'Parada'* to the bus driver. Then he'll let you off the bus." That's what her family told Helen to say, and it worked.

Helen really liked helping her sister-in-law. Then one night when she woke up, she realized she had been walking in her sleep. She had gone into her brother's bedroom at night. When they teased her about it in the morning, Helen was **mortified**, or embarrassed. How could she have done such a thing? Suddenly, she was very homesick. She wanted to be back at home with her mother. So her brother put her back on the bus.

When Helen got home, the family was busy butchering pigs. Inside the house, the big girls were sewing a new dress. The dress would be Helen's Christmas present. When the sisters saw Helen walking to the house, they had to scramble to get their sewing cleaned up. They got the pretty green cloth into the drawer just in time.

Martha

Martha had to work hard, together with her brothers and sisters. They were all still young when they did very hard work. At harvest time they worked in the bean fields. "Father had made himself a set of long knives to cut the large, dry bean plants. With the knives, he could cut two rows of beans at a time. We children followed him and gathered the dry bean plants into piles. It was hard and heavy work for children. It was really too hard for us children. But it had to get done. Once the beans were harvested, we picked corn. That was also very hard work in the hot sun," explained Martha.

Butchering

Mennonites did not buy their pork (or other meat) in grocery stores. They raised pigs and other animals on their farms. In the fall, when the weather was getting cold, they turned their pigs into pork chops, spareribs, hams, sausages and lard. This process is called butchering.

"When Christmas came, we children gathered beans that had been left behind in the field. (Most winters, there was no snow on the ground in Mexico.) We sold our beans, and this was our Christmas money. We used it to buy presents. Sometimes we bought chocolate, instead, with our precious money. Chocolate cost a lot of money, and in no time it was eaten. So we had to decide how to spend our few pennies: on chocolate or on Christmas presents," she said.

Martha remembers how happy they were for that money. She also never forgot how **frugal**, or careful with their money, they learned to be. Martha's family was very poor, too poor.

9 DAVID'S TALES: LUCKY YOUNGEST BROTHER NOT SO LUCKY

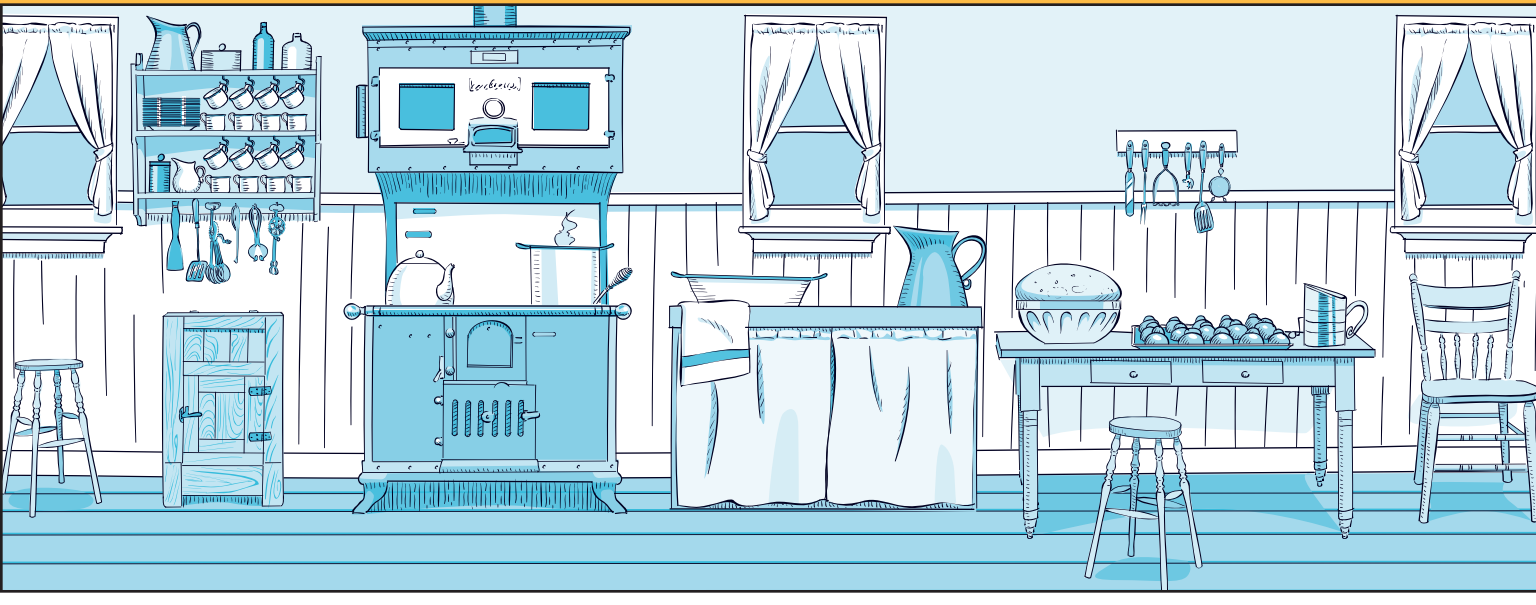
David was the youngest boy in his family. That was lucky, in a way. His parents often forgot to put him to work. They already had four older boys who could look after the farm and the yard. It's not that David didn't have to do any work. He weeded the garden, hoed the bean field, carried in firewood and pulled up bean plants at harvest time. And he had to help in the house. There was also one more job that was perfect for the youngest son. That's what David's parents thought.

Behind every farmyard in David's village was a field of grass. Most villagers had a fence around the field to make a horse pasture. At night the horses were in the barn, but in the daytime they were in the fenced area. David's farmyard did not have a fence. When the horses were put out to graze, there was nothing to keep them at home. They moved right along to the neighbours' fields. That's where the parents needed David: a young boy with not too much to do; a boy who was old enough to be the "cowherd" for the family horses.

What a boring, boring, BORING job. To David, getting the horses to stay on the grass seemed like endless hours. He had to make very sure the horses did *not* decide to take off for the neighbours' fields. He could not let them feast on the neighbours' delicious young corn plants. Horses also loved rolling in the freshly cultivated soil between the cornrows. David's job was certainly a very important one. But why did it have to be his job?

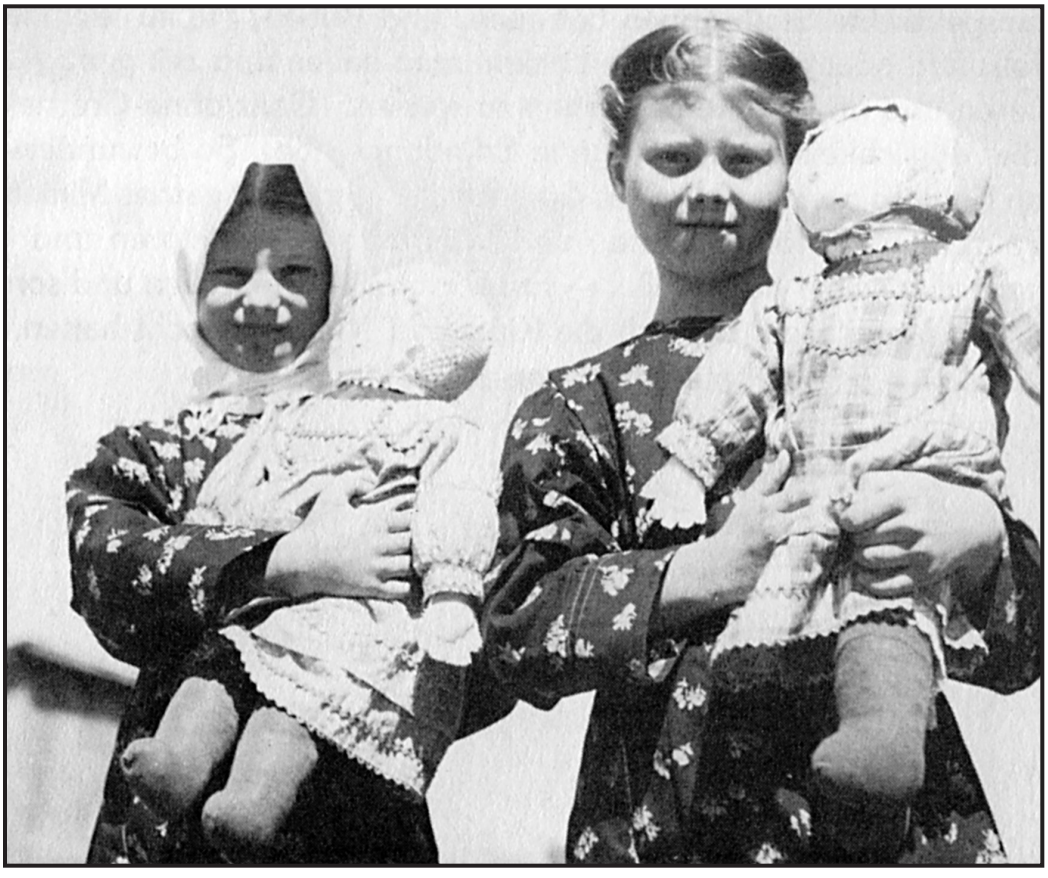
CHAPTER THREE

Children Play and Then Grow Up



1 WHAT DID CHILDREN PLAY?

Was it boring to live on a quiet colony with so many jobs to do?
Yes! Sometimes it was.
Was it hard?
Yes! Sometimes it was.
Was it fun?



Little girls loved their baby-sized dolls that their mothers made for them.

Yes!

Did children ever get to play?

Yes! But their toys were simple. Sometimes even play was a little bit like work.

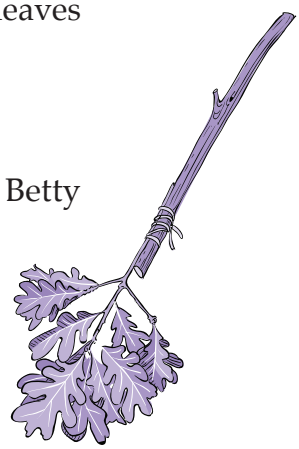
How did children play?

Betty

Because Betty was the youngest in her family, she was already an aunt when she was very young. She had nieces and nephews. When Betty came home from school, the children's parents would say, "Betty, take the children outside. Find something for them to do." So young Aunt Betty played school with the little ones. She was the teacher, and the little children were the pupils.

Tina

Tina laughed when she talked about how she and her friends played. Their toys were very inexpensive. They cost nothing. The children found everything in their yard. Tina made herself a little house in an old wagon box in her yard. With boards and firewood blocks, she made furniture for her house. The wagon-box house also had a china cabinet. Tina made that with an adobe brick frame. She hung the frame on one of the wagon-box walls inside her wagon-box house. Then she filled her cabinet with pieces of pretty glass she found in the yard. These were her fancy dishes. One day Tina and the other children found an old broomstick in the yard. They wired leaves to the stick, to make a broom for sweeping their wagon-box floor.



Betty

Little girls called this game *Schtofje**, which means "Little Room." Betty made herself a little room in their empty henhouse. She swept the floor and sprinkled it with sawdust to make it nice and clean. She and her friends set up all kinds of things in their house.

* Pronounced SHTOAf yeh

Soil, wood, tin and other things they found on the yard: that is what the Gerhard Rempel children used to build this **miniature**, or little, colony village.

2 DAVID'S TALES: THE ENVY OF THE VILLAGE, BUT ...

Christmas was coming. What would *Nätklos*[*], Father Christmas, bring this year? In those days, everyone was poor. Children did not expect big presents. They often got homemade Christmas presents. But this year David and his brothers and sisters noticed that Father kept going over to Grandfather's place. David never knew why. Asking Father was no use. Father's answers were never clear on that matter.

When Christmas morning finally arrived, the secret was out. Father came walking proudly into the house. *What?* He was pushing a bicycle! That's what he had been building. No one in the village had a bicycle. No one even *thought* of having a bicycle. This father-built bicycle had three wheels. So it was really a tricycle. But it was as big as a small bicycle. David was just a young boy, and the bicycle was the perfect size for him. Father had made everything himself out of sheet metal: the wheels, spokes, frame and handlebars. He built it all in Grandfather's *Schmäd*[†], metal shop. The only thing Father had to buy was the seat.

Sometime later David went with Father to the village welder. They needed to get some hooks for the horse harness. The bicycle also needed a bit of work. So it was put in the wagon at the back. When the welder saw the bicycle he asked Father, "What do you have in the back there?" David, of course, could not contain himself. "That's our BICYCLE!" he said proudly. Well! It was the wrong thing to say.

The welder was a very strict man. He believed there should be rules that kept young people from going too far away from home. David's colony did not have cars or trucks. Only horses and buggies were used for travelling. There wasn't a rule about bicycles, but the welder had a rule. A bicycle was a vehicle and that was that.

"What are you thinking?" the welder asked Father. "You build such a thing for your children?" The welder kept on talking in a loud voice for some time. Then he fixed the bicycle. Nothing more was ever said about it.

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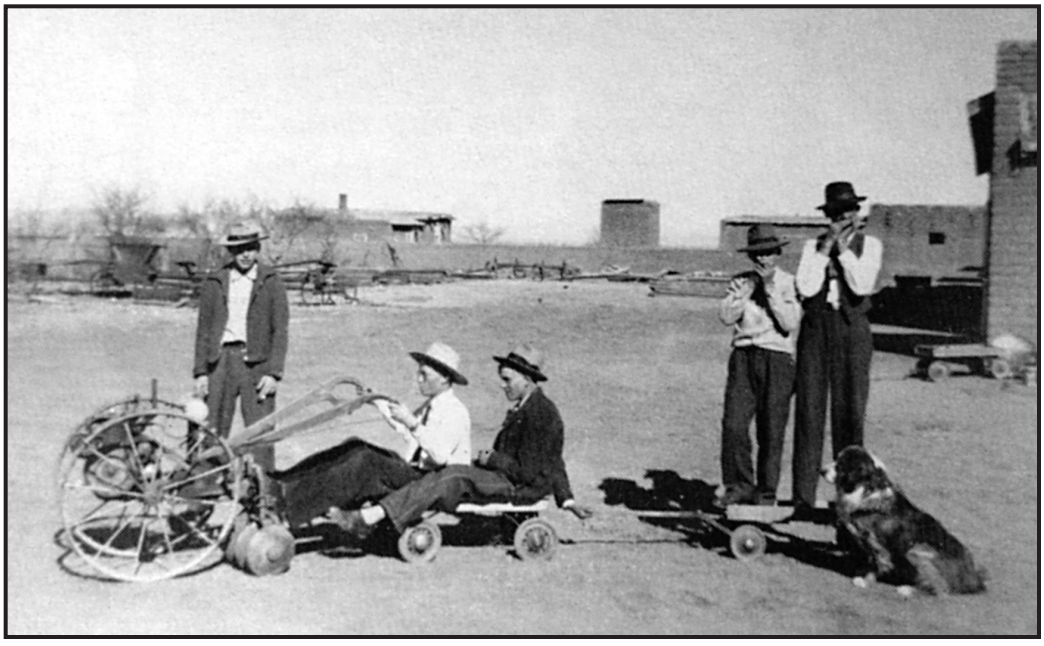
* Pronounced NAIT kloass
† Pronounced Schmaid



David's father was not the only one who made amazing vehicles. Can you see how this "car" was built and what propels it forward?

David and his friends and sisters and brothers kept on enjoying that bicycle for many more days and years.

3 AND THEN WE WERE GROOT

Once children were out of their school years, at age 12 or 13, they started doing adult work. For example: girls learned to sew clothes. All clothes were sewn at home: coats, overalls, dresses, aprons, shirts, jackets and more. Boys learned to fix machinery, sharpen tools, build furniture and so on.

Older children often helped out in other families' homes and farms. Those who came from poor families might get a job with a family in another village. They lived with the family. That could be fun. It could also be very lonely. It depended on the family.

Here are four more short stories. In these stories, the storytellers don't feel like children anymore. They're not adults yet, but they are groot.

Esther

Esther sometimes worked for other families. She said, "For a while I worked for one of the families in our village. The woman wasn't very tidy. That's why I enjoyed cleaning there. When I scrubbed the floor it had a different colour afterwards. They also had a pail for their drinking water. One day I was looking after the children while the parents went to town. I thought to myself, I'll scrub that pail clean. I did that, and it also turned a completely different color. It felt good to get things so sparkling clean!"

Helen

Helen remembered sewing her own dresses when she was a girl. She didn't always agree with her mother about the style. Helen said, "When I sewed – I don't know if I should say this – but my mother was very strict. The sleeves shouldn't be puffed. It was the custom for girls to have their sleeves a bit high, more puffed. They liked to show off their sleeves. I thought I'd also make my sleeves puffed a bit higher.

Father and children picking pears at Grandmother's house. These pears, called butter pears, were delicious. Many families had at least one of these big trees in their yard.

But my mother knew exactly how to manage things. When I was ready to sew the sleeves into the dress, Mother sent me to the henhouse to let the hens out. When I came back, she had cut the armhole bigger. That meant there wouldn't be much puff in my sleeves. In any case, my sleeves weren't as high as the other girls'. I had no puffed sleeves to show off with my new dress."

Susie

Susie remembered learning at home. She said, "Finishing school after I turned 12 did not mean I stopped being a 'school girl.' Our father was very strict. After we finished school, Father always said, 'You didn't go to school for nothing.' He checked to make sure we could still write, do arithmetic and that we kept on reading. We could not let the books lie. We also had married brothers who lived in Bolivia. We would often write letters to them, so we kept practising our writing."

Mary

Mary remembered their wonderful farm. The farm had everything they needed. For example: there were always chickens for meat and eggs. When Mary was hungry for chicken noodle soup, she cooked a chicken and made noodles with flour, eggs and salt. The whole family loved Mary's soup. Mary was just a young girl when she made noodles by hand and cooked giant pots of soup for the whole family.

Mary added: "We also had a big garden. In our garden there were vegetables and lots of fruit: gooseberries, currents, *Brommbäaren*[*] (mulberries), strawberries, raspberries, pears, butter pears, peaches and apples.

Mother said some of the fruit trees had come from Canada back in 1922. Grandparents brought them and planted them in Mexico. Then they planted new ones from the old. Watering all these trees was one of the most important jobs for children. If the trees didn't get enough water, they died. Our mother's trees always got enough water."

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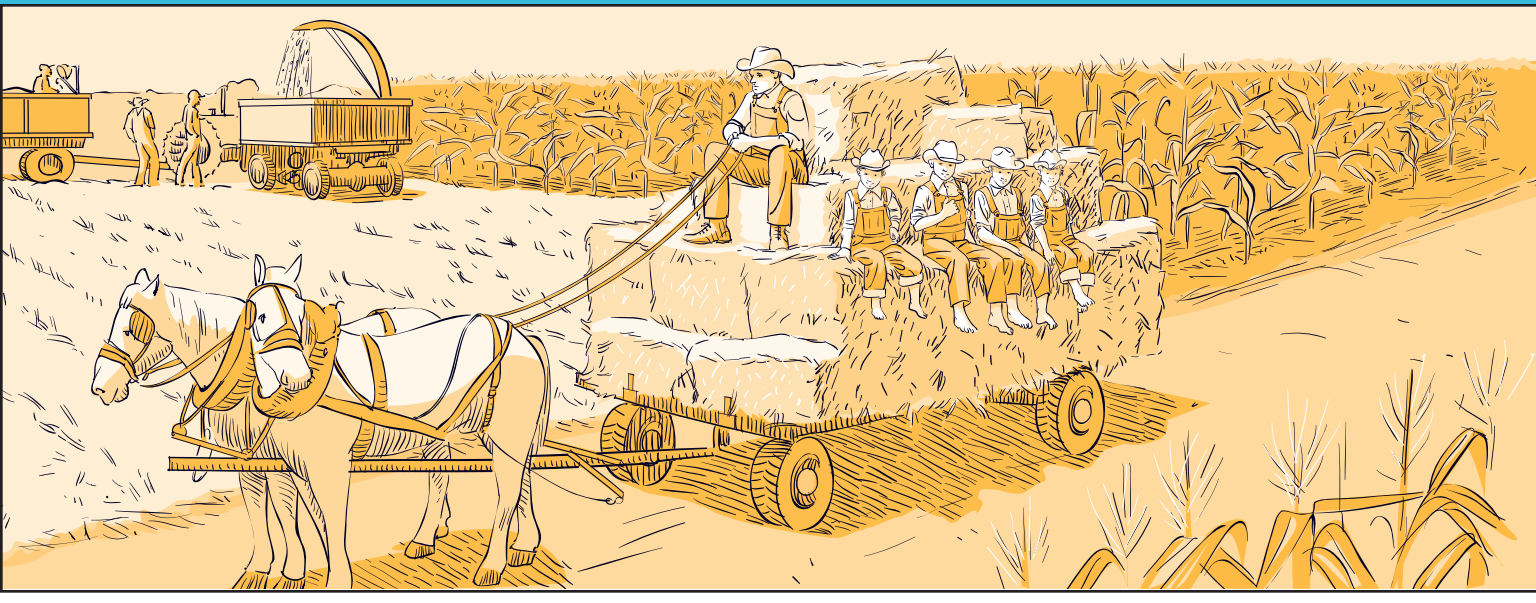
* Pronounced BRUMM BAY ah-rin

Farmers Grow Up

CHAPTER FOUR



1 FARMERS LEARN TO FARM AGAIN

"Mexico has enough business people. What we need is expert grain farmers." That's what the president of Mexico himself had said to the Mennonites. That was in 1921. When they first came to Mexico, the Mennonites knew exactly how to grow grain. But these confident farmers soon had a bad surprise. They didn't know everything after all. Making things grow in

Mexico was completely new for them, so they had to learn.

Farmers had to learn how to plant new crops in different soil and in a new climate. One of their first hard lessons was about wheat. Wheat was the queen of crops in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. But this was not so in Chihuahua, Mexico. Wheat did not grow well there. Corn and beans are what they had to plant. The farmers were relieved that oats did grow in Mexico. They could not do their work without horses. Horses need oats to eat if they are to do the hard work of pulling a plow and other heavy implements.

Selling their Mexican beans, corn and oats was complicated. First, because the buyers spoke Spanish. Mennonites lived in colonies, separate from the world around them. They spoke Plautdietsch and German, but not Spanish. Once again, they had to learn. They tried and failed, then tried and failed again, until they solved their language problem. Mennonites learned a little Spanish, and Mexican buyers learned a little Plautdietsch.

Even during the hard, early years, Mennonites earned enough money from their farms to make a living. Soon many were doing very well.

Milking cows is something everyone knew how to do. That did not change in a new country. Every farm had milk cows. Milk was important for feeding large Mennonite families. When Mennonites learned to turn milk into cheese, they had another way of earning a living.

Later, farmers in Chihuahua started to grow apples. Growing apples to sell was new for Mennonites. At first only a few farmers tried it. The tricky part was apple blossom time. One cold night could kill all the blossoms. That year there would be no apples to sell. Most families didn't want to take the risk.

And last, most Mennonite villages had people with a talent for inventing things. Working with their hands seemed to be part of being Mennonite. Once they were settled, Mennonite inventors used this talent to make and sell farm implements.

For the adults, learning new ways to make a living felt like growing up – all over again. They felt like school children. Feeling foolish was hard. It also felt good when they finally figured out how things were done in Mexico.

2 CORN

Corn has grown in Mexico for as long as anyone can remember. The Tarahumara people in Chihuahua were already planting corn many hundreds of years ago. They knew how to do that in a land that had very little rain. Mexicans learned from the Tarahumara. Mennonites from Canada learned from the Mexicans.

Here is how corn was grown in the traditional Tarahumara-Mexican way.

The rainy season started in June or July. This is when things really started to grow. But the Tarahumara planted their corn in April or May. They used long planting sticks to make small holes in freshly plowed soil. Below the dry layer, the soil was moist. They tossed three corn seeds into each hole and covered them with soil. Now the seeds were in a dark, moist, warm place, just right for **sprouting,** or starting to grow.

For the Tarahumara, corn planting time was very important. They wanted the corn to be up before the rains came. But they had to make sure it didn't come up too soon. If that happened, the young plants would dry up before

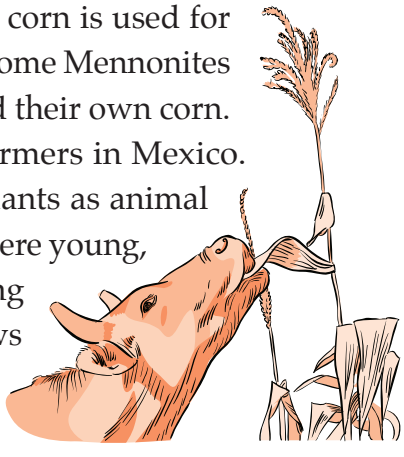
Harvesting corn was children's work. In this photo the older children have picked corn all day. Now the job for the little ones is to load the corn ears into the wagon, to bring the corn home. At home the whole family will husk the corn. Only then can they take it to town to be sold.

How Long Does It Take to Pick a Field of Corn by Hand?

Our storyteller David had an uncle with "nifty hands." He had a way of grabbing the corn ear, twisting his wrist and tossing the ear into the wagon, all in one motion. He could fill a wagon box in one afternoon. The wagon was about 1.5 metres by three metres in size.

the rain came. If corn was planted at just the right time, the young plants were already up and growing when the rainy season started. Then it rained almost every day, and the corn began to really grow.

Soon tiny ears of corn sprouted on the plants. Once the ears filled out they ripened, and the corn plants dried up. It was now time to pick the ripe corn and turn the kernels into flour. (In Mexico, corn is used for flour. In Canada, flour is usually made from wheat.) Some Mennonites followed the Tarahumara example when they planted their own corn.



Mennonites learned another good lesson from farmers in Mexico. These farmers used the green leaves of their corn plants as animal feed. This is how it was done. When the corn plants were young, the leaves were soft and green. As soon as the young corn ears appeared, farmers walked along the corn rows with their **machetes,** or large knives. They chopped off the **succulent**, or juicy, green tops just above the baby corn ears. This made excellent **green fodder**, or food, for their animals. The little corn ears kept right on growing.

In Mennonite colonies, picking corn was children's work. As soon as the

corn was ripe, everyone was sent to the fields to pick. After picking came **husking**. Getting the dry leaves off the cobs was slow work. If they were ever going to get all the corn husked, the whole family had to help. "Many hands make light work," they said. (Mennonites had large families.) But still, husking corn could be very **tedious,** or boring. If the corn crop was very big, families hired corn huskers to help get the work done.

And then it was time for the cows to have their treat. They were let out in the corn fields to munch on the dry corn stalks. Mexican neighbours' cows were welcome to join Mennonite cows for the feast.

3 SELLING WHAT THEY GREW

Selling corn and other crops was a challenge. Many Mennonite farmers waited until the corn buyers came. These merchants drove their trucks through Mennonite villages, hoping to buy their corn and beans. It was the easiest way to sell, but the prices were low. Some farmers got taken advantage of. They sold their corn for prices that were much too low.

All farmers had to make a decision: Was it better to take a long trip to town by horse and wagon to sell your crops for more money? Or was it better to sell for less and not have to move the grain yourself. They had to do the math.

4 ¡*QUESO MENONITA*! CHEESE FACTORIES COME TO THE COLONIES

¡*Queso Menonita*!* That's Spanish for "Mennonite cheese." Do you like Mexican food? If you do, you know that the best part is melted cheese. Mexicans loved cheese. They used a lot of it in delicious dishes. Mennonites also loved cheese. They ate it with their bread and butter, as they were used to back in Canada. In Canada they had not used cheese for cooking.

* Pronounced KAY so MEh no NEE Tah

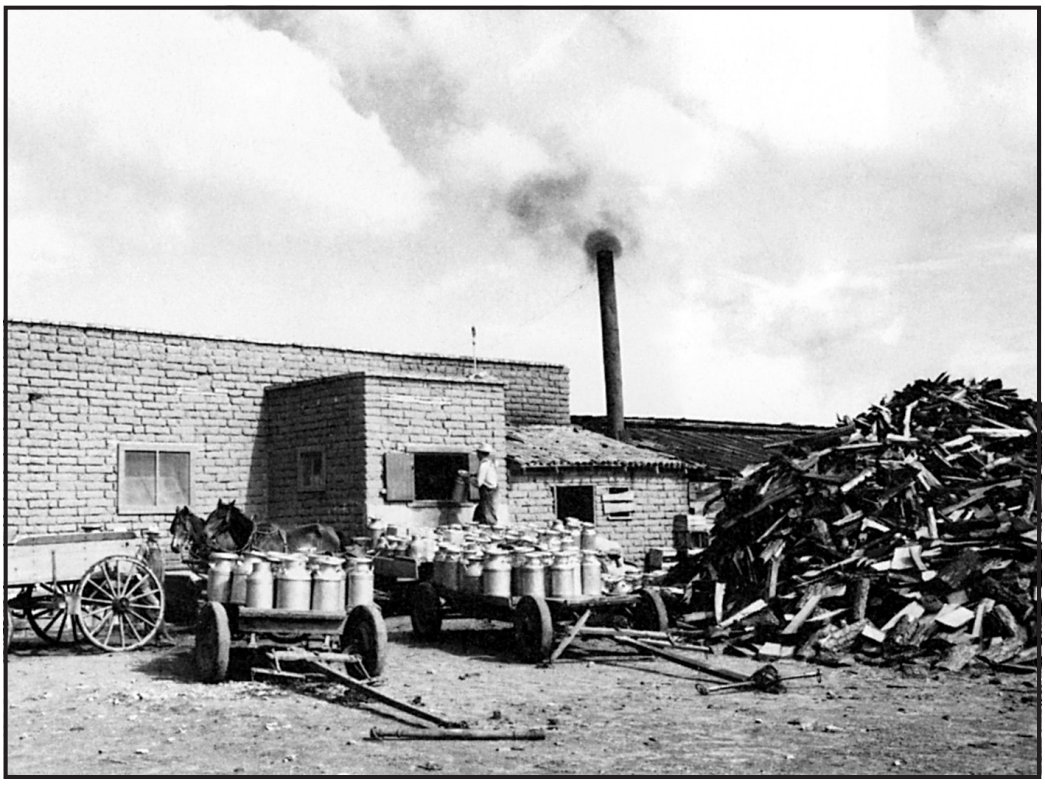
What did Mennonites in Mexico do without their good Canadian cheese? Maybe they bought cheese. Mexican women made cheese to sell. This cheese tasted fine. But Mennonites missed the cheese they remembered from Canada. Well, that problem was soon to be solved. Milking cows two times a day, every day, was part of Mennonite life. And as you know, cheese is made with milk.

It was 1931, and Peter G. Friesen had just come home from Nuevo Casas Grandes. He lived in the village of Rosengart on the Manitoba Colony. Peter had been working for an American cheese maker in Nuevo Casas Grandes. When Peter stirred the huge **vats**, or tubs, of cheese curds he used to wonder: Why don't we make cheese in our village? We have cows and plenty of milk, and we need to earn money. All we need is a cheese maker.

And that could be me! thought Peter. So he got some of the neighbours back home interested. Then he asked the American cheese maker to come down to Rosengart. The American showed the new "cheese makers" how to get started. And that's how the first Mennonite cheese factory came to

Canadian Cows with a Dutch Name on Mexican Farms

The best cows for producing milk were black and white *Friesians*. The calves on Mennonite farms were sold to Mexican dairy farmers. (This was another way to add to the family income.) Mexicans liked these "Canadian" cows with a Dutch name. They were sure to give plenty of milk. Today, you will still see Dutch Friesian Canadian cows on the colonies and also on Mexican ranches and farms.



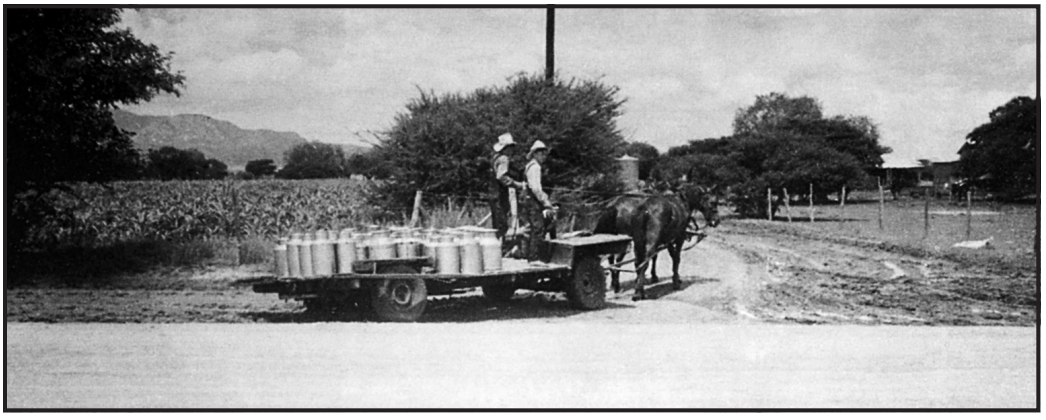
A busy cheese factory on the Hague-Durango Colony. The milk wagon drivers have just arrived with the day's milk they collected in the villages. What will all that firewood be used for?

Chihuahua, Mexico. In Durango, Mennonites started making cheese in 1935. Mennonite Cheese came to be the main **source of income**, or way of making money, on the colonies.

Each village now had a milk wagon driver. Every morning, after the older boys and girls finished milking, they carried pails of milk to the street. There the driver poured the milk into a large tank on his wide, low wagon. Later, milk cans were used. After the evening milking, cans of milk were set in a cool place. In the morning they were taken to the street together with the cans of morning milk.

The milk wagon driver made two trips a day: one with full milk cans in the morning and one with empties in the afternoon. He had to make sure he unloaded the right cans at the right farm. If he didn't he would certainly be reminded!

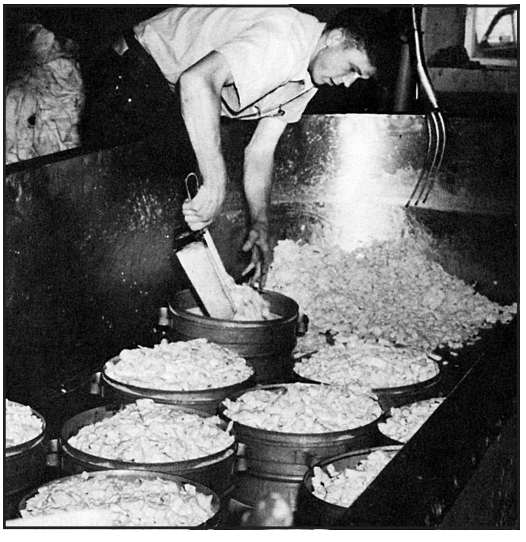
Cheese factories on colonies were a big change. Families now had money coming in all year. (Money from their crops only came in once a year.) They



Two young boys have the job of driving the milk wagon, six days a week, two times a day, on the Hague-Durango Colony.

also had to buy more cows. This meant more work for the older children. Early in the morning they each milked a couple of cows. Only then did they get to eat breakfast. After breakfast, they hurried off to school. In the evening, just when it was time to relax, the cows had to be milked once again.

Selling cheese was a new experience for the villagers. It had to be delivered to customers regularly. The cheese also had to be **uniform**. Each batch had to taste the same and have the same **texture,** or feel. Again, the farmers/cheese makers had to learn. By 1936, the Mennonites were making and also selling their own cheese. They did not need a middle-man to get customers for them.



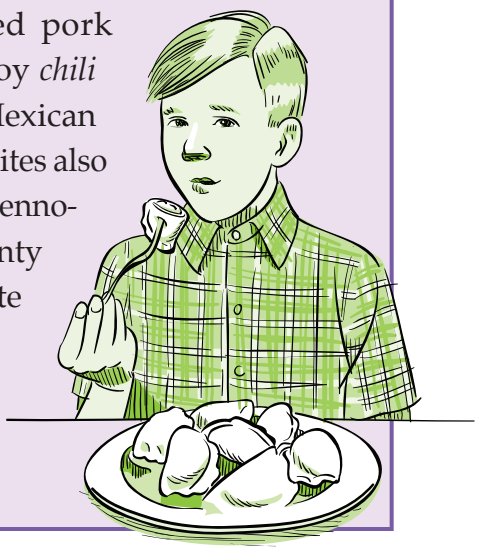
One of the last steps in making cheese. Cheese curds are being packed into round containers. There they will be pressed and turned into solid wheels of cheese.

Cheese factories also brought a nice new tradition. All cheese factories were closed on *Heiljedoag**, holidays. Holidays were usually three days long. But milking cows does not stop for Easter or Pentecost or Christmas.

* Pronounced HEYEl yeh Do-ag

Queso Menonita

Today, Queso Menonita is sold all over Mexico. Mexicans also visit Mennonite restaurants. There they enjoy *Warenikje* and *Ruakwoarscht*[*] (smoked pork sausage). Meanwhile, Mennonites enjoy *chili relleno*[†] – peppers filled with melted Mexican cheese – in Mexican restaurants. Mennonites also cook Mexican food at home and serve Mennonite-style *tacos* and *enchiladas* – with plenty of Mennonite cheese – in their Mennonite restaurants.



[*] Pronounced ROOahk VORsht
[†] Pronounced Reh YAY no

What did families do with all that milk? Remember, without fridges milk turns sour very quickly. But slightly sour milk was perfect for making *Glomms*[*], cottage cheese. And cottage cheese was used to make delicious Mennonite *Warenikje*[†] (cottage cheese pockets).

So to this day, on Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost and other holidays, Mennonite women and girls make cottage cheese with the extra milk. Then they cook giant pots of Warenikje for everyone to enjoy. Thanks to their cows, there is also plenty of cream. Cream is used to make thick, creamy gravy to pour on the Warenikje.

[*] Pronounced Glommz
[†] Pronounced Vah REN ah che

Farmers *and* Gardeners

CHAPTER FIVE

1 APPLES

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away!" That's what parents said to their children back in Canada. It was not possible to grow apples in Manitoba or Saskatchewan. The winters were just too cold. Apples came from the store and cost money. If you came from a poor family, your mother might change an old saying just a little. When you begged for a second apple, she'd say,

"Sorry, one apple a day keeps the doctor away."

In northern Mexico, the climate was just right for growing crisp, sweet, juicy Golden and Red Delicious apples: not too warm and not too cold. In the 1940s, farmers in Chihuahua, Mexico, started to grow apples. Soon there were apple orchards all around the colonies. Once the orchards got going, apple farmers earned well.

Today, many Mennonite farmers have apple orchards. But it took a while for them to decide. Did they really want to grow apples? They had good reasons for saying no./ Planting an apple orchard cost a lot of money. Then they had to wait more than three years for the trees to produce apples. Spending money on a crop they could not harvest the same year was risky. As well:

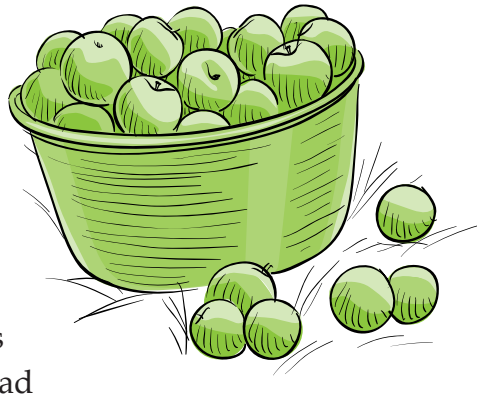
- Looking after the apple blossoms was hard work. In spring when the trees bloomed, apple growers had to watch for frost every night. They set up oil heaters throughout the orchards, which they lit on cold nights. Then the apple growers had to be outside, sometimes all night, to tend to the heaters.
- Once the apples formed, they had to be **pruned**. With a pair of scissors, the pruners walked from tree to tree and cut back the number of little apples. This way those that were left had more room to grow. Apple growers hired pruners for this job. Hiring help cost money.
- The fruit also had to be protected from hail. Covering hundreds of apple trees with wire nets to keep off hail took many hours of work.
- Apple orchards had to be irrigated. This system of watering crops was new for apple farmers. Setting up an irrigation system was expensive. Tending the system, turning the water on and off, also added more work.

When they thought about it, the Mennonite farmers said, "We're grain farmers, not gardeners."[3] It took a while before they were ready to try "gardening."

2 HOW FRUIT TREES CAME TO THE MANITOBA AND SWIFT COLONIES

Mennonites pioneers were already planting fruit trees when they first came to Mexico. They brought young trees all the way from Canada. But that was not enough. They would need many more trees to make their front yard look like a proper Mennonite front yard. (The tradition was to have fruit trees, not lawns, in front of their houses.)

Here's a story about how the families on the Manitoba and Swift Colonies got their first Mexican fruit trees. It was told by Walter Schmiedehaus.[4] This German friend lived near the colony in the town of Cuauhtémoc:



One cold and snowy winter evening, Mr. Schmiedehaus and his friend Mr. Peters were sitting by the fire. There was a knock at the door, and in stepped young David Redekop. David had brought a stranger with him. David introduced the man as Abram Goerzen. Mr. Goerzen was a big man. He had bright, confident eyes and a long, blond moustache. He was wearing a light jacket, thin low shoes and a hat. The brim of the hat was rolled up **optimistically**, or hopefully. It seemed to say, "I'm ready to get going." Mr. Goerzen laid a bunch of papers on the table and asked, "Would you like to buy cream separators?"

"Sir," said Mr. Schmiedehaus, "what would we do with cream separators?"

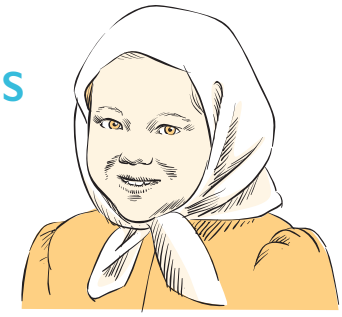
Then Mr. Goerzen told his story. His family was sitting in the town of Irapuato in the south. They had come by ship from Russia to Mexico. When they got to Mexico, the family was not allowed into the country. So using his last cent, Mr. Goerzen made a trip to Cuauhtémoc. All he had for Mr. Schmiedehaus was the stack of papers on the table. But he also had something else that was

more important than cream separators. He had an **enterprising**, or bold, spirit to see things through. Mr. Goerzen was a man who would fit into their community, thought Mr. Schmiedehaus. His friend, Mr. Peters, thought so, too.

It so happened that a few days earlier, someone else had stopped by – a man from a company that sold fruit trees and grape vines. He had left a bunch of pamphlets. "Let's leave the cream separators for now," said Mr. Schmiedehaus. "Leave them for later. But, would you be interested in selling fruit trees? We could do it together." Mr. Goerzen was happy to go along with the idea. The three men were soon deep into the catalogues. They were making a work plan for selling fruit trees.

This new friend was a proud man. He did not want to take any gifts from Mr. Schmiedehaus and Mr. Peters. He just went right to work, peddling fruit trees. In his thin summer shoes, he trudged through the snow. Sometimes he had a vehicle. Sometimes he walked. He went from village to village, from farmyard to farmyard. Finally, he came back to Cuauhtémoc. He had a stack of orders for trees in his hand. He also had a nice sum of money in his pocket.

And so it came about. The three men started a small but useful business. Through their business, the colonies got their first grape vines and fruit trees. These plants were still bearing fruit many years later. As for Abram Goerzen, as he helped the colonies get the trees they needed, he stepped into a new life. His family joined him in Cuauhtémoc later.



3 SARAH'S TALES: LITTLE SISTERS DECIDE THEY'RE BIG

Sarah and her sister Mitch could already manage their horse when they were still very young. Here is one of Sarah's stories from her childhood:

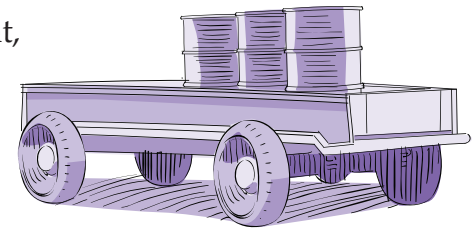
> We had a big, obedient horse. The horse was quite a bit better behaved than we were sometimes. We used to have to wait for our brother Jils* to harness the horse for us. One day we decided not to wait.
>
> We were still too small to reach up to get the harness on to the horse. So I climbed on to the divider. Mitch chased the horse up against it. Well, she didn't chase him, she walked behind him and urged him forward. The horse already knew he had to walk to the divider. Then I climbed up on the horse. Mitch got the collar and held it in place at the front. I buckled it from above and then I slid backwards. Mitch got the harness and held it up to me. I put it on the collar, and she buckled it at the bottom. I climbed further back. Here you had to buckle it again. Then there's another strap that goes under the horse's tail. I turned around, put the strap through the tail and buckled it. Then I was ready to slide down to the ground. That was the only way, because the horse was so tall, and I was so small.
>
> Suddenly, Father was there. "*Mejalen*!† Girls!" he said. "*Waut doo jie hea*?‡ What are you doing here?" He'd been standing in the barn door the whole time, watching us in secret. (The girls hadn't seen their father smiling proudly to himself as he followed each step with his eyes.)

---

* Pronounced Yills
† Pronounced Meh YAH len
‡ Pronounced vaut DOW yee HEE ah

"Well," we said, "we wanted to get the horse ready to haul water."

"*Na*," Father said, "Jils can do that. He can get the horse ready for you."



Father was right; our brother Jils could do that, but he was too slow for us.

Another time, the girls forgot one piece when they harnessed the horse. Sarah recalled:

We wanted to get water for our fruit trees. Our parents lived far away from the street. The well was by the street, and we had to get our water from there. For this, our parents had made a big *Krota**, flat wagon, which our horse pulled to the well. Once when we went for water we realized that we had made a mistake. We had put on the reins, but had forgotten the bit. The bit goes into the horse's mouth. The reins are attached to the bit, to guide the horse.

Dan kleiwda onns ut†. Then that horse got away from us! *Dan feks fonn onnsem Krota rauf*‡. Then, quickly off our Krota, we ran to the front. We held on tight to the horse's harness. The horse had gotten tired of waiting for us to fill the barrel. He wanted to get back into the barn. We knew that the Krota with our water barrel couldn't get through the barn door. It was a wide wagon. So it would all work out. But we were able to stop the horse and persuade him to take the water to the orchard first.

The girls drew water up from the well with a pail on a rope and a pulley. When the large barrel was full, the horse pulled it to back to the orchard. Filling their pails again and again, the girls carried water to every tree, until each tree was soaked down to its roots.

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* Pronounced KRO tah
† Pronounced Nahn chl-eye-v dah onns ut
‡ Pronounced Dahn fex fun unzen KRO tah rowf

4 TRACTORS COME AND HORSES GO

In 1937, the colonies were ready to switch from horses to tractors. This did not mean they were also ready to have cars. Cars would change the simple lifestyle of a colony too much. Horses and buggies would still be used for travelling.

The Village Pasture

Each village had a large pasture. It took up about a quarter of the village land. Cows were taken out to graze in the pasture every morning. In the evening, the cows came home to their barns for the night.

Villagers had to make sure they did not put too many horses out to graze. In their dry climate, they had to take good care of grassland. Cows use their tongues to pull grass into their mouths. This is easy on grass. Horses' teeth can **crop** grass very close to the ground. This is hard on grass. Short, cropped grass did not have enough time to grow again before the horses were back for more.

Using tractors meant farmers needed fewer horses. This meant more grass for cows. Cows were needed to provide milk for the cheese factories.

But tractors would also make a big change on a colony. Why did colonies decide to use tractors, but not cars? They had several good reasons:

- It was hard to find enough feed to keep their horses strong and healthy.
- The high **altitude**, or land height, of northern Mexico – far above sea

level – meant the air was thin. Horses could not work as hard as they needed to at this altitude.

- When cheese factories came to the colonies, cows became more important than horses. Horses were eating the feed that the cows needed.
- In 1937, the **economic depression**, or hard times, was almost over. The Mennonites were ready to settle down in Mexico. They were ready to get their land to really produce. Tractors would make this work much easier.
- Farms in the United States were getting bigger, and farmers were buying new, big tractors. This meant there were many small used tractors for sale at low prices. Soon businesses in Cuauhtémoc were bringing these tractors into Mexico. They were exactly what farmers in Chihuahua needed.

Tractors

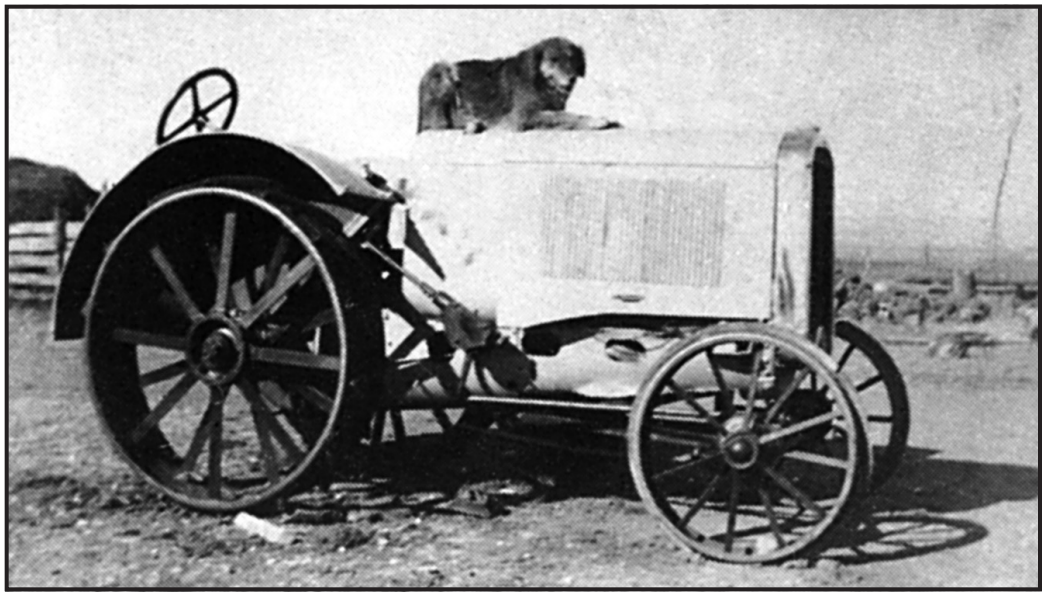
Mennonite colonists liked strong, durable used tractors with older, uncomplicated designs. Two-cylinder John Deeres and four-cylinder Farmalls were two of their favourites. Getting parts for these makes was also easy – an important point when buying used tractors.

International Harvester made the Farmall A, from 1939 to 1947. This model had a four-cylinder engine and weighed approximately 1,900 lbs. The A had an offset engine, a wide front end, four forward gears and one reverse gear.[5]

5 TRACTORS WITH PERSONALITY

Retired Tractor

Still useful, not only as a lookout place for the dog. This tractor was given an eight-cylinder Buick car motor and was used to power a sawmill in the forest in the mountains.

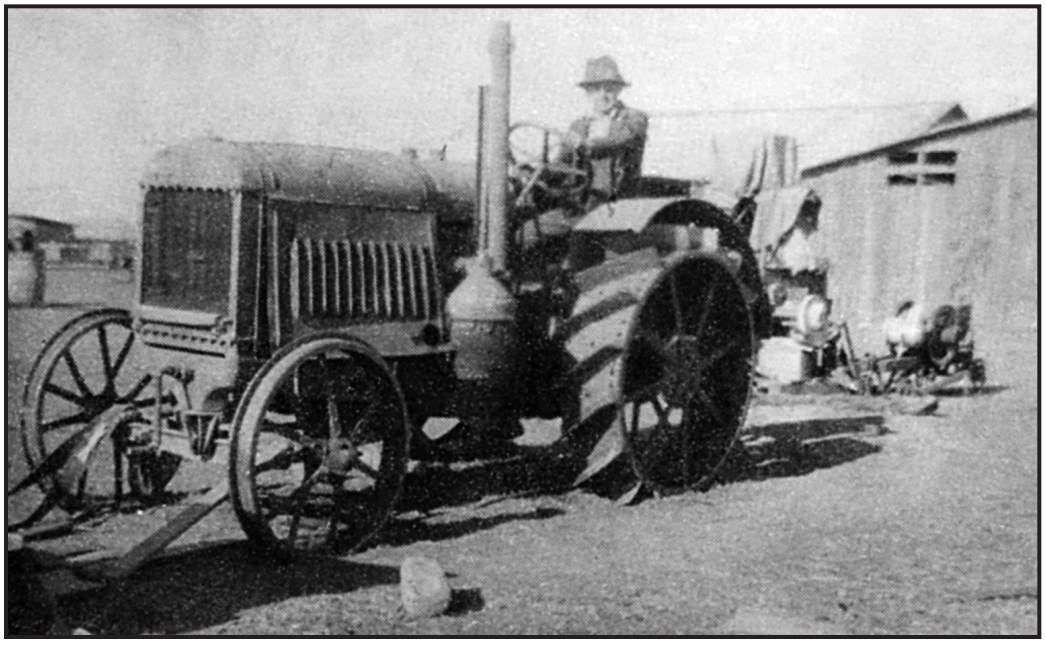


Tractor Power

Pulling two implements at once. One of two Peters brothers drives the tractor. The other works the cultivator, which is pulling the seeder.

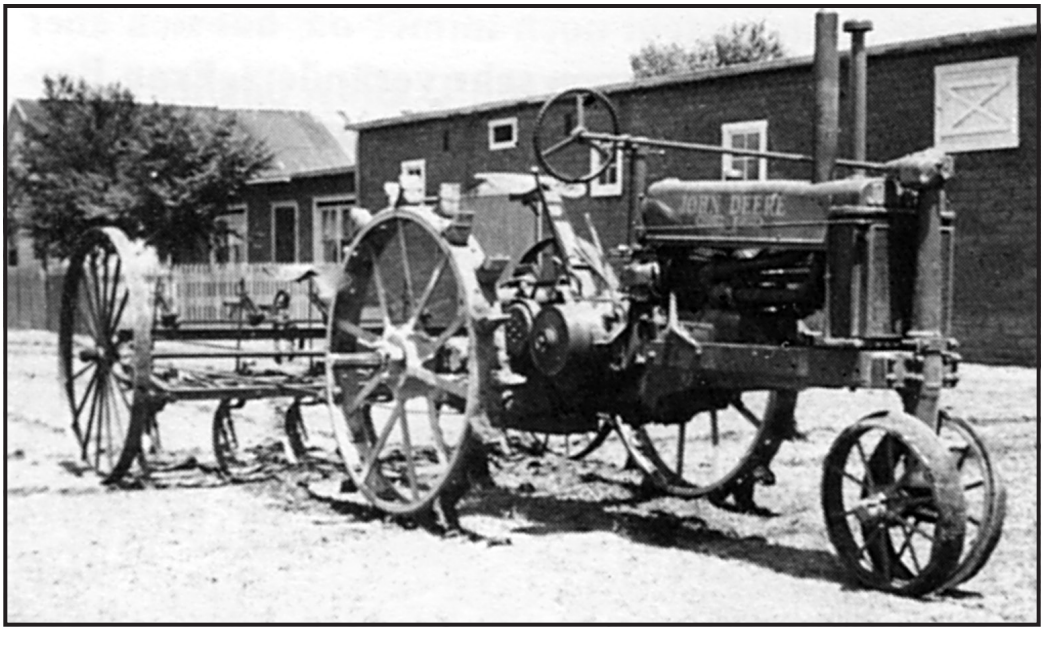
Pioneer Tractor

The tractor that travelled all the way from Canada, in a train boxcar in the 1920s.



Favourite Tractor

With a nickname. This little John Deere A tractor was a Mennonite favourite. They called him *De Schteila Au* (Pronounced Deh SHTEYE la auw), the Tall A.



Young Ladies' Tractor

A tractor for young ladies. Father works the binder on this field of oats, and the girls drive the tractor.

6 SARAH'S TALES: WHO DOES THE FIELDWORK?

When Sarah was young, farm work was done with horses: plowing, seeding and cutting the grain, then raking it and hauling it to the farmyard. Who did this fieldwork, girls or boys? In Sarah's family that depended on how many girls and boys were living at home. It also depended on who was good at what. Sarah and Mitch were the youngest two in their family. When their older brothers got married and left home, the two girls did the fieldwork.

Sarah remembers:

> In the winter, I had to pick stones. There were many stones on our fields. In spring we had to plow.

"Mitch worked the plow," Sarah said, "but I and the plow, *feschtunnden onns nich*[*], we didn't understand each other. *Doa dajkt ekj bloos rauf*[†]. I just fell off the seat. When it came to the corn weeder and corn planter, we both knew how to work those. And I and the harrow, which is used for breaking up soil, we also understood each other. Mitch, again, didn't like the harrow. She didn't like to walk behind a harrow. So I always did the harrowing."

Sarah didn't do much work inside after the boys had all gone from home. She was usually in the field.

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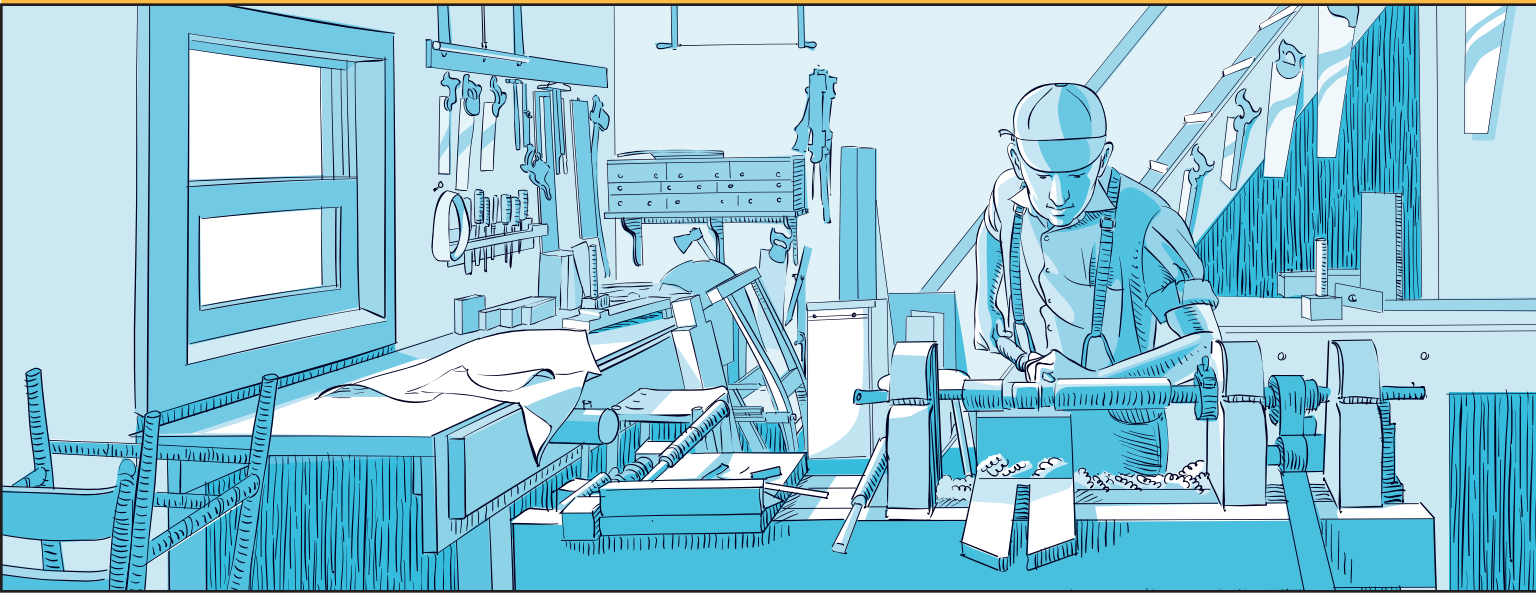
* Pronounced fe SHTUNN den onns nijch
† Pronounced DOH ah DEYEkt ek blous rauf

Inventive Pioneers

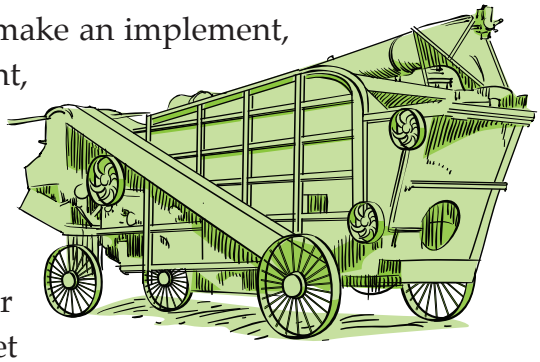
CHAPTER SIX



Mennonites came to Mexico in the 1920s on 36 trains. They brought everything they would need in their new homeland with them. Implements like plows, harrows, rakes and binders were loaded into the train boxcars. (Binders tie loose grain into bundles.) The new settlers had even loaded huge threshing machines and the giant steam engine tractors that ran the threshers. Over the years, these Canadian farming implements had begun to wear out. It was time to try building new working machines.

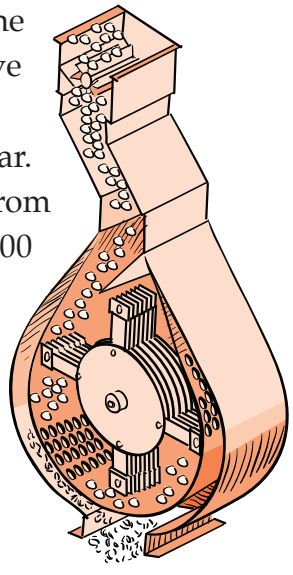
1 BUILDING EQUIPMENT

Pioneers, as you know, often had to make the things they needed. Mennonites were talented at making tools and implements. When they needed a new piece of equipment, they figured out how to make it. Some of their Canadian machines weren't suited for Mexico. Their plows, for example, weren't strong enough to cut through hard Mexican soil. For new crops such as corn and beans, they needed new implements. So they built stronger plows and machines for harvesting beans and corn.



Once these farmers figured out how to make an implement, they tested it. When they had it exactly right, they set it to work. Then they began to think about selling. The first "Mennonite" implement made in Mexico was a bean thresher. (A thresher separates the beans from the shells.) The moving parts of a bean thresher work quite slowly. So it wasn't too hard to get the parts to fit well and move smoothly.

The hammer mill was another Mennonite-made machine. A hammer mill crushes grain, such as oats, to make animal feed. The moveable parts of a hammer mill turn very quickly. So they had to be built **precisely**, or very carefully. Every part had to fit perfectly.



Machines like this were made with simple tools in the village, not in factories on assembly lines. Working in a machine shop was a good job for a young man who did not yet have his own farm.

Mennonite-made machines soon became very popular. They were well-built and cost less than those that came from the United States. By 1965, Mennonites were making 300 hammer mills a year. There were hammer mill factories on four colonies: Manitoba, Hague-Durango, Ojo de la Yegua* and La Batea†.

* Pronounced OH ho day la YAY gwah
† Pronounced La Bah TAY ya

How to Keep Food Cold Without a Fridge

Mennonite villagers also had to be inventors. This was true on their farms and in their homes, especially in homes that did not have electricity. Here is one example.

First, build a large box with a removeable roof to keep out the sunshine. The walls of the box are made of fine wire screen. Place the box about 1.5 metres off the ground outdoors, in a breezy spot. Put your food in the box together with a pan of water. Soak a cloth in the water. Leave one end of the cloth in the pan. Spread the rest of the cloth over the food. The water will be drawn up into the cloth. As the breeze moves through the box, the cloth will dry. The water will evaporate and cool the air around the cloth. Milk and fresh meat keep for several days in this "fridge." The temperature in the box can go down to 3 or 4 degrees Celsius in summer.

Mennonites also used this idea in their cold *Koma**, pantry. The cold Koma was a small room with louvred walls. The breeze moved through these moveable slats. A pan of water was placed on the shelf together with the milk, vegetables, eggs and meat. The **louvres** were opened and closed to adjust the amount of air that came into the room. As the water in the pan evaporated, the air cooled. Lightly smoked or salted meat would keep for four to six weeks in a cold Koma.[6]

* Pronounced KO mah

2 USED CARS AND TRUCKS COME IN HANDY

By now the Mennonite colonists were well-settled. Their style of living and farming fit well into their Mexico homeland. This did not mean that they could stop inventing. They still had a couple of problems to solve.

Car Engines

Car engines were also useful. They ran on gasoline, not electricity. (Remember, many Mennonite colonies did not have electricity.) Car engines were used to power many different kinds of machines and appliances.

Problem One

Farmers were using heavy Mexican wagons to haul grain and other goods. These wagons, called *remolques**, were built to haul **ore,** or rock with metal, from Chihuahua silver mines. It took four to six horses to pull a load of ore in one of these wagons.

The remolques were much too heavy for farm work. Building lighter wagons was not hard. The problem was getting the wagon frames. In El Paso, Texas, frames cost more than $150. (That was a lot of money in those days.) Wagon builders needed to find less expensive frames.

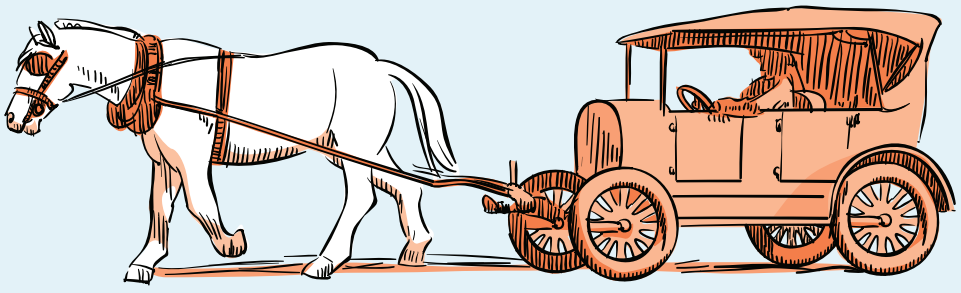
Problem Two

High steel and wood wheels made good-looking buggies. But roads on the colony were hard and full of holes. Wooden wagon wheels were not meant for bumpy roads. How could they get a smoother ride, wondered the inventive builders on the colony?

The answer to both problems came from the United States. During the

* Pronounced ray MOLE case

They Say That …



The idea of car-wagons came from Canada. In the 1930s almost everyone in Canada was poor. People who had cars had no money to buy gasoline. Then someone came up with an idea. Why not use the cars to put the horses back to work? If one took the insides out of a car and hitched it to a pair of horses, poor people could travel without paying for gasoline. This is what they did.

Canadians called their new vehicles Bennett Buggies, after their Prime Minister, R. B. Bennett. The name was a message to Mr. Bennett. They wanted him to get the economy going again. People were tired of not having jobs and being poor.

When Mennonites from Mexico visited relatives in Saskatchewan, they picked up the idea of horse-drawn cars.

1930s, many Mexicans were living in the Unites States. Because of the economic depression there, they were now coming back home. They drove back to Mexico in their American cars. Once they were home, many decided to sell their cars. Gasoline was just too expensive.

Solution One

Mennonites did not drive cars, but cars had other uses, besides driving.

Used American cars only cost $45 to $65. That was $100 less than new El Paso wagon frames. Once you had a car, you could take it off the **chassis**, or frame, and wheels. Then you attached a horse pole to the chassis, built a light wooden wagon box and set the box on the frame.

That solved problem one. The people now had "light-draft, well-sprung, pneumatic-tired running gear" for light wagons.[7] A team of horses could easily pull one of these wagons with a big load. Once you had a good wagon frame, you could add almost anything besides boxes. For example: tanks, bundle racks or closed coaches. The new vehicles were called *Koawoages**, or car wagons.

By now, some farmers were renting land off the colony to grow grain. At harvest time, the grain had to be hauled home. Four new car-wagons, connected with tandem hitches, were used for hauling grain. Pickup truck frames were used for building larger wagons. These wagons were pulled with tractors.

Koawoages became very popular with Mennonite and also Mexican farmers. Several Mennonite farmers now became wagon builders.

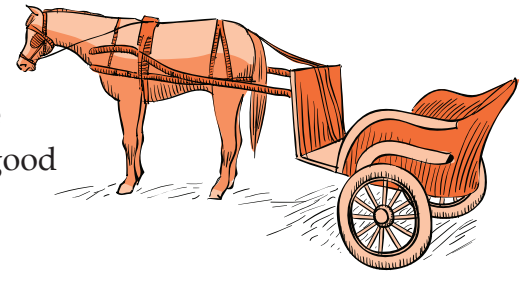
Solution Two

For bumpy buggy rides, used cars again had the answer. The first step was taking the good-looking steel and wood wheels off the buggy. Then small steel car wheels with soft rubber tires were put on in their place.

For an even smoother, more comfortable ride, coil springs or torsion bar suspensions from the cars were installed in the buggies. A torsion bar is a metal rod attached under the car at one end of the body and at the other to the suspension lower link. It makes a smoother ride by twisting when the car passes over a bump and then returning to its normal position.

* * *

On the Hague-Durango Colony, wagon builders made small vehicles for two people that could be pulled by one horse. These little wagons had good springs and rubber tires for a comfortable ride.



* Pronounced KO ah VOah guess

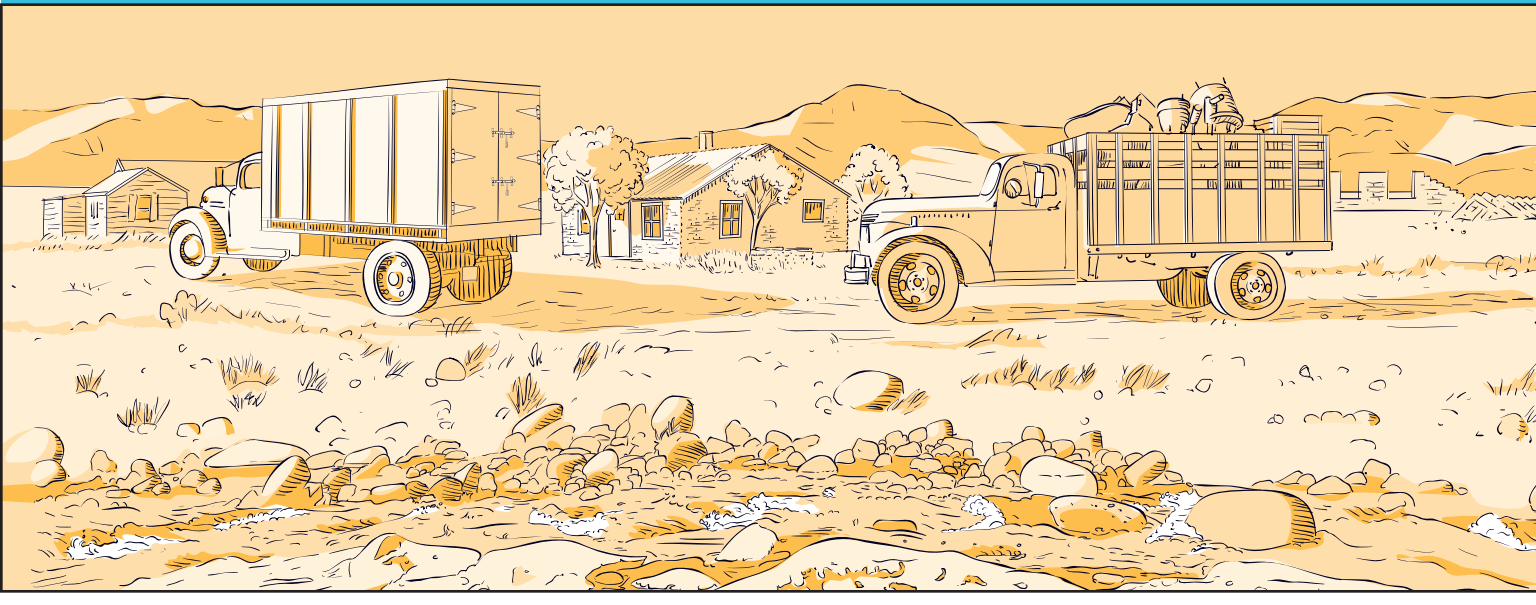
3 MATURE MENNONITE VILLAGES IN MEXICO

Growing food: that's what Mennonite colonies were known for. But first, they had needed to learn what would and what would not grow in Mexico. Then they had learned how to sell the crops they grew. They also found other ways of earning a living. Mature Mennonite villages had people who could make their living in Mexico. Once they could do that, they felt that they belonged in Mexico. At the same time, they kept their traditional lifestyle, living simply and separated from the world around them.

Gerhard Rempel, who was a *Vorsteher* (Pronounced FOOR SHTAY er), or leader, of the Manitoba Colony, is the father of this Mennonite family. Mother, Father, Grandmother, Baby and a row of children make a family of 17. Once the Mennonites were well-settled in Mexico, a good farm could support all of them quite nicely.

Colonies Grow Up

CHAPTER SEVEN



1 CHILDREN NO MORE

The storytellers in this reader all remembered a certain time in their life – the time when they didn't feel like children anymore. Once they finished school things changed. They weren't adults yet, but they felt different, more mature.

Margaret remembered how she felt after she finished school. She had just

turned 12. Did she still play with dolls? "Ye-es," she said, "You could still play with dolls when you finished school. But most didn't want to anymore. The *groote Netua*[*], adult mind, sets in and you catch the feeling from others. Most girls would be embarrassed if anyone saw them playing with dolls."

Martha said, "Once you were out of school, you were simply groot, grown up. Children finished school at age 12 or 13. As a school child, you played and learned to work. When you finished school you learned to become an adult." Martha remembered her last day of school like this: "Yes, and then I was 12. I had to quit going to school. I went to the *Fens*, cow pen, where there was a self-feeder. I went there and climbed way up on that self-feeder. I sat there and wept, because I had to quit school. I couldn't resign myself to this. I loved school so much, and I had to quit. I cried hard that day. Your childhood years were just taken away from you."

"Well," Martha added, "I just had to turn my head around. I had to take it out of the school and simply say, 'I am ne groote *Mejal*. I have to start working at home.'" As a grown girl, Martha could go visit other girls during the daytime. That was fun. It took some time, but she did learn to be groot, mature.

2 DAVID'S TALES: A SMART TEACHER AND AN EVEN SMARTER SON

David's grandmother needed a little new henhouse. She had told Father how big she wanted it. It was the custom to hire Mexican bricklayers to build their adobe houses. But Father had to order the bricks. How many bricks would Grandmother need for the henhouse? Father was good at many things, but not at math. The teacher was good at math, and that's where Father went for help. With a few quick numbers on a piece of paper, the teacher figured out how many bricks Grandmother would need.

Then the teacher said to Father, "You know, your Isaac could have done this for you." Isaac? Our Isaac? thought Father. It was true. David's older

* Pronounced GROUT te nah TOO ah

brother Isaac was a math whiz. He could figure out almost any number question. But to Father, Isaac was just a boy. Most villagers went to their smart teacher when they needed advice about numbers. They didn't go to their young sons.

So Father thought he'd try a little test. Without telling Isaac where he had been, Father showed him the henhouse plans. "How many bricks do I need to order?" he asked Isaac. Isaac didn't answer. He just let his mind go quietly to work. "1,420 bricks," he said after a few minutes. It was the same number the teacher had given Father.

Father didn't want to be too proud of his smart son. But he couldn't keep a big grin off his face. Where did that boy get his talent? Actually, Isaac wasn't just a boy anymore. He would soon be a man. It made Father think. Where would life take their Isaac? he wondered.

3 SARAH'S TALES: GOING VISITING

Sarah and Mitch decided for themselves when they were grown up. Here's another tale from Sarah. This one is about a decision to stop acting like children. To do that they had to let their parents know they were almost adults. Visiting nights were the evenings when young people met on the street to visit.

Sarah recalled:

> There was no *Jesalschoff**, company, on the street in our village. We just stayed at home on visiting nights. When we did go visiting, we went to a different village, six or eight kilometres away. We went on foot. For a long time we always had to ask for permission to go visiting. We weren't always allowed to go. My brother always taunted us: "You're big brutes already and still asking for permission to go visiting?" We thought to ourselves: "*Ha die domm*†, go ahead, tease us." Mother heard our brother and was cross. She

* Pronounced Yeh ZAHL shuff
† Pronounced Ha Dee Dum

wondered what his teasing would lead to.

But we were thinking. Once Sunday gets here, we'd just say where we were going out. Then we'd go, not ask. Mitch was older, but she said I should be the one to ask first. She'd listen to what I would ask. Well, I wouldn't ask, just tell. But I didn't want to. I said to Mitch that she was older. She should be the one to make the start. She said, no, I should. So I walked over, opened the door and said, "We're going to Neireich."

"*Säd de Foda*[*]," Father said. "Really?"

I didn't answer. I just closed the door quickly and then we were off.

It worked so well that next Sunday I said to Mitch, "Now it's your turn. You have to ask." This time Mitch went and said the same thing. "We're going to Grossweid," she said.

"Again?" Father said this time. Mitch quickly closed the door and again we were off.

The third Sunday it was back to me; I had to tell Father. This time he said, "Again? *Kjempt mie aul fäaken fäa*[†]. This is beginning to seem often to me."

The fourth Sunday we stayed home. But after one Sunday at home, it seemed like a long time. We had worked in the field all week. That's how it was. We always had to work in the field. Now we needed to go visiting again. It was Mitch's turn. She went in and said, "We're going to Neireich, to Grandparents', to visit Grandmother." Father said: "Give them our greetings."

It had worked so well, we had to do it again. Now we didn't ask

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* Pronounced Zade deh Foadah
† Pronounced FAY-ah-ken FAY-ah

The Sommerfelder

In the beginning, Mexico had four colonies. Manitoba, Swift Current and Hague-Durango were Old Colony. The fourth colony, called Santa Clara, was Sommerfeld. There were also Sommerfelder villages just north of the Manitoba Colony: Halbstadt Campo 55, Bergthal Campo 40, Springfeld Campo 41 and Cordovana Campo 45. The Sommerfelder have only a small part in this story, but they were always part of Mexico Mennonite life.

for permission anymore. We just told the parents where we were going.

Sarah, Mitch, Isaac, Margaret and Martha weren't village children anymore. They had become the village Jugend.

4 COLONIES MATURE

By 1945, the Mennonites in Mexico had turned their minds around. They still remembered Canada, but they didn't feel like Canadians anymore. They still lived separately on their colonies, like they had always done. But now they had their own ways of thinking and living. They were Mexico Mennonite ways because *Mexico* was their home.

In the 1940s, the four old-timer colonies got to show newcomers the Mexico way. In 1947, a new group of Mennonites came to Mexico from Canada. They were the *Kleine Gemeinde**, which means "Small Church."

* Pronounced KLY ne geh MINE deh

In the 1920s, the Old Colony Mennonites travelled to Mexico by train. The Kleine Gemeinde newcomers drove from Canada to Mexico in trucks, loaded high with their goods.

When this church started, back in Russia, it was very small. This is how it got its name.

Kleine Gemeinde settlers opened a new colony in Chihuahua. But they did not have to learn everything from the beginning. They got a lot of good advice from the Old Colony and Sommerfeld Mennonites. The early Kleine Gemeinde settlers made many trips to the Old Colony and Sommerfeld villages.

When old-timers help newcomers, the old-timers know they are at home. They feel settled. They know they belong in Mexico.

The Kleine Gemeinde called their colony *Quellen**, which means "Springs." In Spanish the name is *Los Jagueyes*†. The Kleine Gemeinde are not part of this story. But they were, and still are, an important part of Mexico Mennonite life today.

Mennonite villages are registered with the government by a number.

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* Pronounced KVELL en
†Pronounced Lohs Ha WAY yahs

Campo is Spanish for "farm" or "land." It is also used for villages on a Mennonite colony. Most villages use their names. Others liked to be called by their Campo numbers. For example: village Bergthal was also called Campo 40.

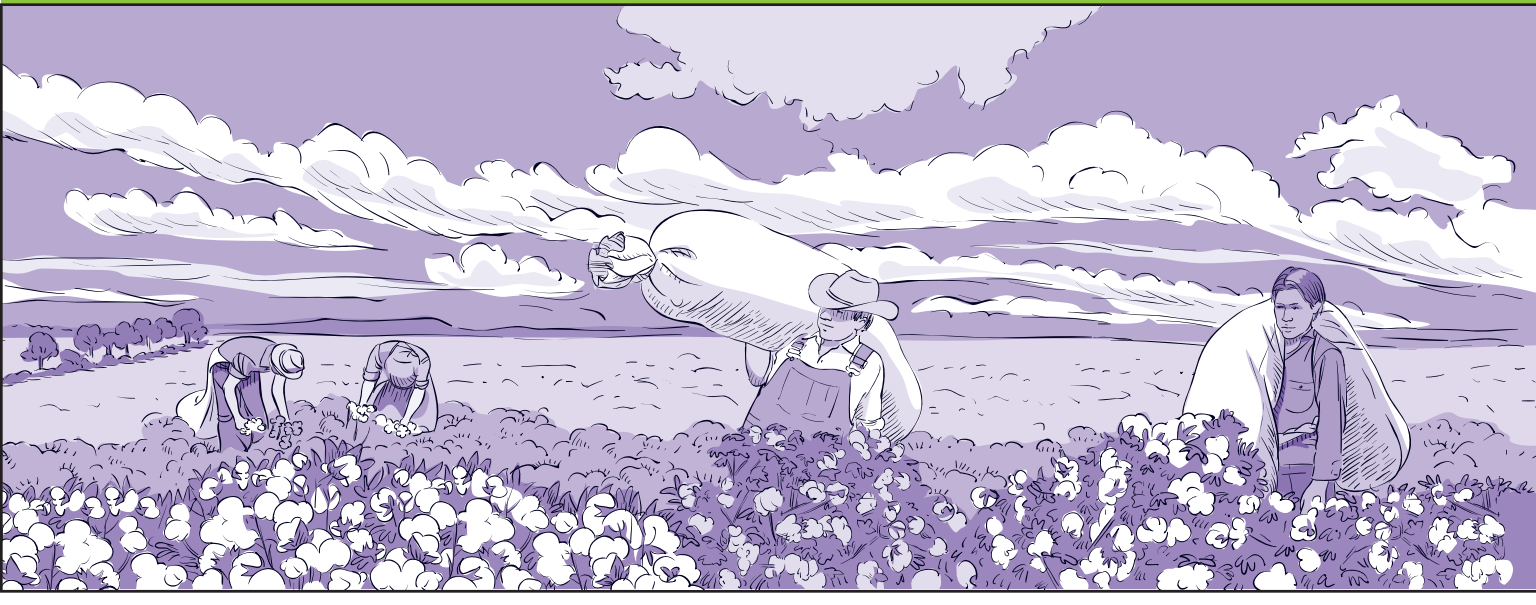
5 MEXICO BECOMES THE OLD HOME

In 1959, a Mennonite group from Mexico opened a colony in Belize. In 1967, a group from the Swift Colony moved to Bolivia. Another group moved to Paraguay. "Give them our greetings," said the Mennonites in Mexico when someone went to Bolivia or Belize to visit relatives there.

These new settlers took their Mexico Mennonite ways with them. They went back home to *Mexico* to visit, not to Canada. Mexico had become the old home. It was the "grown- up" place that people came home to. It was the place that showed others how to build colonies.

The Colonies of Mexico Today

CHAPTER EIGHT



1 THE PRESIDENT'S IDEA

In 1925, President Plutarco Calles visited the Chihuahua colonies. He especially liked how the Mennonites were organized. Each family had their own land, but all lived together on a colony. President Calles's government wondered if they should invite more Mennonites to Mexico. That would be one way of spreading experienced farmers across the country.

In 1925, spreading these farmers across Mexico was an idea. In a short while the idea was a reality. The first Mennonite colonies kept on growing, and new ones spread across the country.

2 MENNONITE COLONIES ACROSS THE LAND

- One of the first moves was close to home. In 1932, during an economic depression, Swift Current Colony's bank failed. People lost a lot of money. Some had not yet paid for their land. When they couldn't make payments, they lost the land. A group of these families found 2,500 hectares of land in Saucito. Here they started farming all over again.
- The Hague-Durango Colony had bought very little extra land. When new families from Canada arrived, more land was needed. Between 1920 and 1930, Hague-Durango bought land for five new villages: Grünfeld, Blumenort, Neuanlage, Reinland and Hochfeld. Later, Schönthal and Hamburg were added.
- The Manitoba Colony had some land south of the railroad. Kleefeld was the only village there because the land did not have enough water for more. By 1938, the colonists were drilling deep wells, and water was not a problem anymore. Three villages were added: Kronsgart in 1938, then Silberfeld and Weidenfeld in 1940.
- Ojo de la Yegua was Manitoba's first daughter colony. It opened in 1946, just north of the Manitoba Colony. That's how it got its nickname of *Nuad Kollonie**, or North Colony in English.
- Yermo was opened in 1950 by the Manitoba Colony. A good piece of land was found, and 25 families were ready to move. More followed. At first all went well, but in the end, the Yermo Colony failed for several reasons.

  The first reason was water. At the beginning, the settlers had plenty of water. Then their wells went dry. Second, the main crop at Yermo was a new one, cotton. During the first years the cotton crops failed.

* Pronounced NOOad KULLen NEE

Three young children pose for a photo in Yermo, while workers pack down their fathers' load of cotton. The cotton is on its way to be sold in the city. Cotton was a new crop for Mennonites on the Yermo Colony.

Then came the biggest shock of all. The colonists found out that they would not be able to buy their land. They had an agreement to rent the land and buy later. But when the time came to buy, the owner gave them a very high price. This meant that the settlers could not afford the land on which they had worked so hard.

For all these reasons, the Yermo Colony grew smaller and smaller. One by one the settlers gave up and moved back home. In 1974, the last family left. The Yermo Colony was no more.

- In 1958, a group of Chihuahua Mennonites bought land near the city of Nuevo Casas Grandes, close to the American border. They called their colony *Buenos Aires*, "Good Air." Buenos Aires already had water wells and cultivated fields. But crops in Nuevo Casas Grandes had to be irrigated. Watering crops was a new way of farming for the Mennonite settlers in Buenos Aires.
- In 1961, five families from Durango moved to the state of Zacatecas. There they settled on 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) of land. They called their colony La Batea. Most of the new settlers moved from Hague-


UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
La Sombra
Buena Vista
Las Virginias
Sabinal
Buenos Aires
El Cuervo
El Capulín
CHIHUAHUA
Los Jagueyes
Santa Clara
Santa Rita
Ojo de la Yegua (Nord)
Swift Current
Manitoba Plan
Monclova
COAHUILA
Sonora
Yermo
Nuevo León
DURANGO
TAMAULIPAS
Hague-Durango (Patos)
La Honda
ZACATECAS
Nueva Padilla
Villa de Casas
La Batea
Gonzalez
Sinaloa
San Luis Potosí
Nayarit
Aguascalientes
Guanajuato
Querétaro
Jalisco
Hidalgo
MEXICO
Pacific Ocean
Michoacán
México
Tlaxcala
Colima
Morelos
Puebla
Guerrero
North

THE EARLIEST COLONIES OF MEXICO

CHIHUAHUA
Manitoba Plan, 1922
Swift Current, 1922
Santa Clara, 1922
Ojo de la Yegua (Nord), 1946
Los Jagueyes, 1947
Buenos Aires, 1958
Santa Rita, 1962
El Capulín, 1962
El Cuervo, 1979
Las Virginias, 1980
Buena Vista, 1985
Sabinal, 1990
La Sombra, year unknown

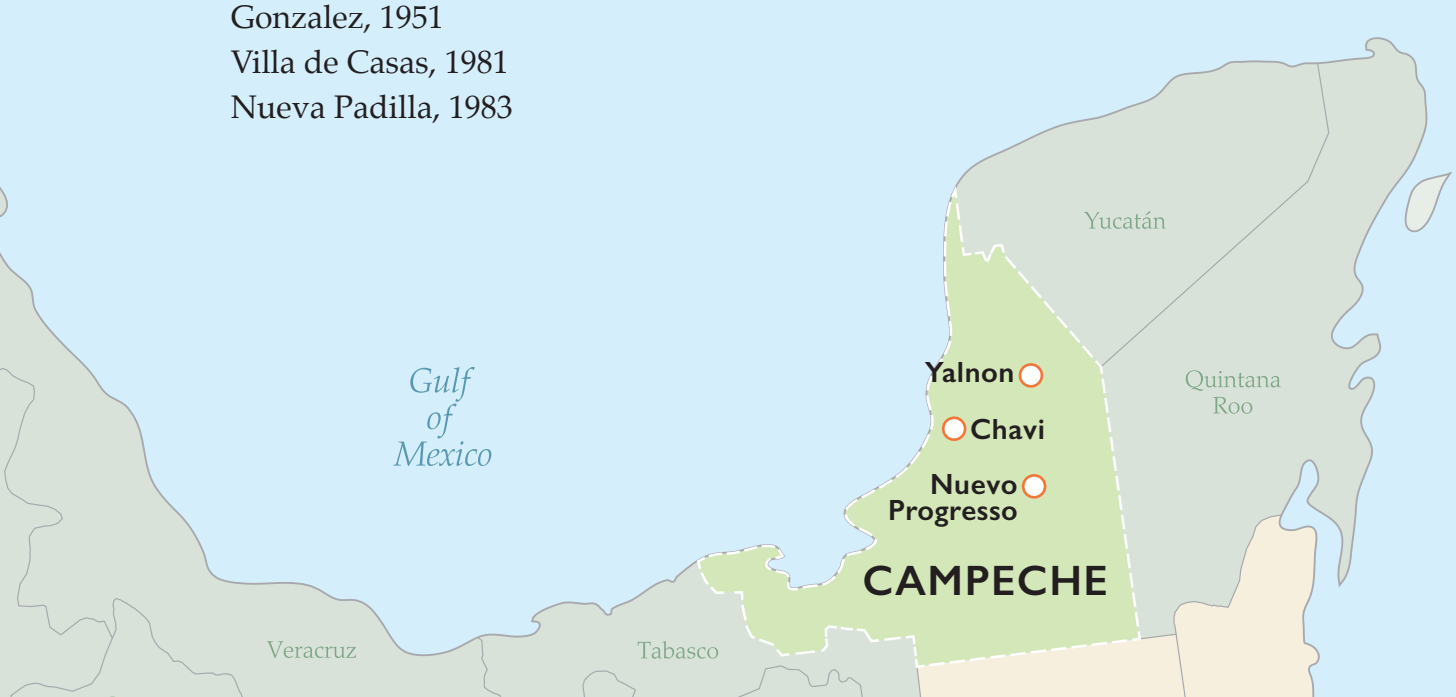
TAMAULIPAS
Gonzalez, 1951
Villa de Casas, 1981
Nueva Padilla, 1983

COAHUILA
Monclova, 1974

DURANGO
Hague-Durango (Patos), 1924
Yermo, 1950–1974

ZACATECAS
La Batea, 1961
La Honda, 1964

CAMPECHE
Yalnon, 1983
Chavi, 1986
Nuevo Progresso, 1987



Durango. Others came from Chihuahua.

To their surprise, the settlers found that they could grow wheat at La Batea. Back in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, wheat had been the main "Mennonite" crop. This is what the grandparents had grown before they moved to Mexico. Wheat usually did not grow in northern Mexico.

- The Santa Rita Colony was founded in 1962 in an unusual way. Two men from the Chihuahua colonies, Cornelius Rempel and David Reimer, opened their own colony. They bought a large ranch just north of the Ojo de la Yegua Colony. Then they invited families to buy land from them. Families from Swift, Manitoba and Ojo de la Yegua colonies were interested. This unusual way of opening a colony meant that it had a mix of people, from three different colonies. Each of the colonies had somewhat different ways of thinking and doing things.
- El Capulín was opened in 1962, not far from Buenos Aires. It had crop land, as well as ranch land. El Capulín is known today for its giant Mexican cottonwood trees.
- La Honda was a very successful colony, founded in 1964. The land was good for growing beans, corn and oats. It already had buildings, wells and large water tanks. The La Honda land was also beautiful, especially in the rainy season. After a rain, the land was covered in blue flowers. There were also prickly pear cacti, and mesquite and huge mimosa trees, which bloomed with yellow flowers. The Mennonites were interested to learn that this land had once been the home of Pancho Villa. Villa was one of the leaders of the Mexico Revolution in the 1920s. That was just before the Mennonites had first arrived in Mexico.

3 THE PRESIDENT'S IDEA TODAY

This history tells the story of the first Mennonite colonies in Mexico. Check out the map on page 76 to see how far and wide Mennonite colonies spread during the first 70 years. Since then, the number of colonies has kept on growing. (You can find a list of these colonies in Appendix Two.)

Many new colonies were very successful. Some were not. Many colonies are well off today. Some have become quite poor.

As you already know, a colony was a group of people living together in villages. All colonies were farming communities. Usually, the colonists agreed with each other. Sometimes they argued with each other. All believed it was right and good to live together peacefully. They knew it was important to work together.

All colonies had good times and bad times. Adults, children and youth also understood that in good and bad times, their God was with them. "All of life comes from God," they said, "and God sees his children through, even in bad times."

APPENDIX ONE: LIFE ON A COLONY– WHAT DID IT MEAN?

1. What About Land? Why Was It So Important?

History about Mennonites is often about land. The Mennonites in Mexico could never stop thinking about land. They were farmers, and farmers need land for growing food. But why was farming so important to Mennonites?

Land gave people food, which was a gift from God. The colonists plowed fields, planted seeds, waited for rain, smiled when the rain came and watched the seeds grow. Then they harvested their oats, beans, corn and cotton. The farmers knew that each step needed the loving hand of God to finally bring a harvest.

For Mennonites, faith and farming were one unit. The two belonged together. To trust God for good harvests was the way of Mennonite faith. This was so, even in years when there was little grain to harvest. Growing food was also a Mennonite way of helping feed the people in the world. For both, working the land was a way of living close to God.

Farming was part of colony life. Families on farms, in villages and on a colony were the Mennonite ways of looking after each other. In school, the children read in the *New Testament* about the first Christians. These people of old were an example for Mennonites. The early Christians also looked after each other. They shared what they had.

The *New Testament* did not teach people to compete with each other. It did not teach them to work hard to become the richest person on the colony. This *New Testament* message was at the centre of Mennonite Christian faith. Children learned this faith at school and at home. Being kind, helping neighbours, doing their jobs well, in the house and on the farm, were all ways of being faithful Christians.

2. What If You Had No Land?

People without land had to get jobs and work for others. This was fine for youth. They often worked for others: in machine shops, as farmhands, clerking in the village store, helping the neighbour clean her house, looking after children. But once they got married, they needed their own farm.

So a colony could never stop thinking about land. Someone was always

TO THINK ABOUT . . .

You have been taught by God to love one another. We urge you to do so more and more.

Live quietly, mind your own affairs, work with your hands … so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one. – I Thessalonians 4: 9, 10 (paraphrased)

Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established. – Proverbs 16: 3 (paraphrased)

looking for places to start a new colony. A new colony meant being pioneers again. For children it meant new adventures. It also meant leaving friends behind. But sometimes their friends also moved to the same colony. For young adults, a new colony was a way of getting a farm. Following the land was the Mennonite way of life.

3. Rules to Live By

Every colony had rules. Most rules were about living simply, without many fancy things. Rules made sure people stayed together as a group.

But living by the same rules did not make everyone the same. Some children liked to clown around and be funny. Others were very serious. Some adults looked on the happy side of life. Others saw the sad and dark side. Some children loved school. Others were glad when they were done with school. Most adults, and also youth, were excellent farmers. Some were just average farmers. Some youth would rather work in the village store than help run a farm.

Rules did not mean everyone in a village got along. No Mennonite believed that people were perfect. Everyone had faults and failures. Children said a prayer every evening. They asked God to help them be good

on this Earth and teach them to be ready for the next world.

Living side by side with people could feel tight. It could make you want to push out the wall of rules. Young people pushed against the rules, at least some of the time. Most of them settled down as they became adults. Some decided to leave the colony.

4. Individuals in a Group

Mennonites were not all the same. Everyone was a different individual. But when children, men, women and youth lived together in a village on a colony, they developed a **group personality**. Each colony and village had its own way of talking, doing things and so on. It was often quite easy to tell which village you came from, because you had a certain way about you that was similar to everyone else in your village.

APPENDIX TWO: MENNONITE COLONIES IN MEXICO TODAY

Chihuahua State

- Manitoba
- Swift Current
- Ojo de la Yegua (Nord Kolonie)
- Santa Rita
- Santa Clara
- Manzanillas
- Los Jagueyes (Quellen)
- El Valle
- Las Pestañas
- El Llano
- El Vado
- Cerro Blanco
- El Sabinal
- El Capulín
- Buenos Aires
- El Cuervo
- Las Virginias
- Saladas
- Camello
- Villa Ahumada
- Valle Esperanza
- El Agate
- Las Cuatas
- La Viboro
- El Oasis
- Nueva Holanda
- Las Bombas
- Los Cienes
- Las Palmeras/Los Juncos

Durango State

- Hague-Durango (Patos)
- Nuevo Ideal

Zacatecas State

- La Batea
- La Honda

San Luis Potosi State

- Las Grullas

Tamaulipas State

- Gonzalez
- Villa de Casas
- Los Ebanos
- San Carlos
- Los Magueyes

Campeche State

- Yalnon
- Chavi
- Nuevo Progreso
- El Temporal
- Santa Rosa
- La Nueva Trinidad
- Las Palmas
- Nuevo Durango
- Las Flores
- Sierra Verde
- Santa Fé
- Nueva Esperanza
- Las Maravillas
- El Zapote

Quintana Roo State

- Salamanca

NOTES

1. Schmiedehaus, W. (1982), p. 147.
2. Sawatsky, H.L. (1997), p. 235.
3. Ibid., p. 263 ff.
4. Schmiedehaus, W. (1948), p. 144 ff.
5. Sawatsky, H.L. (1997), p. 284.
6. Ibid., p. 256.
7. Ibid., p. 248.

THIRTY-THREE WORDS! THAT MIGHT BE NEW FOR YOU

LIST #1

Bolded words in the order you see them in the reader.

Introduction

descendants. One's children and grandchildren.
forebears. One's grandparents and great-grandparents.

Chapter One

established. Settled down.

Chapter Two

recite. Say from memory.
inherited. Gotten from one's parents.
penmanship. Handwriting.
embellished. Added extra things to make something fancier or more beautiful.
tackle. Grab someone to try and push them down.
implements. Machines used for working, especially on the farm.
mortified. Very embarrassed or ashamed.
frugal. Very careful about spending money or using up items.

Chapter Three

miniature. A small version of something larger. For example: A miniature house is a tiny house that a child could play with.

Chapter Four

sprout. A seed starting to grow underground or in water.
machete. A large knife for cutting grass, grain and so on.
succulent. Soft and juicy.
green fodder. Plants like corn that are cut down and shredded to make food for animals.
husk. Take the outer leaves off an ear of corn.
tedious. Difficult and boring.
vat. A very large tub.
source of income. What one does or has to earn money.
uniform. When all pieces are the same in size, colour and so on.
texture. What something feels like.

Chapter Five

prune. Cut off small fruit from a tree, to let the fruit that is left grow bigger.
optimistically. Hopeful, enthusiastic.

enterprising. To be bold, ready to try new things.
altitude. The height of the land.
economic depression. A time when money has little worth, hard times.
Sidebar: crop. Bite off grass close to the ground, like how a horse eats.

Chapter Six

precisely. Very exactly or carefully.
ore. Rock from underground that has metal such as gold or silver in it.
chassis. The frame of a car or a truck.
Sidebar: louvres. Slats of wood used to make a window blind. The louvres are moved up and down to open or close the blind.

Appendix One

group personality. Group of people who are similar because they are part of the same group.

LIST #2

Bolded words in alphabetical, or A-B-C, order.

altitude. The height of the land.
chassis. The frame of a car or a truck.
descendants. One's children and grandchildren.
crop. Bite off grass close to the ground, like how a horse eats.
economic depression. A time when money has little worth, hard times.
embellished. Added extra things to make something fancier or more beautiful.
enterprising. To be bold, ready to try new things.
established. Settled down.
forebears. One's grandparents and great-grandparents.
frugal. Very careful about spending money or using up items.
green fodder. Plants like corn that are cut down and shredded to make food for animals.
group personality. Group of people who are similar because they are part of the same group.
husk. Take the outer leaves off an ear of corn.
implements. Machines used for working, especially on the farm.
inherited. Gotten from one's parents.
louvres. Slats of wood used to make a window blind. The louvres are moved up or down to open or close the blind.
machete. A large knife for cutting grass, grain and so on.
miniature. A small version of something larger. For example: A miniature house is a tiny house that a child could play with.
mortified. Very embarrassed or ashamed.
optimistically. Hopeful, enthusiastic.
ore. Rock from underground that has metal such as gold or silver in it.
penmanship. Handwriting.
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source of income. What one does or has to earn money.
sprout. A seed starting to grow underground or in water.
succulent. Soft and juicy.
tackle. Grab someone to try and push them down.
tedious. Difficult and boring.
texture. What something feels like.

uniform. When all pieces are the same in size, colour and so on.
vat. A very large tub.

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Acknowledgements:
Recorded life stories by Mennonite women who grew up in Mexico, and interviewer Dr. Doreen Helen Klassen, for permission to use their stories.

Photos and first-hand accounts of colony life in Mexico in *Eine Fest Burg Ist Unser Gott* and *Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexico* by Walter Schmiedehaus; and *Pilgrims and Strangers* by Abe Warkentin.

Information about land, climate, farming and people in the Chihuahua colonies in *The Quiet in the Land* by H.L. Sawatsky.

In *Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico*, you met a group of Mennonites who sold their farms in Canada and moved to Chihuahua and Durango, Mexico. In the second volume, *Discovering Mexico: A Strange New Land*, the Mennonites get settled in their new homeland. In this reader, young people and adults are settlers no more. Mexico is their homeland. You will meet David, whose Christmas present makes him the envy of the village; Helen, who learns to sew her own clothes; and the Rempel children, who build an adobe village. And Sarah is back with more spunky stories. All this and more is in *A New Home: Living in Mexico.*

On the cover: In northern Mexico, the climate is just right for growing crisp, sweet Golden and Red Delicious apples – not too warm and not too cold. In the 1940s, farmers in Chihuahua, Mexico, started to grow apples. Soon there were apple orchards all around and in the colonies.